Fair play

The government must build consensus on delimitation

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) appears to have zeroed in on a hurried delimitation of Lok Sabha constituencies as the central piece of its strategy for the next general election, due in 2029. As the current constitutional scheme stands, a fresh delimitation is triggered once the data from the ongoing Census 2027 is published. That default path, which is based on population distribution across States, will considerably cut down the representation of States that have stabilised their population since the last delimitation. The Centre has now proposed to extend the constitutional freeze on inter-State distribution of Lok Sabha seats for another 25 years, until 2051, while increasing the size of the House to a maximum of 850 seats. The demarcation of the boundaries of Lok Sabha constituencies will be based on the 2011 Census within each State. The delimitation exercise will also bring into force 33% reservation for women, which Parliament approved in 2023. Considering the need to balance the 'one person, one vote' principle with the principles of federalism, which is about protecting the group rights of States, the proposals are a reasonable way forward for India. That said, the inter-State distribution of Lok Sabha seats is such a central question of democracy and federalism that any changes must be preceded by thoughtful deliberations at multiple levels.

That makes the approach of the Centre, which is trying to pass a constitutional amendment through defections and manipulations, dubious and lacking in good faith. If the Centre has been willing to extend the constitutional guarantee of inter-State distribution of seats on the basis of the 1971 Census, it could have built an all-party consensus on the issue. Instead, in April, it made a deceptive move by promising to maintain the current proportion of seats while the constitutional amendment it moved would have made that promise unconstitutional. At present, when the Centre is keen to appear accommodative, a more appropriate manner to proceed with such a generational measure in India's federal democracy is to refer the Bills to a parliamentary committee that can examine them in detail and generate a national conversation. A bigger Lok Sabha will create its own challenges, while the case for increasing its size is not entirely without merit as India's population has grown by at least 2.6 times since the 1971 Census, which forms the basis of the last delimitation of 1973, based on the 1971 Census. The Centre should not rush this vital question, which is not merely about garnering enough votes for passing a Bill. It must be based on consensus, as it happened in 1976 and again in 2001, under a Prime Minister from the Congress and one from the BJP, respectively.

Lifting off

Science-based diplomacy could aid India-Pakistan bilateral engagement

The economic and diplomatic consequences of India's efforts to estrange Pakistan often overshadow the costs distributed between them. For example, Pakistani space scientists can today access facilities in China whereas Indian space scientists can access facilities in the United States and Europe. But Indian scientists studying environmental conditions in Pakistan and Pakistani scientists studying conditions in India have far fewer alternatives. The latter matters much more for regional development and stability. On November 25, Beijing's 'Space Silk Road' diplomacy and the strain on New Delhi's hedging strategies converged in the Shenzhou-24 mission as China launched Pakistan's first astronaut, Muhammad Zeeshan Ali, to the Tiangong space station. Pakistan had offered in 2015 to contribute to India's proposed SAARC satellite and wanted the project administered under SAARC, but India insisted on operating it as largesse to its neighbours. If it had really been SAARC's satellite, ISRO and its Pakistani counterpart, SUPARCO, could have developed an institutional relationship and India could have influenced its neighbour's space programme through a multilateral mechanism. But today, India's ability to engage Pakistan on regional matters has increasingly depended on negotiating with powers beyond South Asia, in institutions with other agendas.

Even as spaceflight emerges as a new geopolitical realm, its substantial scientific component affords countries opportunities to engage independently of interstate relations in other domains. The Shenzhou-24 experience will be significant for SUPARCO just as the Axiom-4 mission in the U.S. was for ISRO, helping to significantly lower Islamabad's cost to access similar future opportunities, especially those under the Asia-Pacific Space Cooperation Organization, which also includes Bangladesh, and the Belt and Road Initiative's Space Information Corridor. There is no question that Indian spaceflight is technologically superior to that of Pakistan, but the Shenzhou-24 mission is a reminder that China's technological superiority *vis-à-vis* India's leaves India with an unequal contest. India has been ceding the neighbourhood to China's space networks, and by squandering the opportunities afforded by science diplomacy, it has left Pakistan to look to China even on problems it shares with India. The Apollo-Soyuz interaction during the Cold War and India and Pakistan working together to respond to a locust outbreak barely a year after the Balakot crisis (2019) are testament to the ability of science-based diplomacy to clear room for bilateral engagement with guardrails, without compromising the counter-terrorism agenda. India should revive such engagement.

India's place in the emerging global energy order



Mahesh Sachdev

Retired Indian Ambassador, specialising in West Asian and energy issues

During this decade, strong cross currents have buffeted the global energy system, causing humongous turbulence. These include the COVID-19 pandemic, the El Niño effect and climate change, the geoeconomics of wars in Ukraine and the Gulf, renewables and the shale phenomenon. Their impact has exposed the inadequacy and the unsustainability of the current fossil fuel-based energy order. The dire and chaotic situation necessitates the invention of a new global energy order. Although its contours are hazy, they are likely to be shaped by concerns for energy's improved availability, self-sufficiency, security, affordability and environmental friendliness.

A world of energy inequalities, disruptions

The current global energy ecosystem cuts across the following major fault lines. Global energy is a complex function of the rise in global population and energy intensity. Overall energy demand has tripled during the past half a century, with rampant growth in China (a 10-fold increase) and Asia. Yet, 720 million people lack electricity and two billion cook on polluting fuels. At the other extreme, gigawatt-sized data centres are sprouting. Due to global warming, the world now expends more energy cooling than heating. This energy disparity has concomitant development costs for the "South".

Historically, man has sourced energy largely from nature and fossil fuels, concentrated in some geographies. In 2025, fossil fuels accounted for approximately 86.2% (oil 33.5%, coal 27.7%, natural gas 25.1%) of total global primary energy supply, while low-carbon sources made up the remaining 13.8% (renewables 5.9%, nuclear 5.2%, and hydro 2.7%). This high dependence on fossil fuels has been problematic, causing supply bottlenecks, climate change, pollution, the resource curse and wars. Global warming (a "hoax" to some diehards) in the past two centuries is largely anthropogenic, caused by fossil fuel-burning; we are warned that average global temperatures rising by more than 1.5°C would cause irreversible damage. Yet, the current trend would lead to global temperatures rising by 2.5°C by 2100. The recent failure of COP31 over fossil fuel phase-out and clean technology funding mechanisms underlines this dilemma.

The ongoing wars in central Europe and the Gulf, major hydrocarbon exporting regions, have disrupted an already high-strung global energy situation. In particular, the United States-Israel war against Iran has stymied the Strait of Hormuz, the passage for nearly a fifth of global maritime transport of oil and gas. These wars have so far led to a cumulative loss of 2.8 billion barrels of crude and 60 billion cubic metres of natural gas. The effects of the crisis are global: three-quarters of the world's population live in oil- and gas-importing countries, while more than four billion people live in countries that depend on the Strait of Hormuz for over 30% of their oil supplies.

The country must balance rising energy demand with security and sustainability

Before the Iran war, most of the hydrocarbons and derivatives crossing the Strait of Hormuz were headed to Asia. The remainder mostly met Africa's basic needs. The crisis worsened the vulnerabilities of two continents, particularly in transportation and agriculture. These two conflicts continue, defying all peace-making attempts, causing supply and price turbulence to this vital commodity. In its recently published annual World Energy Outlook (WEO), the International Energy Agency (IEA) called 2026 "a year of unprecedented disruption", describing the Strait of Hormuz crisis as "the largest threat to energy security in history".

The global energy transition

Some hopeful signs mitigate these three foreboding factors. Jolted by years of disruption, the world is now prioritising energy security along two broad axes. First, electricity's share in the energy milieu is set to rise, particularly in the transportation sector. Electricity currently constitutes 23% of global final energy demand; the WEO expects its share to reach 30% by 2035 and accelerate subsequently. The increase in electricity share comes with greater efficiency in power generation and downstream appliances.

Second, in a force-multiplier effect, renewables and low-emission sources are rapidly replacing fossil fuels for power generation. With improved efficiency and better storage, the renewables' share in global electricity generation is expected to rise from a third today to half by 2035. The WEO notes that since 2022, energy-consuming economies have invested $500 billion annually in renewables and energy efficiency measures, and the current crisis would boost this further. The energy crisis has also reversed nuclear energy's decline, and nearly 90 GW of generation capacity is currently under construction. While coal's share may rise in the short run due to the crisis, it would start declining from 2030 as more renewables come online.

During the next decade, power distribution would require laying 25 million kilometres of new power lines and upgrading 15 million km of existing ones. On the other hand, on average, $540 billion has been invested annually in the upstream hydrocarbons sector, but 90% of it is to offset the decline in production. While an oil glut may emerge once the crisis abates, the localised shortages of natural gas are likely to persist.

Depending upon the relative intensity of national responses to the energy conundrum, the IEA believes that many of the steps initiated would lead to an irreversible decline in hydrocarbon consumption. It has reiterated its forecast that the global oil demand may peak by 2035.

The WEO, nevertheless, contends that even the most vigorous short-term measures to tackle the current energy crisis may prove insufficient to arrest climate deterioration, and urges long-term plans for a resilient future.

India's rising energy appetite

India is destined to play a prominent role in the emerging global energy order. It is currently the world's third-largest primary energy consumer, with a 6.1% share. India is the second-largest consumer of coal, and ranks as the third-largest power producer, consumer of crude and in renewable capacity. At the micro level, though, the average Indian has been energy thrifty: for instance, India's annual electricity consumption of 1,153 units is a third of the global average. Reflecting its world-beating GDP growth, India's energy demand is projected to gallop by an annual average of 2.5% annually through 2035 – three times the global rate. Its energy appetite is being fuelled by rising incomes, urbanisation, industrial expansion, transport (12,000 new cars added daily), and cooling (200 million new air conditioners). The IEA projects that India will be the world's largest driver of energy demand growth through 2035.

While India's energy canvass is large and expanding, the granular picture is quite mixed. Despite valiant efforts towards greater self-sufficiency, India remains an energy-short economy. It currently imports around 40% of its energy demand, including 90% of its crude oil and 50% of its natural gas, and these dependencies are likely to grow. Electricity currently accounts for 22% of India's total final energy consumption, and this share is likely to double by 2047 as demand grows by 6% annually.

Although its renewable capacity has crossed half of its power generation, 70% of its total electricity is still generated from fossil fuels. During the 2025-35 decade, oil demand is expected to rise by 1.3 mbpd (26%), coal output by nearly 30%, and average annual energy investment is forecast to reach $200 billion, up 85% from 2025 levels. To move closer to the stated ambition of "energy independence by 2047", India would need to de-emphasise its oil and gas requirements, accelerate electrification and dramatically improve energy efficiency. If done right, a comprehensive energy strategy would not only attain long-term energy independence; it would also catalyse overall economic growth and help clean up the environment.

A new model for Delhi's neighbourhood engagement



Constantino Xavier

Senior Fellow, Centre for Social and Economic Progress

One year ago, Nepal was swept by a Gen Z revolution, leading to the electoral victory of a 36-year-old former rapper and Mayor of Kathmandu, known for his anti-India zingers on social media. As he took the prime ministerial oath alongside one of Nepal's youngest-ever cabinets, New Delhi began the uphill battle of reaching out to him.

Pragmatism over diplomatic pageantry

This Monday, November 23, 2026, marked an important, new chapter in that engagement. Prime Minister Narendra Modi met the young man behind the black sunglasses, established a personal rapport in a two-hour-long private discussion, and delivered a massive package of economic support that is bound to build new trust. On his first bilateral visit abroad, Nepal's Prime Minister Balendra Shah communicated concerns and expectations eye to eye with a leader twice his age, set his eyes on the future, and brought back deliverables no other Nepali leader had been able to extract from India before.

This was a brief, clinical, and work-oriented visit, reflecting that Nepal's Gen Z means business and that New Delhi is ready to play ball. There was no side trip to the Taj Mahal. No big banquets or speeches. Unusually little on the historical and civilisational ties. And a loud silence on many issues and irritants that have taken far too much oxygen from negotiation rooms in the past.

Instead, the focus was on a positive, productive, delivery-oriented partnership with economic connectivity at its core. It is difficult to imagine how this could have gone any better for both sides, given all that could have gone wrong.

Rather than playing political victim or geopolitical games with China, Mr. Shah had the courage to visit New Delhi first to reinforce, not deny, geography: India as Nepal's only indispensable partner, a rising regional economic force that should be leveraged, not resisted. For Mr. Modi, this was a shot in the arm for the Neighbourhood First policy, showing that beyond all political calculations or occasional tensions, India remains committed to its regional economic and connectivity strategy. In Nepal's case, after the tragic Himalayan floods, India is proving to be a friend in deed to a neighbour in need.

Balen Shah's visit promises a new India-Nepal partnership — and could be a model to revive India-Bangladesh ties

Three win-wins

Three outcomes from the visit promise a new chapter in bilateral ties. First, the unique road map "Viksit Bharat and Samunnat Nepal" commits both leaders to reimagining the partnership and taking it to the next level toward developed, middle-income status. Accordingly, the first three of the 10 pillars focus on upgrading the engines of interdependence: developmental and economic ties, physical and digital connectivity, and energy and climate.

Second, the vision map drops the tired mantra of a "special relationship", which New Delhi traditionally emphasises, and instead proposes an "aspirational, modern and mutually-beneficial partnership" to "reflect contemporary political, economic and technological realities". The vision map repeatedly mentions a "forward-looking" relationship – clearly what young, *Naya* Nepal expects from Bharat.

Third, Mr. Shah returns to Nepal with his first foreign policy success and a much-needed political boost for his government, which faces constant revolutionary pressure. Among the several deliverables are many that Delhi had delayed for years, including $1.6 billion in grants and lines of credit to revive the economy, steps to improve air connectivity, new railway links, and hydropower investments.

While all this portends a new chapter in India-Nepal relations, only time will tell whether it can be called a historic turning point. That depends also on whether Mr. Shah will consolidate his grip on his party and remain in power. India is never just a silent spectator: its political comfort and preferences are always heard loud and clear in Kathmandu.

To continue building trust and prevent tensions from flaring up again, both leaders should establish direct communication channels, including bimonthly calls. Mr. Modi should also use the positive momentum to travel soon to Kathmandu, after eight long years since his last visit.

Then there is the question of how the ambitious road map can be operationalised, with the devil in the details of implementation. Reviving a High-Level Monitoring Group to track progress is a good device, but it will require strong political support to ensure new cross-border infrastructure advances, from energy pipelines to railway links.

Another challenge will arise as Mr. Shah knocks on other doors for external support and navigates a tense geopolitical context, especially with overconfident adversaries China and Pakistan, as well as an unpredictable United States.

New Delhi will naturally have to communicate its core security concerns and enforce red lines with Kathmandu. But it must also ensure that such tactical security denial does not undermine this week's focus on strategic economic delivery: new ways for India to supply more, better and faster to meet the developmental demands of a new Nepal – young, confident and transactional.

Model for Bangladesh?

This week's joint India-Nepal vision may also serve as a model to repair India-Bangladesh relations. The irritants and stakes are much higher, especially the Sheikh Hasina conundrum, which has delayed normalisation.

But here too, political leadership can play a facilitating role with workarounds to restart a mutually beneficial India-Bangladesh economic partnership based on trade, transportation, energy, and cross-border connectivity that transformed the entire East South Asia sub-region since 2009.

Bangladesh Prime Minister Tarique Rahman has been postponing a much-expected visit to New Delhi and different readings point to either his inability or his unwillingness to invest political capital in repairing ties with India. But the struggling Bangladeshi economy, as well as the success of Mr. Shah's visit to New Delhi, might now be raising the stakes and changing the calculus in Dhaka.

The views expressed are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Paternity leave

True parenting is a shared lifelong journey, not a brief vacation from the office. While Tamil Nadu must be applauded for acknowledging a father's role (November 27), such a short duration barely allows a parent to support a recovering mother or bond with a newborn. More importantly, this benefit currently excludes the vast majority of private sector employees. To make a real societal impact, the government must mandate robust, gender-neutral parental leave across all sectors. A truly modern workplace must encourage men to be equal partners at home.

K. Chidanand Kumar,
Bengaluru

Tariff mountain

U.S. President Donald Trump appears to have reached the summit of the tariff mountain, with India now facing the second-highest proposed tariff rate of up to 25% on its exports to the U.S. Mr. Trump seems to defy the law of diminishing marginal utility: with every concession he extracts, his appetite for more only grows.

Akhil Verma,
Bengaluru

At Rockfort

The framing of the image capturing the Karthigai Maha Deepam atop the historic Rockfort hill at the Thayumanavar temple in Tiruchirappalli ('Picture of the Week', November 27) was a visual delight. The radiant glow of the sacred flame against the twilight sky manages to capture not just the grandeur of the festival, but also the serene devotion and cultural vibrancy that define Tiruchi during Karthigai Deepam.

R. Sivakumar,
Chennai

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



The Kolkata Municipal Corporation office, which may seat 209 elected councillors, increased from 144, after the West Bengal government redrew the wards. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

In Kolkata, the BJP redraws power lines

The BJP government in West Bengal has taken up a delimitation exercise of civic bodies of the twin cities of Kolkata and Howrah, increasing the number of wards in both municipal corporations. Opposition parties have claimed there has been gerrymandering. Elections will impact over seven million people. **Shrabana Chatterjee** and **Shiv Sahay Singh** examine the delimitation exercise and the related legal challenges

Before August 2026, the erstwhile ward number 58 of Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC), located in central-east Kolkata's Topsia area resembled a contiguous irregular polygon. After the delimitation of KMC wards, the areas under ward 58 have been split into three: 73, 74, and 75. The newly demarcated ward number 73, now somewhat resembles a hammer, with a narrow strip of land connecting two areas.

The delimitation exercise, now challenged in the Supreme Court of India, has been coupled with accusations of gerrymandering. Gerrymandering, a two-century-old political tool, is defined as the practice of drawing the boundaries of electoral constituencies in a way that gives one political party, or group, or individual an unfair advantage over others.

Three months after coming to power in West Bengal in the summer of 2026, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government, on August 12, passed The Kolkata Municipal Corporation (Amendment) Bill, 2026, in the State Assembly. Its provisions increased the number of wards of the city's civic body from 144 to 209.



While the last delimitation of wards of the Kolkata Municipal Corporation was carried out in 1980, during the time of the Left Front government, almost 46 years ago, Opposition members say that the BJP has now carved out wards to benefit themselves, in the local body elections.

Sajal Ghosh, former councillor of the previous ward no. 50 and BJP MLA of Kolkata's Baranagar Assembly seat, says a delimitation was necessary. "The municipal corporation is like a service industry. In your lifetime you may or may not need an MLA. One in 10,000 may need an MP, but there is no family who does not require the services of their councillor and the municipality where they stay," he adds.

On ground, people are confused about which ward they belong to when they need to approach authorities for administrative work. Critiques also say that the claims and objections period was just 10 days, giving citizens little time to examine and file petitions.



In addition, they say the KMC, which has 144 elected councillors, is now run by a State government-installed administrator, who does not have the authority to conduct a delimitation exercise. The government cites the law to back the delimitation.

Elections to the KMC are essential to providing services to about 60 lakh residents of the city and the dispute over the delimitation has cast an uncertainty over the civic polls in Kolkata.

> Boundaries have been drawn without considering geographical contiguity, compactness, and administrative convenience. After the delimitation, no one knows which ward they belong to and where they should go for administrative work
>
> **DIPU DAS**
> Two-time KMC councillor

Along with Kolkata Municipal Corporation, the West Bengal government will hold elections to Howrah Municipal Corporation, home to 16 lakh people across the river Hooghly. A similar delimitation exercise was carried out in Howrah, increasing the number of wards from 50 to 68.

Dipu Das, a two-time councillor from former ward no. 67 of the KMC, went to the Calcutta High Court (HC) over the Kolkata delimitation, halting the election process until the verdict is clear. Earlier this month, a petition was filed, again before the HC, challenging the delimitation exercise in Howrah as well.

Claims and objections

On August 22, the administrator of KMC wrote to the West Bengal government's Additional Chief Secretary of State's Municipal Affairs Department with the number of old and new wards of the city's civic body. On the same date, the draft of Schedule II, which details the wards, was made available for public inspection until September 3. On September 11, the amendment to Schedule II of the KMC Act with 209 wards was notified.

In south Kolkata's Prince Anwar Shah Road area, three parts of erstwhile ward 94 have been shifted to new ward number 166, Tollygunj area, a locality almost a kilometre away.

"When we have to get a certificate made for an 80-year-old, how will we take them this far? Weren't the new wards made to help with better administration? This will only make it more complicated and common people will suffer," Md Samsad, a 37-year-old activist in the Anwar Shah area says.

Samsad adds that he had drafted an objection letter, as Part 3, 5, and 6 of his ward 94 has been the worst affected, but since the time given was only 10 days, he could not file it. "There should be some geographical cohesiveness and administrative logic to this system. What they are doing is random," Samsad reiterates. He argues that even if the area of Prince Anwar Shah Road was clubbed with ward number 167, adjoining Golf Green area, it would have made some sense.

Ghosh justifies the delimitation: "Before, the population was very high in some wards. They were so massive that a whole Assembly seat could fit, so should we not divide them and make them into smaller wards for better administration? We need to provide service for everyone." He adds that every ward gets the same funds, so the redrawing of lines ensures more even distribution of money.

Gerrymandering accusations

Former West Bengal Minister and Communist Party of India (Marxist) leader Debesh Das participated in the claims and objections process during the delimitation exercise of KMC. Debesh says that the exercise was carried out in such a way that fewer representatives could emerge from Muslim-dominated areas, by merging them with Hindu-dominated areas.

Though the new map of wards is yet to be released, the former MLA says that during one of the hearings, he pointed out that the newly demarcated ward 73 looks like a hammer, but the authorities expressed surprise and asked him to file an objection.

"Political considerations cannot be the only reason for delimitation of wards. A civic or municipal ward is meant to provide services to the people under a geographical continuity. Once these new boundaries come into effect, people will have to bear with them for decades," the CPI(M) leader says.

Kallol Majumdar, the secretary of the Kolkata District Committee of the CPI(M) says that the argument put forward by the government in favour of delimitation was rationalising the number of voters of each ward. However, he says this does not hold true when analysis of individual wards is carried out.

Majumdar cites the example of newly announced ward numbers 57, 39, 37, and 36. They have approximately 5,655; 6,119; 7,076; and 7,490 electors, whereas proposed ward Nos. 121, 45, and 66 have approximately 23,059; 24,048; and 28,695 electors respectively. "No rational, objective or disclosed criterion is capable of explaining disparities of such magnitude," the CPI(M) leader argues.



> Before, the population was very high in some wards. They were so massive that a whole Assembly seat could fit, so should we not divide them and make them into smaller wards for better administration?
>
> **SAJAL GHOSH**
> MLA and former councillor

Before the delimitation process, the smallest ward, no. 45, had a population of 8,394, while the largest ward (no. 66) had a population of 98,024. After the delimitation, the smallest ward (no. 57) has 5,655 electors in 13 polling parts and the largest (no. 66) has 28,695 electors in 43 polling parts.

In a letter to the Municipal Commissioner, KMC, dated August 29, Majumdar claimed that areas where the BJP secured comparatively higher percentages of votes in the previous election have been placed in wards having substantially smaller electorates, whereas areas where the party secured a substantially lower percentage of votes have been grouped into wards having considerably larger electorates.

As per the last census of 2011, the population of Kolkata was 45 lakh, out of which Hindus comprised 76.5% and Muslims about 20.6%. The last elections to the KMC were held in 2021 and 21 of the 144 elected councillors were Muslim. These councillors were elected from Muslim-dominated areas.

Rights and duties

The Trinamool Congress had controlled KMC since 2010. After the BJP came to power, former mayor of KMC, Firhad Hakim, resigned on June 3. On June 8, the West Bengal government dissolved the KMC board. The governor, under Section 118 (1) (b) of the KMC Act, appointed an administrator, Smita Pandey, to administer the largest municipal corporation of the State.

West Bengal Congress general secretary Ashutosh Chatterjee represented the Congress party during the meetings and hearings related to delimitation. "The administrator, who is a bureaucrat, does not have the right to conduct a delimitation process. That should only be handled by an elected body," Chatterjee says. "I have attended at least 10 hearings at the KMC office in Dharmatala and the Congress party filed at least 25 objections, but the whole process was just for show. There was no proper system for the hearing; nor did the KMC officials answer any of our objections," the Congress leader points out.

Dipu says that the areas of the ward in Kolkata's Kasba area, which she had represented in the past, have been split into three wards 129, 130, and 124.

"Boundaries have been drawn without considering geographical contiguity, compactness, and administrative convenience. After the delimitation, no one knows which ward they belong to and where they should go for administrative work," she says.

The councillor approached the Calcutta High Court over the issue. In the petition, she has alleged that in the majority of the delimited areas, where the number of electors was less than 10,000, the BJP vote share was over 50% in the last elections, while wards where the number of electors have gone beyond 20,000 the BJP vote share was low.

Dipu, in her petition, argues that the number of voters in KMC elections stands at 31.66 lakh. With 209 wards after delimitation the average number of voters should come to 15,148 per ward. However, an analysis of voter lists of individual wards show that 102 of the 209 wards have voters lying outside the band of 10% on either side (10% above and below 15,148 voters). She argues that 29 of the delimited wards have more than 18,000 electors.

BJP's call for triple engine government

When BJP won the West Bengal Assembly in 2026, it resulted in mass resignations of chairpersons and mayors of municipal bodies, since most of the civic bodies were administered by Trinamool Congress. By the second week of June, Kolkata Municipal Corporation, the largest civic body of the State, was being run by an administrator.

The BJP leadership had started preparations for elections to the Kolkata Municipal Corporation and the Howrah Municipal Corporation. In August the party appointed former State BJP president and Union Minister Sukanta Majumdar as the person in-charge of holding civic polls in Kolkata and another former State president and Rajya Sabha MP Rahul Sinha to oversee the preparations for civic polls in Howrah.

The party set up drop boxes so that people could nominate themselves and not only leaders from the BJP. Breakaway groups of the Trinamool Congress started lobbying for tickets to contest civic polls. Leaders from Nationalist Citizens Party of India, where 20 Lok Sabha MPs of the Trinamool Congress have defected to, have even offered an alliance with the BJP for the civic polls to Kolkata and Howrah.

Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari urged the people of the two civic bodies to ensure that there is a triple engine government. "Responding to Modiji's appeal, you have given him a double-engine government (in West Bengal). Now, at the request of your Chief Minister, you have to give us a triple-engine government... Standing on the streets of Kolkata today, I appeal to you to give me Kolkata and Howrah," Adhikari had said on October 12, at a public event in West Bengal's capital city.

Legal battle

The delimitation attempt at KMC has resulted in a legal battle. The petition Dipu filed was set aside by a single judge bench of the HC, but resulted in an interim stay order by a division bench on announcing the dates of civic polls till the challenge to delimitation is addressed.

A division bench of Justices Sabyasachi Bhattacharyya and Arjun Ray Mukherjee on November 6 directed the West Bengal State Election Commission against issuing any notification calling an election to the Kolkata Municipal Corporation on the basis of the amended Schedule II of the KMC Act as notified in the Official Gazette, until the pending petition challenging the delimitation exercise was decided.

Appearing for the petitioner Dipu, senior advocate Bikash Ranjan Bhattacharya, who is also a former MP, questioned whether the administrator, appointed by the State Government upon dissolution of the corporation, could act as the "Corporation".

Bhattacharya claimed that the West Bengal Government and its agencies have resorted to gerrymandering in order to secure a partisan advantage for the ruling political party in the State.

Chief Minister Adhikari and other leaders of the BJP said that the petition was an attempt to delay the twin cities' election, as the Opposition feared a defeat.

The State government challenged the High Court's order before the Supreme Court. On November 25, Chief Justice of India Surya Kant said the apex court was inclined to set aside the order of the High Court after taking into consideration pertinent legal and factual issues raised by the State government. The dispute remains before the Supreme Court.

Meanwhile, the BJP leadership in the State government has decided that if there is no order in favour of holding civic polls at the earliest, the State government will appoint coordinators, who will perform the functions of an elected representative. "If needed, we will appoint coordinators in 209 wards. Appointing a coordinator is a temporary matter, so there should be no legal issue in it," BJP leader and Union Minister Sukanta Majumdar said on November 21. The party has also announced that local BJP leaders will be appointed as co-ordinators.

Lawyers say that the civic polls in Howrah will depend on the outcome of the case involving the Kolkata Municipal Corporation before the Supreme Court. Civic polls in Howrah were last held in November 2013 and municipal elections have been due in the civic body since 2018.

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BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Project refreshed, questions remain

A THIRD-term government that had returned with depleted numbers in 2024 — the story went — was being forced onto the back foot. In April, the Narendra Modi government brought a set of bills that linked operationalisation of the long-pending women's reservation in legislatures to expansion of seats in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies and a lift of the freeze on delimitation — only to be defeated by a united Opposition in Parliament. In July, Dharmendra Pradhan had to step down as Union minister of education after students' protests against the NEET cancellation-and-retest forced the government to bend. After that, protesters again took to the street against the Chief Election Commissioner's (mis)conduct of the SIR, adding to the sense of the ruling establishment under siege. Now, however, the script may be turning a new page. The announcement of a special Parliament session next week, where the government is poised to bring fresh legislation to implement the women's quota in an expanded legislature after a new delimitation, bears the mark of its older stance and self-image — the audacious disruptor with a large appetite for big change. In the process, it also touches off apprehensions that its big-ticket moves, from the abrogation of Article 370 to demonetisation, have invited — that it is giving short shrift to processes of consultation, deliberation and public reasoning.

At first glance, the government seems to have recovered in November-end much of the ground it seemed to have lost in April by blunting the main concern of its opponents and by breaking the Opposition. Now, the fear of the southern states — that they would lose their relative share of representation because of their successes in stabilising population — has been taken care of by codifying a uniform 50 per cent increase in seats, without disturbing the existing inter-state balance. Insecurities triggered by the women's quota were already sought to be addressed by expanding the House. What has visibly changed since April is also this — the Opposition that briefly united to defeat the government has shown an inability to hold together. Be it the breakaway TMC or the Sharad Pawar-led NCP, or the DMK — all of whom are likely to vote with, not against the NDA — the narrative of the predatory government must necessarily be leavened by hard questions that the INDIA bloc must ask itself.

The legislative changes that may stand or fall next week are consequential. In Parliament, the government's bills must not just bring on a numbers game. Questions must be asked, and answered. Why must the delimitation for an election in 2029 follow a census from 18 years before, when a new census is underway? Is the government imposing change with an eye on the electoral calendar, or redrawing the electoral map using women's reservation as a cover? How will it dispel the cloud of distrust that could settle over delimitation's institutional mechanism — of which the discredited CEC will be a part? How will women's reservation reckon with caste? The debate in Parliament must give answers, not just the final tallies of aye and nay.

On packaged food, a much-needed warning

THE SUPREME Court's intervention on the labelling of packaged eatables should make the country's food safety regime more responsive to the challenge of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and obesity. On Thursday, the Court directed the use of separate red hexagonal labels to alert consumers to excessive levels of sugar, salt and unhealthy fats. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) proposed a common warning symbol. However, public-health experts cautioned that clubbing multiple nutrients under one symbol could dilute the warning, with lower levels of one nutrient offsetting excessive levels of another. Separate hexagons will give a distinct visual warning for each nutrient present in excess.

Front-of-package warnings have been on the FSSAI's anvil for at least a decade. Its earlier proposal to introduce a health star rating was criticised by public health experts for potentially creating a misleading impression of the nutritional value of products. A star-based system, which gives an overall rating, can obscure the presence of excessive amounts of individual nutrients that are harmful when consumed regularly. Stars are usually perceived as positive, and warning labels bearing them have often been associated with increased consumption of unhealthy foods. In contrast, a body of research suggests that labels warning people about the risks of unhealthy food can encourage healthier choices. A 2017 study at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health found that warning labels on sugary drinks led to a statistically significant decline in their consumption.

The Court has given the FSSAI four months to frame the rules. Companies will have a year after that to comply. It has also cautioned against manufacturers exploiting the transition period to flood the market with unlabelled products. The regulator must ensure these directives are meticulously followed. Labelling cannot, by itself, reverse India's NCD burden. But as a part of a broader approach that increases access to nutrient-dense food, it can be an important public health measure.

Taylor's guitar will continue to sing

LONG BEFORE pop stars became accessible through social media, Birmingham pop-rockers Duran Duran, with their slicked-back hair and natty suits, were the faces plastered on teenage bedroom walls. For a generation growing up in the '80s, with Walkmans and 2-in-1s for company, the "Ordinary World" boys were the soundtrack to teenage love, and its beguiling promises.

The band's lead guitarist Andy Taylor, who died at 65 on Wednesday, may have embodied the glam alongside keys player Nick Rhodes, singer Simon Le Bon, bassist John Taylor and drummer Roger Taylor. But it was his guitar riffs that gave the band the rock 'n' roll grip that punched above the gloss.

Born into a working-class family in northeast England, Taylor was five when his mother left without explanation. Raised by his grandmother, he found a guitar in his father's cupboard at 11 and taught himself to play. By 16, he had dropped out of school and was playing in cover bands. In 1980, he spotted an advertisement in *Melody Maker* seeking a "live-wire guitarist" that would change his life. After the success of the first three albums, he left to pursue a heavier rock sound. In 2022, when the band was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, he sent a letter telling fans about his terminal diagnosis. Taylor's guitar will continue to speak for him, its sound indelibly etched into Duran Duran's legacy.

This special session is not for women. It is for delimitation



SAGARIKA GHOSE

A BILL that could redraw India's electoral map has arrived in an artfully draped sari. Before Parliament passes it, the Narendra Modi government must answer one question: Why should it be trusted?

The Modi government wants a big House but a small Parliament. This Bill is likely to swell the Lok Sabha to 850 members, even as Parliament itself is being hollowed out and stripped of the power to hold the government to account. The chamber grows larger while the institution tragically shrinks.

Consider how this Bill has arrived. For days, the country was kept guessing about the Winter Session and a rumoured special session, while the Monsoon Session was not prorogued for a record 103 days. No all-party meeting was called. Then a special session was announced through a tweet, for "essential government business".

That business is the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, the Delimitation Bill and the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill , the same three-bill legislative package that was defeated in April. As I write, not a single copy has been circulated to parties or the public. All we are told is that it will bring more women into Parliament. Such extreme irony! A Bill being marketed as giving women a voice in Parliament is being pushed through without giving Parliament a voice. The Modi—Amit Shah-led dispensation, which has kept women waiting for three years, is suddenly in a tearing hurry to give representation to women.

But women's reservation is already the law of the land. The Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam was passed almost unanimously in September 2023, with every party calling for its immediate implementation. The law then sat in cold storage until it was abruptly notified late on the night of April 16, 2026. This special session is not for women. It is for delimitation.

Why is the Modi regime linking the two? Seats can be reserved for women in the existing 543-member House, in existing constituencies, from the very next general election. But the government's calculation is deeply cynical. Their gamble is nobody will dare vote against a women's quota, so delimitation has to be smuggled in under the cover of the pallu. The sari is the packaging, the redrawn electoral map is the product. Women are being used as a shield, not empowered as equals. This is hardly surprising given the BJP-RSS's contempt for gender equality.

Gaze on the arithmetic. In a 543-member House, it's 181 women and 362 men. In an 850-member House, 283 women would face 567 men, a male bloc larger than the entire Lok Sabha today. Not a single man gives up his seat. This is not genuine transformative power sharing. It is simply enlarging the ladies' compartment — or the *zenana dabba* — while the main train runs on as before.

> Nobody will dare vote against a women's quota, so delimitation has to be smuggled in under the cover of the pallu. The sari is the packaging, the redrawn electoral map is the product. Women are being used as a shield, not empowered as equals

A bigger House does not make a stronger Parliament. Modi and Shah have reduced Parliament to a notice board, where bills are bulldozed and sessions are cut short. When 850 MPs are squeezed into a handful of sittings, when will any of them get to speak and raise the issues citizens care about? Will the government guarantee 120 sitting days a year? Will the PM come to the House and answer questions? Will Parliament be allowed to demand answers on citizens' concerns like the smog that chokes north India every winter and is shortening our children's lives? Going by the record, no.

The citizen-taxpayer foots the bill. By some estimates, 307 more MPs will cost over Rs 1,300 crore a year. That is more than Rs 6,500 crore over a single Lok Sabha term. Citizens will pay more for a Parliament that is not allowed to work for citizens.

Then there is the question of who draws the map. Subverting institutions is second nature to the Modi regime, and the Delimitation Commission will be no exception. Under the Bill, the Chief Election Commissioner or his nominee sits on it. That means Gyanesh Kumar, the CEC on whose watch faith in the electoral rolls has been badly shaken, and whom the united Opposition holds responsible for vote *chori* on a gigantic scale. A neutral, upright commission was never on the cards. The same hands accused of deleting lakhs of voters will now redraw every constituency in India. Can there be any doubt whose interests the new electoral map will serve? This Bill is a make-the-BJP-win-at-all-costs Bill.

Why the desperate hurry? Under the Constitution, seats are frozen until the first Census after 2026. Delimitation was due after the 2027 Census anyway. Fresh data is around the corner, and new seats could realistically take effect in 2034. Instead, the government wants to lift the freeze and redraw constituencies based on the 2011 Census, figures that are 15 years old. Why? So the new map is ready for 2029.

What has changed since April, when this Bill failed to win a two-thirds majority? Only the numbers, rearranged through murky backroom deals. Since April, parties have been broken and coerced. Twenty traitor TMC MPs will vote on this Bill in the Lok Sabha, though disqualification petitions against them are pending and the Speaker has not ruled on them for six long months. Are the votes of these 20 turncoats legal? Could the amendment itself be struck down if it rests on MPs whose status is undecided? This is defining legislation, yet there has been no wider consultation and no public conversation. We have seen where such high-handed methods lead: The 2020 Farm Laws were rammed through without dialogue and had to be repealed.

No amount of nari shakti sloganeering can wish away the trust deficit this government has created. Trust is earned, not demanded. If the government is sincere, it will send the Delimitation Bill to a Joint Parliamentary Committee and implement women's reservation in the existing 543-member House now. Until then, citizens have every reason to ask: Why should the Modi government be trusted?

The writer is MP, Rajya Sabha, All India Trinamool Congress

A Fawad Khan-shaped hole in our screens



SHALINI LANGER

NOT EVEN a week ago, not far from where the powers that be sit in the national capital, the visiting Pakistan Minister for Climate Change and Environmental Coordination, Musadik Masood Malik, gave a message that was much applauded on both sides of the border: *"Dilli jo hai, woh baahar se aane wali tehzeebon se kam nahin hua, bahar ke aane wale logon se kam nahin hua; bahar se aane wali tehzeebon aur bahar ke aane wale logon se badha hai, mazboot hua hai."* Delhi, he said, never weakened due to cultures or people coming from outside, but became bigger, stronger.

We have seen this picture before, as well as what follows after the interval. On Thursday, the Indian government reiterated to Netflix to ensure that content originating from Pakistan is not streamed in India. The immediate provocation was the platform's first Pakistani original series, *Jo Bachay Hain Sang Samait Lo*.

Of course, we are provoked. And just when we were looking forward to Fawad Khan sweeping into our bedrooms again, serenading Sanam Saeed, looking like a Mills & Boon hero and talking in mellifluous Urdu that sounded like real poetry. If any tensions were to be set off by this "Pakistani invasion", they would be all within our fluttering hearts.

Granted, the government has larger considerations on its mind. But haven't we already given it a break on clean air and water, safe food and cities, smooth roads and good schools? Why take away another Khan?

After all, every generation deserves one, every generation has had one, and those of us between generations that we now can't even track, we can still — still — lay claim to Fawad.

As for Pakistani shows and artistes, they have survived across the border through many governments, generations, and blockades. Among their most avid fans are people who suffered the worst of the Partition violence, as people like me, who spent hours fiddling with antennas to catch signals from across the border in Jammu, can attest.

Buddha Ghar Pe Hai, *Bakra Qiston Pay* filled many summer afternoons, and also nights, when smuggled videotapes were played as the entire large joint family, including witnesses of the 1965 and 1971 wars, gathered around a solitary black-and-white TV set. One serial where a woman lost a series of husbands, with blood rushing into her veins being a premonition of death, still gives me goosebumps (much as my older self shrinks from the thought).

> Why take away another Khan? After all, every generation deserves one, every generation has had one, and those of us between generations can still lay claim to Fawad

We don't even need videotapes any more, or the guise of night, as the government well knows.

On Spotify, we can access "banned" Pakistani artistes. On YouTube, old and new Pakistani shows have an avid audience, including my aunt and my mother, who carry their own war and Partition memories from Jalandhar.

In clothes, the Pakistani loose pyjamas are now the staple design. On social media, we share jokes and laugh at each other, and even smile over the absurdities of a *Dhurandhar*. And from Delhi to Bengaluru, Pakistani show *Dar-e-Nijaat*, accessed by India via YouTube, is being shown at organised watch parties (though that run may now be about to end).

Even the younger lot accessing Fawad and others through the few Hindi films they starred in, before the government pulled the curtains shut, love *Kapoor & Sons*, giggle at *Khoobsurat*, and look forward to him in *Ae Dil Hai Mushkil*. Is there a family more Indian than the one that squabbles as the plumber watches helplessly in *Kapoor & Sons*?

This interval too shall pass, of course. And if Fawad Khan is reading this, rest assured, we will be waiting. If we ever go away. *Jo Bachay Hain Sang Samait Lo*, absolutely.

And guess what, courtesy of the government's actions, a little digging into the Faiz Ahmed Faiz poem that the TV series title draws from shows that "sang" here means not together but pebble or stone.

Both Ghalib here, whom the Pakistani minister invoked, and Faiz there, who remains our go-to protest poet, are laughing, up above.

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shalini.langer@expressindia.com

An Olympic effort, one cycle at a time



MANSUKH MANDAVIYA

FITNESS KA Dose, *Aadha Ghanta Roz*!" This was Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call to the nation. In December 2024, we commenced the Fit India Sundays on Cycle initiative to answer that call. The idea was to encourage citizens to step out of their homes and make fitness a part of everyday life. As we stand at the cusp of our 100th edition, it amazes me to see how this movement has grown. By Sunday, the cumulative participation in Sundays on Cycle will have grown to over 40 lakh, with the event being held across more than 40,000 locations, and supported by more than 7,500 NaMo Cycling Clubs. This year, Sundays on Cycle has also gone international, with editions being held in the UK, Japan, and Turkey.

The 100th edition is dedicated to celebrating the Olympic movement in India, under the theme #IndiaReadyForOlympics. Hosting the Olympics is a national ambition, and this edition is our way of bringing the whole country along on that journey.

I will join around 50,000 cyclists at Pimpri-Chinchwad, Pune, for the main event. In association with MY Bharat, young people will celebrate Sundays on Cycle in every district. Mega celebrations will also be held at 100 iconic locations nationwide, where 100 Olympians will cycle alongside citizens. When our champions ride with schoolchildren, families and senior citizens, the Olympic spirit becomes something we share.

This edition is an occasion to make a commitment to the Olympic values of excellence, friendship and respect. Excellence is not only about winning medals or setting records. It is about every individual striving to become a better version of themselves. Every Sunday, when a citizen chooses a bicycle over a sedentary routine, that person is embracing the spirit of excellence. When people of different ages, professions, communities and backgrounds ride together, they learn to respect one another and the spirit of fair play. Cycling together breaks social barriers and builds friendships beyond differences.

A sporting nation is not built only in stadiums and training centres. It is built on our streets, where children discover sport, families embrace healthy habits and communities come together.

Today, India is not only embracing a culture of fitness and environmental responsibility but also inspiring others through it. Earlier this month at COP31 in Turkey, India presented the initiative through a special session titled "Sundays on Cycle: From a Weekly Ride to a Way of Life" at the International Solar Alliance Pavilion. The Turkish Cycling Federation became the first international partner to join the call, showing how a mass fitness movement rooted in India can contribute to global conversations on sustainable mobility, climate action and healthier communities. The initiative has also reached the UK and Japan.

India's sporting future will be shaped by the energy of its people. The fitter our citizens, the stronger our nation, and the more sport becomes part of our lives, the stronger our sporting culture will be. One bicycle ride may seem small, but when millions make that choice, the collective impact is significant.

I invite every citizen to step out on November 29, join the celebration at the nearest location, and ride towards an India that is ready for the Olympics.

> I will join around 50,000 cyclists at Pimpri-Chinchwad, Pune, for the main event. In association with MY Bharat, young people will celebrate Sundays on Cycle in every district

The writer is Union Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports

40 YEARS AGO
November 28, 1986


SAREES
INDIAN EXPRESS
AHUJA
PM, Gorbachev for global N-arms meet
Delhi Declaration signed
Gorbachev outlines star peace plan
Rs 2,000 cr Soviet aid for India

Indo-Soviet joint declaration

THE PRIME Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, and the visiting Soviet Communist Party general-secretary, Mikhail Gorbachev, in a joint declaration, called for the immediate convening of an international meeting banning the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons as a concrete step towards complete nuclear disarmament. The historic New Delhi declaration, which sets forth 10 principles for building a nuclear-weapon-free and non-violent world, also appealed for the destruction of all nuclear arsenals before the end of the present century. A joint declaration was issued when Jimmy Carter visited India in 1978.

Gorbachev's three proposals

THE SOVIET Leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, outlined three major proposals — demilitarisation of the Indian Ocean, enhancement of the authority of the United Nations and launching a 'Star Peace' programme for the peaceful exploration and use of outer space.

Crisis in the White House

THE PRESIDENT, Ronald Reagan, in the grip of a "crisis atmosphere" in the White House, appointed a commission to investigate the role of the National Security Council in diverting the profits of US arms sales to Iran to the Nicaraguan rebels.

UP CM rules out negotiations

THE CHIEF Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Vir Bahadur Singh, ruled out further negotiations on the demand of the striking employees for parity, and announced that his government would deal firmly with the situation and ensure the resumption of work. After a four-hour gherao ended, the Chief Minister told newsmen that he was withdrawing all the proposals made so far to resolve the strike issue, and said that the government "would no longer seek to appease the strikers". Singh said that his government would stand by its commitment to pay 12.5 per cent interim relief and nothing more.

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

The toll on Russia's population has been carefully obscured by Moscow.
— The Guardian

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It happened at Wellington — a 720-run record, but no time to win



SURJIT S BHALLA, ABHINAV MOTHERAM AND SAHIL BHALLA

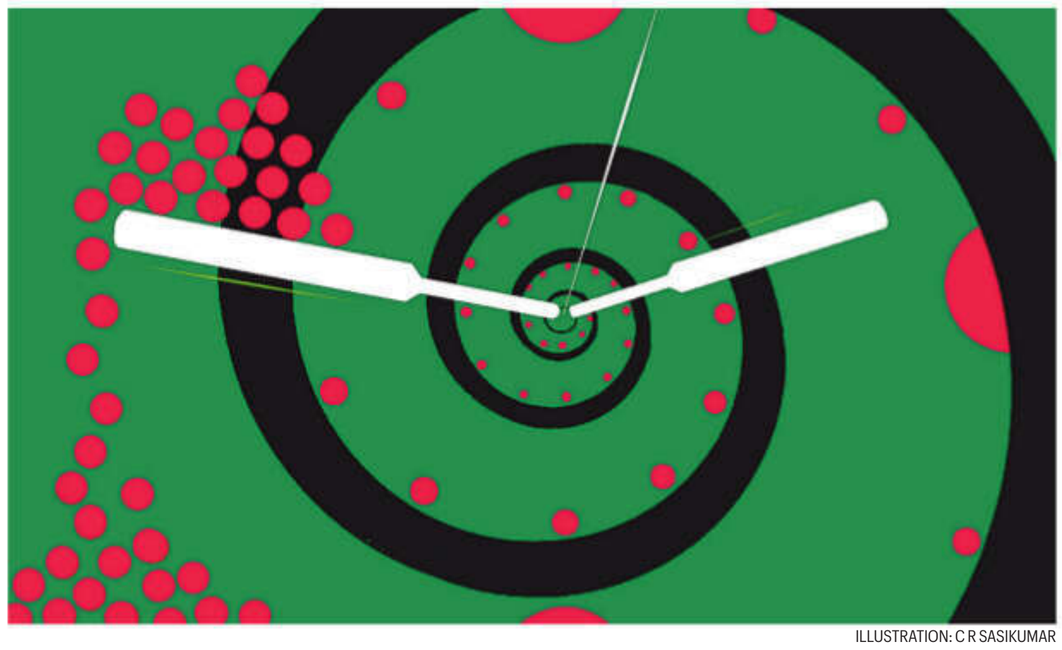

ILLUSTRATION: C R SASIKUMAR

THE CHANGE from the old order (Dravid-Rohit-Kohli) is proving to be a painful transition for Indian Test cricket. Whether this pattern will be repeated in white-ball cricket is an open question. Today, we examine what happened at Wellington, where India made 720 for nine, the highest Test total ever made in New Zealand, and still managed to achieve a tame draw.

Why? First, an explanation not (yet) talked about. A late declaration. India batted on and on and on, as if there was no difference between an Energizer battery and a sure win. Does an innings win bring extra points in the World Test Championship? It does not: A win is worth 12 points, whether by an innings or by one run, and a draw is worth four. What was the worst that could have happened if India had declared earlier? A draw. Isn't that exactly what happened? Then tell us why. And while you are thinking about it, tell us why Mohammed Siraj was not on the team.

While you ponder, let us first give context to our highest score in New Zealand. On India's 2020 tour of New Zealand, they made 722 runs in four innings across two losing Tests. In Wellington, they made almost as many in one. India's previous highest total in New Zealand was 520, at Hamilton in 2009, which is also the last time they won a Test there. In 26 Tests in New Zealand, India have won five, and none at the Basin Reserve since 1968. Of India's five totals of 700 or more, three have now ended in draws. Tell us why.

Unlike the cricket commentary in SENA countries, the discussion in India has been extraordinarily polite. The pitch was dead. The Kookaburra went soft before its time. Excuses, excuses. A dead pitch is a reason to declare early, not late: If wickets are going to be hard to take, grab every extra over.

India made two mistakes, one after the other. The first was the pace of the batting. In response to New Zealand's 368, India scored 159/1 at 4.1 runs/over. On the third day of play, India reached 486 for 4, scoring at the "slow" rate of 3.8 runs/over. Why the cautious, slow scoring? Rishabh Pant showed the way as India galloped to 720 at 5.7 runs/over on the fourth day. He salvaged some respect. On a dead pitch, remember?

The second mistake was the size of the lead. One useful rule of thumb: Depending on the time left and the pitch, a lead of 200 to 250 is enough. Our analysis of every Test since 1990, more than 1,500, agrees with the thumb rule. India passed a lead of 200 early on the fourth morning and 250 before lunch. Why is 200 to 250 enough? Because a side batting to save a Test is bowled out just as quickly when it is 350 behind as when it is 150 behind. At 100 overs, about two in three such sides have been bowled out, whatever the deficit.

> Unlike the cricket commentary in SENA countries, the discussion in India has been extraordinarily polite. The pitch was dead. The Kookaburra went soft before its time. Excuses, excuses

The coach-captain-team were risk-averse. Dhruv Jurel said after the fourth day's play, "The plan was that we were thinking to bowl around 135-140 overs... take the lead of 350 runs and have around 140 overs to bowl." But, as the numbers knowingly reveal, a lead of 350 buys no more wickets than a lead of 150. India bowled 120, left 15 overs on the table, and offered a handshake. Gill defended the handshake but said not a word about the slow scoring or the late declaration. Captains in Australia, England and South Africa do not have this luxury of no questions!

How unsafe was an early declaration? Since 1990, sides that declared their first innings with a lead of 150 or more have won 102 times, drawn 15 and lost once. Of the 111 first-innings totals of 600 or more, none was lost, and 41 were drawn. Of the 18 totals of 700 or more, half were drawn. It is a simple stat, and one our coach and captain seem oblivious to. The huge total is not a symbol of dominance. It is very often the symptom of a draw: So many runs, made so slowly, that the side making them runs out of overs to win the match.

None of this is new. In 1987, in *Between the Wickets*, one of us wrote that captains "feel the ignominy of a loss is not worth the risk of defeat. This is both bad captaincy and bad cricket." The example was Imran Khan, 5th Test at the Oval, in 1987. Pakistan were one up in the five-match series (innings win in the 3rd Test, others being drawn) and needed only a draw for their first series victory in England. They could not lose with 600, or 500, or 400; nothing to gain by batting on and on. Imran did not declare; Pakistan were all out for 708, England followed on, and Gatting and Botham batted out the draw. Thirty-nine years later, India played the same risk-averse match.

There are several unintended consequences of India's embarrassing display of risk aversion, circa 2026. Qualification for the World Test Championship final was at stake, and India needed to be bold, not comfortable. Imran needed only a draw; India needed a win. A win is worth three draws – 12 points for a win, 4 points for a draw. In a must-win match, the risk India would have taken by batting faster and declaring with a lead of 250 was close to zero. The possible gain was staying alive for the WTC final.

We are also embarrassed by the media's near-silence on the late declaration. Siraj's exclusion error was noted, not the late declaration. The coach/captain were seemingly unaware that 108 of Siraj's 144 Test wickets came away from India. India have won only nine Tests in SENA countries this decade, starting with Siraj's debut at Melbourne in 2020. The only player to have played them all? Siraj.

What a "great" score — 720. A lovely number for the record books. It is a poor number for a coach-captain who should have felt a desperate need to win. India held on to the bat long after the runs had stopped mattering, because letting go felt risky and holding on did not. Australia arrive in January, with six Tests left in the WTC cycle; there is little room for another draw. The BCCI has a declaration of its own to make before January. It should not make it late.

Surjit Bhalla is author of Between the Wickets *(1987), Motheram is an economist based in Delhi and Sahil Bhalla is a freelance journalist. They are co-authors of a forthcoming book on 150 years of Test cricket. Views are personal*

Between India and Nepal, a bond that has survived ups and downs



RAM RAJYA

BY RAM MADHAV

IN THE Rajamandala theory of the *Arthashastra*, Kautilya surmised that neighbours can be both friends and foes. He advocated for the *shadgunya niti* — a six-pronged strategy to deal with them— involving friendship and alliance when possible, patience when required, and toughness when necessary. No other relationship India shares with its neighbours has passed through all these phases like the one with Nepal. This relationship, which all successive governments on both sides have described as "age-old" and "civilisational", has witnessed several ups and downs over the past seven-plus decades. Ultimately, however, what prevailed was a natural bond of emotional oneness — a feeling of brotherly affinity that has helped the two countries overcome strains on many occasions.

Prime Minister Balendra Shah's visit to New Delhi earlier this week — although a short one —proved once again that the bilateral relationship is based not just on agreements and treaties, but on mutual goodwill and natural affinity. After becoming PM in March this year, Shah took his time before engaging in diplomatic ventures, initially declining to meet with foreign dignitaries. He took time to meet the Indian ambassador and India's foreign secretary. Although this raised eyebrows, one could eventually appreciate that the Prime Minister, being new to the national role, wanted time to understand the complex dynamics of his country's relationships with its immediate neighbours.

As PM Shah's visit to India faced delays, strategic circles in India kept their fingers crossed, recalling his earlier nationalist stance on border issues when he was the mayor of Kathmandu. On its part, India conveyed its desire for a cordial bilateral relationship by extending the PM an invitation to visit New Delhi. When Rabi Lamichhane, a senior minister and leader of the ruling party, visited India in July this year, he received warm hospitality. Given this background, the 25-hour visit turned out to be a successful one, helping to reset the relationship. His mature and positive demeanour helped remove any lingering apprehensions in Indian strategic circles.

For Prime Minister Narendra Modi, relationships with immediate neighbours — which he assiduously built from the day he assumed office by inviting all heads of state of those countries to his swearing-in — remain a priority. Going beyond protocol, Modi held an hour-long one-on-one meeting with then Nepal PM K P Oli when he visited New Delhi in 2016. A similar meeting took place at Hyderabad House during Shah's visit, where Modi spent close to two hours with his counterpart discussing various issues pertaining to the bilateral relationship. This generous, personalised approach — a trademark of Modi's foreign policy — helped the leaders not only build a warm personal bond, but also exchange views frankly, unhindered by protocol, and resolve complicated issues. This time, too, the lengthy meeting between the two prime ministers led to the release of a joint statement without the two sides having to sit across the table for formal negotiations.

This demonstrated the level of trust and confidence India has in its relationship with the Himalayan neighbour and its leader. Modi lavishly praised Shah for "his clear vision and unwavering commitment to the future of Nepal and to India-Nepal relations" and reminded him that the relationship between the two countries is "not merely one of neighbourhood; it is rooted in a deep sense of kinship and enduring trust". Prime Minister Shah reciprocated the sentiment by calling India a "dependable and trusted neighbour" and described the bond between the two countries as being as tall as the Himalayas.

India's relations with its Himalayan neighbours, such as Nepal and Bhutan, were shaped by the Cold War-era geopolitics of the 1950s. Those were also the tense years when Mao Zedong's China extended its rule over Tibet, with Mao reportedly pursuing the "Five Fingers Policy" — which described Tibet as China's right palm, and Ladakh, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, and Arunachal Pradesh as its five fingers. With a view to helping each other protect their sovereign interests, India entered into bilateral treaties with Bhutan and Nepal in 1949 and 1950, respectively.

India conveyed its willingness to discuss all outstanding bilateral issues in the spirit of the treaty. It was decided during Shah's visit that the foreign secretaries of both countries would soon initiate discussions on those issues.

Since the 1990s, India has followed the "Neighbourhood First" principle, which PM Modi has vigorously pursued. However, he added an important dimension to it by insisting on the motto "Together We Grow". India expects its neighbours to appreciate this spirit, which suggests that while foreign policy is the sovereign prerogative of every country, one nation's decisions should help — not hinder — the interests of its neighbours.

The writer is national vice president, BJP and president, India Foundation

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Deepam row

IT IS surprising that, after staying the relevant operative portions of the Madras HC verdict upholding Justice G R Swaminathan's direction, the Supreme Court permitted the *deepam* to be lit at the disputed survey stone as a one-time arrangement ('CM Vijay must face Court, forge political consensus', IE, November 27). Many contend that such permission effectively legitimises the lighting of the *deepam* at the disputed pillar. Should not the Supreme Court's order be unambiguous and justifiable?

Tharcius S Fernando, Chennai

Big three

THE SUMMIT represents a staged effort at peacemaking, sending the message that the chief negotiators are the US, Russia and China, while bypassing real-time solutions to the most contentious issues concerning the rest of the world. ('Xi, Trump and Putin at Shenzhen: Three peas in a pod', *IE*, November 27). The world is increasingly dealing with what economists call the "principal-agent" problem, in which a company's manager puts their own interests ahead of those of its owners, paralysing institutions such as the UN, which are required to maintain world order.

Madhusree Guha, Kolkata

US tariffs

THE CLAIM that India suffers from "structural excess capacity" is farcical ('Pushed to US tariff wall, Delhi must seek certainty', *IE*, November 27). Trade and manufacturing data clearly expose this weakness in the USTR's reasoning. The editorial's core rebuttal is that India's persistent merchandise deficit and limited manufacturing base hardly resemble the conditions associated with industrial overcapacity. The logic behind US tariff policy is driven more by geopolitical leverage and supply-chain politics than by economics. India's priority should be to secure policy certainty, which raises the question of why Washington is pursuing such action in the aftermath of the midterm shake-up.

Abhinav Shah, Lucknow

Women's reservation, delimitation: About equality



ADITI NARAYANI PASWAN

AS PARLIAMENT reconvenes on November 30 for a special session, it is set to revive, arguably, two of the most significant pieces of legislation in recent history: Delimitation and the legislation on women's political representation. Both, despite all the political whataboutery, are urgent: One addresses the issue of unequal representation of citizens across constituencies, and the other, the persistent exclusion of women from legislatures. Prime Minister Narendra Modi must be lauded for putting his weight behind women's reservation before the 2029 general elections. And, as Bharatiyas, we must avoid thinking in the binaries of North vs South or ruling vs opposition parties.

While preparing for the first election in 1951-52, the Election Commission faced a peculiar issue. Women in many places, as was customary, did not disclose their original names and were known by the relationship they had with their male relative ("wife of", "daughter of"). For several decades post-Independence, women's empowerment and agency were terms reserved for academic discourse, despite India having a woman head of government relatively soon after Independence.

Cut to 2019. The country saw a 67.18 per cent women voter turnout, which was higher than the male turnout. Some states counted more women than men in their electoral rolls. The current delimitation exercise and giving effect to the 106th Constitutional Amendment — one-third reservation for women lawmakers in state legislatures and Parliament — is a final push to make women not mere constituents but also active participants in law-making.

As it stands, the 131st Constitutional Amendment Bill provides for an increase in Lok Sabha seats to 815 (plus 35 seats for UTs). It will provide for women's reservation immediately after delimitation, instead of waiting for the next census. The bills will in all likelihood incorporate assurances given to the southern states. Contrary to some political statements, delimitation is an essential part of any functioning democracy. It provides for fair and equitable representation, ensuring that each vote has the same weight. The process is essential for ensuring that each constituency has a roughly equal population.

> The 131st Constitutional Amendment will provide for women's reservation immediately after delimitation, instead of waiting for the next census

The more important transformative aspect of the present debate is the question of women's representation. In 2023, the Modi government secured the passage of the 106th Constitutional Amendment Act. It was popularly known as the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam. The name reflects the spirit of women's empowerment by recognising their potential and giving them parity with men in the country. In the words of Iris Young, this enhanced presence of women enhances the democratic legitimacy of the institutions. Thus, women's representation will bring about the long-awaited corrective action to their structural exclusion.

India's experience with women's reservation in Panchayati Raj tells us why this representation matters. Economists Raghabendra Chattopadhyay and Esther Duflo showed through their research that reserved leadership positions for women also influence the political economy of the village and positively affect the allocation of public goods. Thus, women's entry into Parliament is a step towards a more inclusive, accommodative, and just democracy.

Where delimitation seeks to provide equality of representation, women's reservation will not only provide equity to the largest constituency in India but also correct the historical wrong of marginalising the *nari shakti* of this country. Delimitation will become an instrument of democratic redistribution whose benefits will be reaped by future generations, especially Gen Z women. It can bring India's representative institutions closer to the constitutional promise of substantive equality. We must stand behind and support this watershed moment.

The writer is associate professor, Dr Ambedkar International Centre

Let's focus on preventing infection, not just treating it



KAMINI WALIA

EVERY YEAR, November brings renewed attention to the threat of antimicrobial resistance (AMR). We organise awareness campaigns, release surveillance reports, conduct scientific meetings, discuss antibiotic stewardship and reiterate the importance of responsible antibiotic use. Yet, year after year, the underlying challenge persists. Resistant infections continue to threaten our ability to treat common bacterial infections, manage critically ill patients and safely deliver modern medical care. Have our efforts translated into meaningful progress, or are we becoming better at managing a problem we have not succeeded in controlling?

The recently published *Lancet Commission on 21st Century Global Threats to Health* provides an important perspective. It identifies 17 major threats that could profoundly affect human health and survival between 2025 and 2100, including AMR, obesity, air pollution, climate change, pandemics, childhood malnutrition, inequality, nuclear conflict and even the malicious use of AI. The inclusion of AMR alongside threats of such enormous global significance is a powerful reminder that resistance is a long-term threat to public health, economic development and global security.

The Commission estimates that differences between plausible best-case and worst-case futures for AMR could amount to 3.44 billion disability-adjusted life years over this century. This is not a prediction of inevitable loss; it represents the potential health gains that could be achieved through effective action. The future trajectory of AMR is within our capacity to influence. But the window for action cannot be taken for granted.

There is considerable progress to acknowledge. We have strengthened antimicrobial resistance surveillance, developed better diagnostic tools, improved our understanding of resistance mechanisms, introduced antimicrobial stewardship programmes and expanded the availability of treatment options for some difficult infections. Initiatives such as the ICMR Antimicrobial Resistance Surveillance and Research Network have generated evidence to guide clinical practice and public health policy. National and state action plans have brought AMR higher on the policy agenda.

> We have built significant scientific and institutional capacity, but must now move towards better implementation, stronger accountability and measurable outcomes

Yet these victories have not necessarily translated into control of the larger problem. We can treat a patient with carbapenem-resistant *Klebsiella pneumoniae*, but can we prevent the next patient from acquiring the same infection? We can establish sophisticated diagnostic laboratories, but are their results reaching clinicians in time to change treatment? We can promote antibiotic stewardship in tertiary-care hospitals, but what about inappropriate antibiotic use in the community, inadequate infection prevention, poor sanitation and antimicrobial use across animal and environmental systems?

Perhaps our greatest weakness is that we have focused disproportionately on treating resistant infections rather than preventing infections and interrupting the conditions that allow resistance to emerge and spread. Without effective infection prevention, vaccination, water and sanitation, timely diagnostics, responsible antimicrobial use and integrated One Health action, new antibiotics, however important, cannot be our only answer.

We have built significant scientific and institutional capacity, but must now move towards better implementation, stronger accountability and measurable outcomes. We need to know not just how many hospitals have stewardship programmes or how many laboratories conduct surveillance, but whether infections are declining, appropriate treatment is reaching patients faster, preventable deaths are being avoided and resistance is being contained. The real measure of success will not be how many resistant infections we can treat today, but how many we can prevent tomorrow.

The writer is senior scientist and programme officer, AMR, ICMR

THE COURT HAS SCHEDULED THE NEXT HEARING FOR JANUARY 21, 2027

HC refuses relief to Tata Trusts, allows Nov 30 Tata Sons meeting

ENS Economic Bureau
Mumbai, November 27

THE BOMBAY High Court on Friday refused to grant any interim relief to Tata Trusts, allowing the Tata Sons board meeting scheduled for November 30 to go ahead. However, any resolutions passed at the meeting will remain subject to the outcome of the proceedings before the court, which fixed January 21, 2027, as the next date of hearing.

"We are not granting any relief today. Let the meeting go on as scheduled and everything will be subject to the outcome," Justice Abhay Ahuja said, making it clear that decisions taken by the Tata Sons board would be subject to further orders of the court.

Tata Trusts has been granted time to file its response in the matter. The Tata group battle moved to the Bombay High Court on Thursday, with Tata Trusts challenging the reappointment of N Chandrasekaran as executive chairman for another five-year term through a casting vote. The trusts alleged that the resolution passed by the company's board on September 17 was ultra vires its Articles of Association (AoA) and, therefore, null and void.

Tata Trusts maintained that the reappointment resolution, based on the casting vote of the chairman of the board meeting, Harish Manwani, was legally invalid because the AoA requires the affirmative vote of a majority of the Trusts' nominee directors for a decision on the appointment or reappointment of the chairman. Noel Tata voted against the resolution, while Venu Srinivasan supported it.

A Tata group source said the issue centred on Articles 104B and 121 of the AoA of Tata Sons. "As Abhishek Singhvi clearly articulated, the requirement of the affirmative vote of a majority of the Tata Trust nominee directors cannot be overridden by a casting vote," the source said.

"That is the central question of law, which is subject-agnostic. The legal validity of the affirmative vote has already been upheld by the Supreme Court in the Cyrus Mistry case," the source added.



Tata Trusts challenged Chandrasekaran's reappointment as Executive Chairman of Tata Sons. REUTERS

The trusts sought interim orders restraining Tata Sons and its directors from acting upon the resolution and from passing board resolutions over the objection of either of the two Trust-nominated directors in matters where the affirmative vote of a majority of Trust directors is required.

The move by the trusts came ahead of the November 30 Tata Sons board meeting. The dispute centres on the September 17 board meeting at which Tata Sons approved Chandrasekaran's reappointment for another five years as executive chairman, after he had earlier indicated that he would not seek another term beyond February 20, 2027. The board also set in motion the process to list Tata Sons.

Senior Advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi, appearing for Tata Trusts, urged the Bombay High Court to restrain or defer the November 30 Tata Sons board meeting, arguing that the company's AoA was designed to safeguard the interests of the trusts, which collectively hold 66% of Tata Sons.

He alleged that despite Noel Tata's opposition, the board proceeded to consider several matters, including the reappointment of N Chandrasekaran as chairman.

Senior Advocate Harish Salve, appearing for Tata Sons, countered that the dispute stemmed from divisions within the trusts themselves. He argued that Tata Trusts could have appointed additional directors but had chosen not to and could not now seek judicial intervention to prevent the board from functioning.

Salve said the trusts were effectively insisting that no decision could be taken unless Noel Tata agreed, arguing that the injunction sought would enable Noel Tata to dictate how Tata Sons was run. The trustees' internal disagreements could not be used to stall the company's functioning, he said.

FULL REPORT ON
WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

India-US trade deal close to culmination, says Goyal

Ravi Dutta Mishra
New Delhi, November 27



Commerce and industry minister Piyush Goyal addressing the India Debt Capital Market Summit 2026. ANI

A DAY after the US released its new tariff architecture following the conclusion of two Section 301 tariff investigations into India and 15 other countries, Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal on Friday said that the pathway to a US trade deal was now taking "some shape" and was "close to culmination".

Speaking at the Debt Capital Market Summit, Goyal said that India's exports in October touched an all-time high of $90 billion, with total exports reaching $90 billion in a single month, even as many of India's substantive free trade agreements (FTAs) have yet to come into effect.

"The EU FTA will hopefully be executed and signed later this year and come into effect in March next year. The US trade deal is close to culmination. The process and pathway, which was always something that held back the finalising of the deal, is now taking some shape," he said.

This comes as the US seems to have agreed to a key Indian demand of securing a comparative advantage over its rivals. Under the new tariff architecture, India has received a marginally better tariff rate offer of 17% post-US deal, compared with the 18-20% rates offered to other Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries such as Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and Vietnam.

To be sure, the US also has fresh leverage over India after US President Donald Trump signed into law the Lindsey O. Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act of 2026 earlier this year, giving him the authority to impose tariffs of up to 100% on countries, including India and China, that continue to buy Russian oil and gas. The use of the Act had been paused for 60 days ahead of the mid-term elections on November 3.

The Ministry of External Affairs had said that India remains committed to ensuring the nation's energy security "through diversified sourcing and based on evolving market dynamics". It has also said that the proposed legislation's implications for the India-US relationship, as well as the global energy market, have been flagged in discussions with US representatives.

While India stands to gain a tariff advantage over its ASEAN peers, New Delhi will have to accept steep demands under the trade deal. Exporters said the government will now have to decide what kind of concessions it is willing to offer in exchange for an 8-percentage-point tariff advantage. The no-deal tariff rate for India is set at 25%.

According to the joint statement released by the two countries in February, India agreed to "eliminate or reduce" tariffs on all US industrial goods and a wide range of US food and agricultural products, including dried distillers' grains (DDGs), red sorghum for animal feed, tree nuts, fresh and processed fruit, soybean oil, wine and spirits, and additional products. However, India did not formally sign the trade deal.

"India agrees to address long-standing barriers to the trade in US medical devices; eliminate restrictive import licensing procedures that delay market access for, or impose quantitative restrictions on, US Information and Communication Technology (ICT) goods; and determine, with a view towards a positive outcome, within six months of entry into force of the Agreement whether US-developed or international standards, including testing requirements, are acceptable for US exports entering the Indian market in identified sectors," the joint statement stated.

It also said India intends to purchase $500 billion worth of US energy products, aircraft and aircraft parts, precious metals, technology products, and coking coal over the next five years.

"India and the United States will significantly increase trade in technology products, including Graphics Processing Units (GPUs) and other goods used in data centres, and expand joint technology cooperation," the statement said.

'India's equipment push should not become anti-China drive'

Dheeraj Mishra
New Delhi, November 27

A DAY after the Union Cabinet approved a major scheme to boost domestic manufacturing of high-value, technologically advanced construction equipment, including tunnel boring machines (TBMs), *Global Times*, the mouthpiece of the Chinese Communist Party, said India's localisation drive should not be driven by an anti-China narrative. It said self-reliance does not mean self-isolation, and localisation should not become synonymous with protectionism.

The Cabinet's decision on Wednesday to approve an Rs 11,000-crore scheme came about a month after China's Commerce Ministry announced restrictions on the export of critical equipment, including TBMs, one of the most important machines used in tunnel construction.

"India's development of its construction equipment industry has its own economic logic, and there is no need to link a normal process of industrialisation to a 'de-China' or an 'anti-China' narrative. According to some media reports, approval of the plan followed nearly two years of discussions between the construction equipment industry and the government on financial incentives to boost domestic manufacturing. This shows that the industry's underlying economic rationale long predates recent supply concerns," *Global Times* said in its editorial on Thursday.

India is currently the world's third-largest market for construction and infrastructure equipment (CIE), after China and the United States, with a market size of around Rs 97,500 crore in 2024-25. However, imports still account for nearly 45% of domestic demand.

On the back of increased infrastructure spending, particularly in the roads, railways, ports and housing sectors, the government expects the domestic market to more than double to Rs 2.28 lakh crore by 2029-30.

"This vast market demand provides a practical foundation for nurturing indigenous manufacturing capacity. China has no reason to see India's industrial progress as a threat. What truly warrants caution is that some Indian manufacturers are trying to secure more market space for local production by imposing tariffs and tightening local sourcing requirements," *Global Times* said.

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MSMEs should make the most of trade deals, adopt newer tech like AI, says RBI Governor

Akash Mandal
Mumbai, November 27

RESERVE BANK of India (RBI) Governor Sanjay Malhotra on Friday said the micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) sector should make the most of the free trade agreements (FTAs) signed by India over the past couple of years, including those with the UK, Australia and Oman, instead of focusing only on the domestic market.

"Look beyond domestic markets. Only about 20-30% of eligible Indian exports take advantage of the lower tariffs available under our FTAs. It is remarkably low compared with 60-70% utilisation by partner countries' exports to India. It is an opportunity we are leaving on the table," Malhotra said at the SME Finance & Investment Summit in Mumbai.

"Learn about the FTAs relevant to your products, invest in quality, standards and certification, and draw on the support available from the agencies concerned," he urged.

Malhotra urged MSMEs to invest in and adopt newer technologies such as AI to boost growth. "Invest in productivity, technology and innovation. This is where the biggest gains lie," he said. "...(AI) can help small firms compete with larger players on speed, quality and personalisation. Overall, AI is estimated to generate $490 billion-$685 billion of economic value for the MSME sector," Malhotra added.

"Opportunities, however, do not come on a silver platter; they must be actively pursued and seized. The ability of an enterprise to capitalise on these opportunities depends critically on its access to timely and adequate finance," he added.



RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra during the SME Finance and Investment Summit 2026. PTI

Reiterating the measures undertaken by the government and the RBI, Malhotra said, "The Reserve Bank and the Government can create the enabling conditions. But growth must ultimately come from enterprises themselves." These measures include collateral-free lending to MSMEs by banks up to a certain threshold, digital lending, greater allocation of capital to the sector through priority sector lending, and easier access to working capital.

Malhotra noted that workers in India's MSME sector lagged behind their counterparts in other global economies in terms of productivity, which could be improved through the adoption of AI and newer technologies.

Despite the obvious advantages, AI adoption remains slow among MSMEs. "Technology is the key to productivity, yet adoption remains shallow. India's MSME sector has an AI adoption rate of about 15%, behind peers such as China, the US and Germany," Malhotra said.

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India's power sector needs Rs 200 lakh cr by 2047: Minister

Press Trust of India
New Delhi, November 27

INDIA'S POWER sector will need investments to the tune of Rs 200 lakh crore until 2047 to achieve various targets, Union minister Manohar Lal said on Friday, and called for stock market listings of state-owned firms and participation from private players to raise funds.

Speaking at the Power Ministers' Conference of States and Union Territories here, Lal emphasised the need for the Centre and states to work as a team to tackle challenges related to transmission of renewable energy.

The power minster also said that the total loss of discoms across the country has reached Rs 7 lakh crore again, even after the central government absorbed about the same amount of losses in 2017 through UDAY (Ujjwal DISCOM Assurance Yojana), a financial package scheme for revival of power distribution companies (discoms).

"We absorbed about Rs 7 lakh crore loss under the UDAY scheme in 2017. Losses of discoms of the entire nation have again reached Rs 7 lakh crore," he said. He also pointed out that last year, all discoms together earned a profit of Rs 2,600 crore.

• BRIEFLY

Forex reserves fall by $4.4 billion to $701 billion

Mumbai: India's forex reserves dropped by $4.443 billion to $700.898 billion in the week ended November 20, the RBI said on Friday. In the previous week, the overall kitty had dropped by $14.205 billion to $705.342 billion. The reserves had touched an all-time high of $785.706 billion during the week ended September 4, driven by a heavy flow of currency as part of a special concessional swap for deposits from the diaspora through which banks raised a record $133 billion, but have been on a decline ever since. During the week, foreign currency assets decreased by $266 million to $583.186 billion, as per RBI data. PTI

RBI sets rules to freeze suspicious bank accounts

Mumbai: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday introduced a uniform, time-bound procedure for banks to place debit holds on highly suspicious bank accounts and transactions linked to financial fraud, money mule activity and terrorist financing, while putting in place safeguards to minimise inconvenience to genuine customers. Under the revised Know Your Customer directions, banks must follow a standard operating procedure to identify suspicious activity, place debit holds, notify account holders, examine their explanations and coordinate with the police and other competent authorities. ENS

• MARKETS

Sensex	NIFTY	Gold ▲	US Dollar ▲
83,339.26	25,607.20	₹1,26,299	₹92.99
-989.33	-277.30	Silver ▲	Oil ▲
-1.17%	-1.07%	₹1,54,300	$92.65

NOTE: GOLD, SILVER RATES AS PER INDIA BULLION AND JEWELLERS ASSOCIATION DATA GOLD PER 10G, SILVER PER 1 KG; CRUDE OIL (INDIAN BASKET) AS OF NOVEMBER 26, 2026

Toll evasion through number plate tampering to invite fivefold penalty

Dheeraj Mishra
New Delhi, November 27

TAKING ACTION against motorists tampering with, masking or concealing number plates to evade tolls at barrier-less fee plazas, the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) has decided to levy a penalty of five times the user fee of the concerned toll plaza.

The Ministry said that the penalty amount will be in addition to the recovery of the user fee itself. It will apply wherever Multi-Lane Free Flow (MLFF) or barrier-less tolling systems are in use, as well as at new locations where they are introduced in the future.

The Indian Express had on November 10 reported that thousands of vehicles were crossing barrier-less toll plazas without paying any toll, resulting in significant revenue loss to the government. These vehicles are termed "unidentified" when either their number plates and FASTags are not visible or are covered while passing through the toll gate, or when the number plates are masked, tampered with or impersonated.

"It (the penalty) will apply only where the act is established to have been done with intent to evade user fee. It covers registration numbers on the front, the rear or both, in cases where the FASTag also could not be detected. Culprit vehicles will be identified through a robust, technology-driven process," the Ministry said in a statement.

Sending out a message to highway users, the Ministry also said that tampering with, masking or concealing number plates, or not affixing a FASTag to avoid user fees, is a deliberate act of evasion.

The MLFF system is currently operational at nine fee plazas, including Choryasi (Gujarat), Mundaka (Delhi), Daulatpura, Manoharpura and Shahjahanpura (Rajasthan), Gharaunda (Haryana), and Paranur, Nemili/Sri Perumbudur and Chenasamudram (Tamil Nadu).

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Tata Steel-APL Apollo deal: Why SEBI is reviewing the Rs 28,000-crore deal

George Mathew
Mumbai, November 27

MARKET REGULATOR Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) on Friday said it has decided to take a look at the Tata Steel-APL Apollo Tubes mega takeover deal amid concerns over high valuation and investors getting short-changed.

"SEBI takes minority shareholder rights very seriously... we are looking into the TATA-APL deal. Investor protection is very important," said SEBI Chairman Tuhin Kanta Pandey. The market regulator takes "minority shareholder rights very seriously", he said on the sidelines of an event on Friday.

Possible violations of related party transactions by APL Apollo Tubes and valuation have come under scrutiny. SEBI is set to question officials involved in the deal, said a source.

The deal by Tata Steel for a mega acquisition of APL Apollo Tubes is a strategic push to build a 15.5-million-tonne downstream steel business. But it has come under the scrutiny of proxy advisory firms and analysts with demands coming for a SEBI review of the deal. With analysts and investors raising concerns, Tata Steel recently indicated that it's reviewing the deal structure as the transaction has unsettled investors, who are questioning the valuation, financing arrangements, potential dilution and the economics of promoter-linked commercial contracts.

Shares of APL Apollo and Tata Steel had fallen in a strong market following concerns over the cost of the acquisition and how the company intends to fund it. While the strategic rationale is clear, the financial implications for shareholders, who were flummoxed by the two-leg transaction, remain less so.

Why is the market uneasy?

On Sunday, Tata Steel said it will sell its entire steel tubes business and its wholly owned subsidiary Tata Steel Colors Pvt Ltd to APL Apollo Tubes for a combined consideration of Rs 28,000 crore. Tata Steel on Monday said it will acquire a 26.6% stake in APL Apollo Tubes from its promoters — Sanjay Gupta and family — for Rs 15,510 crore and make an open offer for an additional 26% stake.



Tata Steel's proposed acquisition of APL Apollo Tubes is a strategic move to build a 15.5-mt downstream steel business. REUTERS

In short, APL Apollo borrows Rs 28,000 crore to buy two Tata businesses and Tata Steel, in turn, uses that money to buy out APL Apollo's Guptas. Investors are debating whether minority shareholders will approve the transfer of two business units as promoters – mostly Tata Sons — hold only 32.94% stake in Tata Sons.

Even as Tata Steel MD TV Narendran on Wednesday indicated that it will review the acquisition structure, the market is apparently worried about the valuation of the transaction, financing structure and the impact on minority shareholders. The approximately Rs 28,000-crore valuation attributed to the tubes and colour-coated businesses has drawn scrutiny, particularly in comparison with the historical net block of the assets being transferred. Questions have also surfaced over the valuation of Tata Steel Colors following the buyout of its joint venture partner, BlueScope.

In a conference call on Monday, Tata Steel CFO Koushik Chatterjee has defended the valuation, arguing that historical asset values do not adequately capture the growth prospects, distribution advantages and operational synergies of the businesses. "Investors need greater clarity on expected revenue growth, operating margins, capital expenditure and the return on invested capital," said an investment analyst. "The valuation will ultimately have to be justified through earnings and cash flows. Projected synergies, however attractive on paper, cannot be treated as realised returns."

"It's so patently arbitrary and positively hostile to shareholder interest," Prime Securities MD N Jayakumar wrote in X.

Call for SEBI intervention

According to Institutional Investor Advisory Services (IiAS), a proxy advisory firm, the deal makes commercial sense, but APL Apollo's minority shareholders bear the cost. The price is steep: 24.8x EV/EBITDA, and the company's balance sheet is funding its own change of control, with the outgoing promoter signing a side arrangement. "Shareholders will get a chance to veto the borrowings — just as they have voted down four earlier resolutions proposed by APL. But regulators too need to step in. SEBI should say whether the existing purpose-and-effect test (related party transaction rules) apply," IiAS said in a report.

"Because the asset purchase was agreed before Tata Steel became a shareholder, it falls outside the related party framework. It needs no audit committee approval and no shareholder vote that excludes interested parties," it said.

FULL REPORT ON
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• DELIMITATION

More seats, same balance of power

Uniformly increasing seats across states raises questions about the Constitutional basis of the exercise



VIKAS PATHAK

THE UNION Cabinet on Friday cleared the Constitution Amendment Bill to implement reservation for women in Parliament and state legislatures through a delimitation exercise. The proposal would increase Lok Sabha seats across states by 50%, potentially taking the House's strength to up to 850, while freezing their relative share of representation until 2051.

The government will likely introduce the delimitation package in a special sitting of Parliament from Monday.

What is the Constitutional basis of delimitation?

Delimitation involves redrawing constituency boundaries and reallocating parliamentary seats among states based on population. Article 81 of the Constitution provides for the "one person, one vote, one value" principle. Article 81(2)(a) says: "There shall be allotted to each State a number of seats in the House of the People in such manner that the ratio between that number and the population of the state is, so far as practicable, the same for all States."

The only exception the Article makes to the norm is for very small states with a population not exceeding six million, so that they can still get proper representation in the Lower House.

This principle is an extension of the idea of equality for all citizens — India gave a single vote to the rich, the poor, men and women, and rural and urban people.

The Constitution also mandated delimitation after each decennial Census to implement the one-person, one-vote, one-value principle. Article 81(3) says: "In this article, the expression 'population' means the population as ascertained at the last preceding census of which the relevant figures have been published."

Why was delimitation to allocate seats among states frozen in '70s?

In the 1970s, there was considerable stress on family planning, and the freeze aimed to ensure that those states that stabilised their population first did not lose seats. In 2001, too, the same logic was used to incentivise family planning. But delimitation after each Census would award more seats to states with higher population growths because of the one-person, one-vote, one value principle.

So, in 1976, delimitation between states was frozen for 25 years via a Constitutional amendment without changing the formula, and this was repeated for another 25 years in 2001. The most recent delimitation exercise took place in 2008, involving the redrawing of some constituency boundaries on the basis of the 2001 Census.

Southern states say that if present Census data is used, they would lose their relative share of seats in Lok Sabha, as the decadal rates of growth of population of states such as Bihar and Uttar Pradesh are higher than southern states.

How did delimitation get linked to women's reservation?

Parliament passed a Constitutional amendment Bill for 33% women's reservation in Lok Sabha and state Assemblies on September 21, 2023, with all major Opposition parties on board. Lok Sabha passed the Bill with just two AIMIM MPs voting against it, while Rajya Sabha passed it unanimously. However, the Constitutional amendment tied the implementation of women's reservation to the next Census, which is now underway, saying that delimitation would take place once the Census data is out, and then women's reservation would be implemented.

Why did the government then try to amend it again?

In April 2026, the Centre introduced in a special session of Parliament three Bills for the purpose of providing women's reservation in the Lok Sabha and state Assemblies as early as 2029:

1. The Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill to amend the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, 2023, in order to expedite women's quota in Lok Sabha and state Assemblies;
2. A Delimitation Bill to set up a Delimitation Commission for the purpose of delimitation based on latest available figures;
3. And a Bill to extend women's quota to Union Territories with Assemblies.

It said that while the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam had laid down that women's reservation would be implemented following delimitation on the basis of the first Census after the Act was passed, this would delay the process as Census figures would take time to be published. The Bill sought to amend Article 81 of the Constitution to lay down that Lok Sabha shall not exceed 815 members from states and 35 from the UTs.

So, the Bill aimed to operationalise women's reservation following delimitation on the basis of the latest Census exercise for which figures had already been published. This meant the 2011 Census.

However, given the fact that some states had increased their populations much more than some others by 2011, it is difficult to understand how a 50% increase across states — as the government was verbally saying — would be compatible with the principle of "one-person, one-vote, one-value" under Article 81(2)(a).

The Constitutional Amendment Bill also sought to amend Article 82 to do away with the necessity to carry out delimitation after each Census.

The Bill failed to get the required two-thirds majority in Lok Sabha.

Why was Opposition against it?

Opposition parties said the Bills were riddled with contradictions and made no mention of the proportion of seats allocated to all states remaining unchanged, unlike what the government had been verbally saying. So, they argued that this would lead to states that did not implement family planning being "rewarded" with a higher share of seats.

Some parties also opposed the idea of a uniform 50% increase, saying that the gap between states whose population had stabilised and the ones whose population hadn't would increase in absolute numbers.

What has changed now?

The Union Cabinet Friday approved a Constitutional Amendment Bill, saying there would be a 50% increase in seats across states and the present ratio of seat allocation to states would be frozen till 2051.

Behind the government's confidence of securing a two-thirds majority are signals from the DMK that it would be open to backing the Constitution amendment Bill if Tamil Nadu's existing share of roughly 7.2% of Lok Sabha seats is assured. The ruling alliance is also counting on support from the NCP (Sharadchandra Pawar).

In the 540-member Lok Sabha — three seats are vacant — the DMK has 22 MPs and NCP(SP) eight. For a Constitutional amendment, at least 360 MPs will have to support the Bill.

In the 245-member Upper House, the NDA has 142 MPs. Support of 161 members will be required for the Constitutional amendment, so the ruling alliance needs support of another 19 members. The DMK has eight Rajya Sabha MPs and NCP(SP) one. Non-NDA parties, including regional parties, account for around 100 members and the BJP is confident of securing adequate support in the Upper House, too.

The DMK cites an Assembly resolution of February 2024: "Due to unavoidable reasons, if the number of (Lok Sabha and Assembly) seats on the basis of population were to (change), (they) shall be maintained at the present ratio for constituencies within states... and for both Houses of Parliament, (which were) fixed based on the population of 1971." Party leader M K Stalin has also demanded that the present ratio of seat allocations to states remain unchanged for the next 25 years.

What are the Constitutional pitfalls involved?

Former Lok Sabha Secretary General PDT Achary told *The Indian Express* that the Constitution provides a formula under Article 81(2)(a) for distribution of seats between states on the basis of one-person, one-vote, one-value principle and, for this, delimitation is Constitutionally required to be undertaken after each census — something that has been frozen for 50 years through Constitutional amendments.

"But the formula is still there, and a Delimitation Commission will have to abide by the Constitutional formula, unless the Article itself is amended to provide for a fresh formula that takes account of southern states' concerns. This will have to be done with all-party consultation, and would require amendments in Article 81 to move to a new formula for a future Delimitation Commission to follow," Achary said. "The government cannot instruct a Delimitation Commission to increase 50% seats across states while the one-vote, one-value formula is still there in the Constitution."

In other words, while the Bill that fell in April just said that the delimitation would be done on the last available Census data — meaning 2011 — without specifying, beyond verbal assurances, that each state would gain 50% seats, even specifying the same may not be in sync with Article 81, unless the present formula itself is dispensed with.

What is the present status of women's reservation?

As of now, the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam of 2023 stands. As per the 2023 Act, the Census will be followed by delimitation on the basis of the latest Census data, following which women's reservation will become a reality after the next Lok Sabha polls.

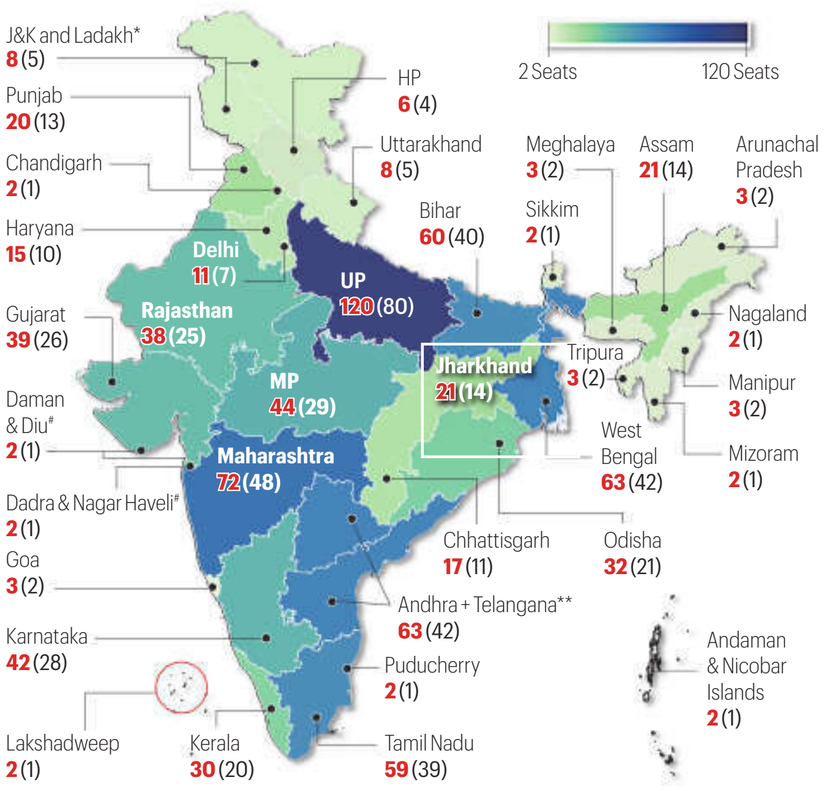


The new Lok Sabha chamber can accommodate up to 888 members. FILE

• WHAT NEW SEAT COMPOSITION COULD LOOK LIKE

States that have controlled population growth, especially those in the south, say delimitation will reduce their Lok Sabha representation. To allay this, the government is looking at an across-the-board 50% increase that will maintain seat proportions. But this will not fix the current disparities in representation.

Proposed Lok Sabha seats (current seats)



NOTES: *U.T. OF LADAKH WAS CARVED OUT OF ERSTWHILE STATE OF J&K IN 2019; **TELANGANA WAS CARVED OUT OF ANDHRA IN 2014; #DADRA & NAGAR HAVELI AND DAMAN & DIU MERGED INTO A SINGLE U.T. IN 2020. POPULATION DATA: 2011 CENSUS

Why Centre is looking to use 2011 Census when a new one is due



DEEPTIMAN TIWARY

WITH THE Centre expected to bring a fresh set of Bills on delimitation and implementation of women's reservation in the special sitting of Parliament beginning Monday, a key question confronting the exercise is why the government wants to rely on the 2011 Census when the enumeration for a fresh Census is scheduled to be completed in most of the country in just over three months.

The government is expected to address one of the major concerns raised by Opposition parties, particularly those from southern states, in April by incorporating in the legislation a provision for a uniform 50% increase in Lok Sabha seats across states. This would ensure that the relative representation of states in Parliament remains broadly unchanged. But it would also raise questions about the continued insistence on the 2011 Census.

Why does a uniform increase in seats change the debate?

The Constitution envisages two kinds of readjustment through delimitation — a change in the number of seats or a change in boundaries of constituencies.

While the allocation of seats among states continues to be broadly based on the 1971 Census, constituency boundaries in most of the country were last redrawn using the 2001 Census in 2008.

While a uniform 50% increase in seats would reduce the number of people represented by an individual MP, it would not address the existing disparities in representation among states. Even going by the 2011 Census, the population represented by an average MP in Bihar would be around 17.35 lakh against 11.14 lakh in Kerala after the proposed increase.

With the government deciding the allocation of seats among states independently of their contemporary population, the principal purpose of a fresh Census for delimitation would be to determine where the additional seats come up within states and how many of them are reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

For these purposes, the latest population data would ordinarily be desirable.

So why use 2011 Census to determine constituency boundaries?

The government's objective is to operationalise the 33% reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and state Assemblies by the 2029 general election.

The Constitution (106th Amendment) Act, passed by Parliament in September 2023, linked the implementation of women's reservation to a delimitation exercise following the first Census conducted after the enactment of the legislation.

Speaking in Lok Sabha on April 17, Union Home Minister Amit Shah argued that a delimitation exercise undertaken after the fresh Census could not be completed before the 2029 elections, given the extensive public consultations involved.

There is a distinction between the completion of Census enumeration and the availability of population figures necessary for delimitation.

The first digital Census of the country is expected to significantly reduce the time taken to process population data. As reported by *The Indian Express* in June last year, provisional population figures were expected to become available within 10 days of the completion of enumeration, with verification likely to take another six months. Delimitation, however, requires granular population data down to the level of villages, towns and wards, including the population of SCs and STs.

Forming a Delimitation Commission immediately after the passage of the Bills could give it over two years to complete the exercise using the 2011 Census. But waiting for 2027 Census figures could substantially reduce the time available.

What are the pitfalls of using the 2011 Census?

One of the principal arguments advanced by the government itself in the Statement of Objects and Reasons of the Delimitation Bill introduced in April was that uneven population growth and migration, particularly from rural to urban areas, had resulted in varying population densities in electoral constituencies.

But much of the demographic change that has taken place in the country since the last delimitation falls outside the 2011 Census. Rapidly expanding metropolitan regions, satellite townships and industrial centres have attracted large populations over the past decade and a half.

While electoral rolls cannot substitute for Census data, they provide an indication of the demographic changes that have taken place in different constituencies.

Consider a hypothetical state which gets 150 seats after delimitation. A region that accounted for 10% of the state's population in 2011 would be entitled to roughly 15 seats. If its share of the state's population has increased to 15% by 2027, it could be entitled to 22 or 23 seats on the basis of a fresh Census. The choice of Census could thus influence the geographical distribution of political representation within states. It could also determine the number and location of constituencies reserved for SCs and STs using population proportions that are no longer contemporary.

Will another delimitation follow the 2027 Census?

The Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026, which failed to secure the requisite majority in the Lok Sabha, proposed to remove the Constitutional requirement of undertaking delimitation after every Census. It sought to amend Articles 81 and 82 to allow Parliament to determine through legislation which Census would form the basis of delimitation and when such an exercise would be undertaken. Even if fresh Census figures became available while the Commission was working, there would be no obligation to incorporate them.

If these provisions are retained in the new Bills, there would also be no constitutional requirement to undertake another delimitation following the publication of the 2027 Census. The constituencies drawn on the basis of the 2011 Census could thus continue for several elections until Parliament legislates for another exercise.

Why link women's reservation and delimitation?

Implementing women's reservation by 2029 would allow the BJP to go into the general election claiming to have delivered on a major promise of political empowerment of women. Also, implementation of women's reservation in the existing 543-member House would leave only 362 seats open to candidates of either gender. In an expanded House of 816 members, even after reserving a third of the seats for women, 544 seats would remain open.

• CORPORATE

Why establishing financial accountability for senior executives has been fraught

George Mathew
Mumbai, November 27

INDIA'S FINANCIAL sector is witnessing the use of 'malus' and clawback provisions to hold senior executives financially accountable for failures in governance, risk management and financial reporting, but enforcement remains limited.

IndusInd Bank's recent action against its former CEO, Sumant Kathpalia, has brought renewed attention to the mechanisms. This was only the third known instance of clawback in Indian banking since the RBI introduced the framework in 2019.

Accountability measures

Malus and clawback mechanisms allow companies to revisit compensation awarded to senior executives when their performance is found to be flawed, or when they are found responsible for misconduct.

Malus — originally a Latin word meaning bad or wrong — refers to the cancellation, reduction or withholding of unpaid or deferred compensation. It reduces an executive's entitlement before payout.

Clawback, on the other hand, involves recovering compensation. This is triggered when financial statements are restated, misconduct is established, or the executive is found to have contributed to losses or failures that warrant recovery.

Malus is easier to implement, whereas clawback can lead to legal disputes. The RBI's compensation framework for banks requires remuneration structures to incorporate these provisions.

A rare banking clawback

IndusInd Bank's action against Kathpalia highlights the few instances in which banks have tried to recover compensation.

The bank disclosed in March 2025, that an internal review of its derivatives portfolio identified discrepancies with a potential adverse impact of approximately 2.35% on its net worth, as of December 2024. The discrepancies involved accounting lapses and losses were then estimated at nearly Rs 2,000 crore. Kathpalia resigned weeks after the disclosure, taking what he described as moral responsibility.

A landmark case

The case involving former ICICI Bank CEO Chanda Kochhar was one of India's prominent executive compensation recovery disputes. In January 2019, following an investigation led by former Supreme Court judge B N Srikrishna into the Videocon loan controversy that involved conflict of interest, ICICI Bank's board treated Kochhar's exit as a termination for cause.

The bank sought to recover bonuses paid to her between 2009 and 2018, coming to around Rs 7.41 crore.

Kochhar challenged the termination and recovery. The Bombay High Court dismissed her writ petition in 2020, while ICICI Bank also pursued recovery through a separate civil suit. The case demonstrated that recovery of executive compensation could become a protracted legal battle.

A prolonged recovery battle

Infrastructure Leasing & Financial Services (IL&FS) recently approached the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT), Mumbai, seeking directions to recover Rs 185.87 crore in excess managerial remuneration from former directors of IL&FS, IL&FS Financial Services (IFIN) and IL&FS Transportation Networks (ITNL).

The recovery exercise has yielded a poor response. The three companies had identified Rs 187.01 crore as refundable but recovered only Rs 91.08 lakh — less than 0.5% of the total amount.

The recovery relates to remuneration paid between 2013-14 and 2017-18, when the companies reported profits in their original financial statements. A forensic exercise to reopen and recast the accounts, however, turned those reported profits into substantial losses. The NCLT ordered a recasting in January 2019.

Former directors have argued that remuneration was approved based on audited financial statements and that they cannot be retrospectively invalidated.

Rarely used

Despite the regulatory push for greater accountability, India Inc. has not seen any significant wave of such actions. The few cases that emerged were largely exceptional.

The RBI's requirement for banks to disclose the cases in which these provisions have been exercised could offer greater visibility into their implementation.

The real test will be whether companies can enforce them when senior executives are implicated in serious failures, rather than merely embedding them in compensation policies.



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Strange proposal

Diluting disclosure framework for FPIs not advisable

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has come up with an ill-conceived proposal to do away with the additional disclosure framework (ADF) for foreign portfolio investors and subscribers of offshore derivative instruments. The move, mooted in a consultation paper, can impair ongoing efforts to clean up Indian markets.

ADF was introduced in the wake of the Hindenburg research's report on the Adani Group in January 2023, which alleged, among other things, that 13 overseas entities including 12 FPIs investing in the Adani stocks were ultimately owned by Adani and his close associates. To recap, the ADF brought into effect in August 2023 laid down that that FPIs with more than 50 per cent of their Indian equity assets in a single corporate group or holding more than ₹50,000 crore of Indian equity investments should provide granular data on all the beneficial owners, irrespective of the extent of ownership or control. An amendment to SEBI regulations in 2018 had removed the requirement to disclose the natural person who is the beneficial owner in an FPI. As a result of this loophole, domestic entities could hide their economic interest behind multi-layered opaque entities in other jurisdictions, which were used to bring black money back to the country or to manipulate stock prices of the listed group companies. SEBI was arguably unable to pierce the veil, as it were, to identify the natural persons. With ADF in force for three years, credibility in stock market processes was restored.

Therefore, SEBI's sudden proposal to scrap ADF is surprising. The reasons being given are deeply unconvincing. The regulator has said that other jurisdictions do not have similar rules and the additional compliance burden can push FPIs out to other countries. However, Indian capital markets are vulnerable to misuse for money-laundering. This has been borne out in several instances over the last three decades, including the case involving Pluri, a multi-layered offshore entity, which was used to re-route money through ODIs to manipulate stocks of the Anil Ambani group. The ADF is required to guard against such risks. The other suggestion in the consultation paper, too is best ignored — namely, that the threshold for determining beneficial ownership of an FPI can be increased from the current level of 10-15 per cent to 25 per cent, in line with other FATF-compliant jurisdictions. The lower limits have been accepted by FPIs, anyway.

To make a case for ADF withdrawal, the consultation paper points out that FPIs have pulled out ₹5.61 lakh crore between October 2024 and October 2026 — while also admitting that the outflows may have occurred due to several factors. Slowing earnings, high valuations, lack of AI stocks and the weakness in the rupee were critical in influencing FPI ouflows over the last two years. Outflows are a flimsy excuse to dilute regulations to check money laundering. Ironically, these outflows may organically reduce due to global developments.

New impetus to Indo-Nepal relations

RESETTING TIES. Nepal's Prime Minister Balen Shah's visit marks a break from the past, but territorial and other issues remain





PAROL CHANDRA

New Delhi has reason for quiet relief and cautious optimism now that Nepal's Prime Minister Balendra 'Balen' Shah has finally made his first bilateral visit to India, eight months after his swearing-in. The prolonged wait had fuelled speculation over how the young, non-traditional leader would pursue his country's relations with India.

The visit delivered a much-needed diplomatic reset, anchored by India's announcement of its largest-ever development assistance package for Nepal, worth ₹15,000 crore. The two sides also unveiled an ambitious Joint Vision titled 'Viksit Bharat and Samunnat Nepal (Developed India, Prosperous Nepal)'. Unsurprisingly, Prime Minister Narendra Modi also frequently invoked shared religious ties in his outreach to Nepal's new government.

Eager to keep Nepal within its sphere of strategic influence amid deepening Chinese inroads into the Himalayan nation, India is seeking a comprehensive economic and development partnership with its neighbour. The two countries plan to deepen cooperation in diverse areas such as connectivity, hydropower, energy, education, and health.

India has also offered transit trade connectivity by granting Nepal access to the ports of Kandla in Gujarat and Paradip in Odisha. Additionally, It finally acceded to Nepal's long-standing demand for Kathmandu-Bhairahawa-Lucknow air route to be made bidirectional.

During the visit, foundation stones were laid for the Lower Arun Hydroelectric Project and the Jhapa petroleum terminal, a cross-border motorable bridge was inaugurated, and the Sarayu-Kamala Express train service between Ayodhya and Janakpur was launched. The two sides also signed eight MoUs.

While all this sounds promising on paper, India will need to deliver on the many assurances made to the Balen Shah government. Notably, a delegation from Shah's Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) was in China being hosted by the Communist Party of China at the same time New Delhi was engaging the Nepalese PM, in continuation of Beijing's ongoing efforts to woo the ruling party and, by extension, his government.

PAIN POINTS

Among the challenges faced by India, the Pancheshwar Dam stands out as a prime example of a long-delayed infrastructure project it has yet to execute. For its part, India asserted that it is Nepal's 'committed partner' on its "journey towards becoming a strong and prosperous nation", while both sides noted that the Joint Vision "provides the roadmap for an aspirational and future-oriented partnership".

However, do such assertions ring true when the partnership appears to be on an unequal footing, or when India seems unwilling to treat Nepal as an equal partner? Even as New Delhi waxed eloquent about being "partners in each other's progress and a source of support for one another in times of difficulty", it showed little regard for its neighbour's sensitivities regarding the report of the Eminent Persons Group (EPG) on India-Nepal relations.

Under the new Joint Vision, the boundary issue is listed among the several outstanding matters to be resolved through mutual dialogue

In remarks to the media, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri summarily dismissed the report as "not relevant, (as) it pertains to the past". He pitched for the future, stating that "we need to look forward in keeping with the forward looking vision of the Joint Vision".

Misri's remarks are unsurprising, given that India effectively buried the report several years ago by refusing to accept it. However, his statement marks the first official admission of the Modi government's decision to consign the report to the dustbin.

The expert panel's terms of reference included reviewing existing bilateral treaties and agreements, notably the crucial 1950 India-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship. Nepal has long sought revision of this treaty to align it with contemporary realities and its sovereign status.

Ironically, the EPG was constituted in 2016 during PM Modi's first term while the China-leaning KP Sharma Oli was Nepal's PM. Although the report was ready in 2018, it was never officially submitted because the Indian government was unwilling to receive it.

The expert panel's report has never been made public, leaving New Delhi's specific objections unclear. Predictably, the Modi government's declaration of this report's irrelevance has stirred a hornet's nest in Nepal and among the EPG members who represented both countries in equal numbers.

New Delhi now wants to shift the focus to the Joint Vision, which states the Friendship Treaty "could be reviewed on the basis of mutual consent". Consequently, Nepal's wait for a review of this Treaty has only grown longer, even as "India hopes to write a new golden chapter in India-Nepal relations".

The EPG was also mandated to examine bilateral boundary issues. The long festering Kalapani-Lipulekh-Limpiyadhura boundary dispute remains a major irritant in bilateral ties. Under the Oli government, Nepal even altered its official map to show these areas as part of its territory.

BOUNDARY DISPUTE

Under the new Joint Vision, the boundary issue is listed among the several outstanding matters to be resolved through mutual dialogue. The joint press statement said the foreign secretaries of the two countries have been asked to address the unresolved boundary disputes.

This is a positive step, especially given New Delhi's past reluctance to honour Nepal's repeated requests for foreign secretary-level talks on the Kalapani-Lipulekh-Limpiyadhura through established bilateral mechanisms.

Previously, as the mayor of Kathmandu, Shah famously hung a map of 'Greater Nepal' in his office and was vocal about the border dispute. Today, the urgent need to fulfil his electoral promises and tackle Nepal's economic challenges are clearly what has impelled him to seek a closer partnership with India.

New Delhi, however, would do well to remember that sweeping contentious issues under the carpet can ultimately undermine the very partnership it seeks to build as well as its own strategic interests.

Shah may have chosen not to press these sensitive matters for now, but the tide and public sentiment in Nepal can turn against India at any moment — especially since Kathmandu is no longer willing to play second fiddle. True strategic stability will require India to engage with Nepal's core sensitivities as an equal partner.

The writer is a senior journalist who writes on foreign affairs

FCNR flows shore up first quarter BoP

The global environment could improve now. But forex management will remain a year-round affair

Madan Sabnavis

The Reserve Bank of India's data on balance of payments for the first half of the year brings to the forefront the overall impact of the global environment on the Indian economy. It also vindicates the decision to get in the FCNR deposits and ECBs.

The trade deficit for this half of the year was higher by $18 billion at $176.1 billion. This was a result of the oil crisis which affected both imports and exports. As refinery products are an important component of the export basket, they normally tend to support the oil equation when the price of crude oil goes up. The war disruption and closure of Strait of Hormuz meant a couple of things. First there was more dependence on Russia for oil, which came at a premium to Brent. The discounts that were had after the Ukraine war had dried up. Second, the exports of refinery products to the Gulf region came down thus pressuring growth in exports.

Second, the increase in service exports was just $6.2 billion at $105 billion. Here, software is the major contributor and was affected mainly due to the global disturbances. This may change in the coming months post US elections.

REMITTANCES UP

Remittances, however, had increased by $10.5 billion to $77.7 billion. This is significant because it was felt that the escalation of the war could impact these remittances as the flow of labour to the Gulf area had slowed down. Also, the fact that the oil industry was in disarray could have led to lower incomes. It is possible that the western nations, which are now the major sources of remittances, have contributed to this increase, as these people typically are in higher paying jobs relative to those who work in the Gulf.

The net income from abroad also widened by $6.6 billion. All put, there has been a strain on the current account. In the past, it is the capital account which has put pressure on the balance of payments. On the capital account, first the FDI in net terms increased from $7.4 billion to $ 8.8 billion. While this is higher, 'net FDI' remains an issue. Outward FDI was higher by $3.4 billion at $22.1 billion. Indian companies are investing in their subsidiaries or involved in M&A activity. In a way it does show that Indian companies are progressively becoming global.



LOOKING UP. External inflows

BLEAK FPI SCENE

The FPI picture was disappointing at minus $10.4 billion. While it was negative last year too, it was worse this time. There are signs that there has been a major reversal this month, and hopefully with peace being more of a reality in the Gulf, or at least oil prices remaining stable, this could increase.

The ECBs and NRI deposits need to be looked at together this time. The FCNR scheme was a major success. It was based on the concept of leverage where loans were arranged to the NRIs to invest in these deposits which yielded a return of 6.75-7 per cent per annum. These loans have been arranged significantly from Indian players as is revealed by the ECB position.

The ECBs 'by India' were at an all-time high of $51.4 billion. This was only $3.4 billion for the first quarter which does correlate the outflow with the FCNR scheme. It would appear that a part of these loans would have been used for leveraging the FCNR scheme. There would also be lending made by Indian companies to other overseas companies on which information is not provided separately.

The balance of payments was finally in positive territory and stood at $66.8 billion. This was largely due to the combo of FCNR and ECBs. This has also contributed to rupee stability. The country will have to arrange for the redemptions which start after three years, making forex management a 365-day affair.

The writer is Chief Economist, Bank of Baroda. Views expressed are personal

OTHER VOICES.

The Guardian

Russia's war dead: the toll won't stop Putin

The toll of Russia's war on Ukraine is appallingly evident in the devastation of apartment blocks and hospitals, in the suffering of survivors and, above all, in the mourning of the dead, which included an estimated 150,000 soldiers and at least 18,000 civilians. The toll on Russia's population has been carefully obscured by Moscow. But a fuller picture has emerged from its own statistics after the hacking group Cyber Partisans, linked to the Belarusian opposition, and the Ukrainian hacker collective Silent Crow obtained 11m death certificates. Analysis by the Guardian offers disturbing insights into the deaths of almost half a million Russians in Ukraine since Vladimir Putin launched a full-scale invasion in 2022. The scale of death is hard to conceive. LONDON, NOVEMBER 26

讀賣新聞
THE YOMIURI SHIMBUN

Persecution of Rohingya Minority

Regarding the Myanmar military's persecution of the Rohingya, a Muslim minority, the International Court of Justice (ICJ), based in The Hague, has handed down a ruling that recognizes that the military committed genocide. This is the first judicial decision to recognize state responsibility for violations of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Amid international attention focused on the disastrous situations in Ukraine and the Palestinian territory of Gaza, the fact that the judiciary has sounded the alarm regarding the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Asia carries significant weight. The Myanmar government must take this ruling seriously and work to improve the humanitarian situation. TOKYO, NOVEMBER 27

LETTERS TO EDITOR

Send your letters by email to bleditor@thehindu.co.in or by post to 'Letters to the Editor', The Hindu Business Line, Kasturi Buildings, 859-860, Anna Salai, Chennai 600002.

Tariff pressure

Apropos the Editorial "Red herring" (November 27), the US has once again changed its cards in levying tariffs. India must respond strongly to the US' baseless allegations in discrediting a democratic country's internal policies, goals and framework on manufacturing.
It is not clear as to what the US needs from the negotiating countries. Let them define the policies and legal framework needed for trade talks at one go and spell out in clear terms and share it with other countries. Exercising brutal force in pressuring countries to agree to their trade terms through punitive tariff, restrictions and sanctions impacts their reputation.
In a liberalised global economy, if the US still believes that upholding the path of force in ruling over others would bring laurels, then it is a clear misconception and it will take a long time them to regain the lost trust.

RV Baskaran
Pune

US hypocrisy

Accusing a developing nation of 'excess capacity' simply because it succeeds in manufacturing is the height of hypocrisy ('Red herring', November 27). The latest US trade allegations against India are not rooted in fairness; they are a desperate attempt to mask domestic failures behind punitive tariffs. It is absurd to penalise a country for having low wages or for aggressively promoting its own industries, especially when advanced economies heavily subsidise their own. India cannot afford to get trapped in this endless cycle of shifting goalposts. While we must negotiate firmly and protect our strategic interests, we also need to look inward. The best response to external bullying is to build an unshakeable domestic economy. We must focus on innovation, strengthen our internal supply chains, and reduce our dependence on unpredictable foreign markets. True resilience is forged at home, not granted by erratic trade partners.

K Chidanand Kumar
Bengaluru

Nvidia's accountability

With reference to the article "Nvidia's liability problem isn't going away" (November 27), corporate accountability cannot end with the departure or defence of one executive. When a company's products may have reached restricted markets through intermediaries, its board must establish what happened, who knew what and whether controls failed. Compliance cannot be treated as paperwork delegated to a single officer; it is a collective governance responsibility. At the same time, allegations must be tested against evidence, not speculation. Independent investigation, transparent disclosure and export-control procedures are essential. Advanced technology carries commercial opportunity, but also national-security obligations. Investors and the public deserve assurance that growth is not being pursued at the expense of lawful conduct.

Abbharna Barathi
Chennai

Published by Nirmala Lakshman and Printed by Praveen Someshwar at HT Media Ltd. Plot No.8, Udyog Vihar, Greater Noida Distt. Gautam Budh Nagar, U.P.201306, on behalf of THG PUBLISHING PVT. LTD. Chennai-600002. Editor: Raghuvir Srinivasan (Editor responsible for selection of news under the PRP Act). ISSN 0971 - 7528

A ND-NDE

Consumers, Quality Begins at Home

Even beyond food, price can't be everything

Supreme Court has rightly wagged its finger at MNCs for supposedly operating a 2-tier system of consumer citizenship: superior products for Western stomachs, inferior ones for Indian intestines. Its exhortation to accord consumers here the same respect as their Western counterparts is welcome. But the judicial rebuke should also occasion some uncomfortable introspection among Indians themselves.

For far too long, India has celebrated its price sensitivity as a sophisticated consumer trait. Less celebrated is its corollary: quality insensitivity. Somewhere along the journey from scarcity to abundance, we perfected the art of negotiating prices down without negotiating standards up. Companies, multinational or otherwise, have been happy to oblige. Nowhere is this more apparent than in services. Airlines punctuality as well as passenger behaviour in airports are 'world famous', not 'world class'. Even affluent Indians, who expect — and get — impeccable standards abroad, frequently display remarkable equanimity about bad service here.



There is a legitimate distinction between buying a cheaper product and accepting a deficient one. India has too often conflated the two, turning an economic constraint into a cultural accommodation. Regulatory intervention can correct information asymmetries and punish corporate misdemeanours. But sustained improvements in quality require consumers who make mediocrity commercially unviable. Complaining, switching brands, demanding refunds and refusing to patronise poor service are instruments of market discipline. India cannot aspire to become a first-rate economy while cultivating a 'chalta hai' mentality about standards. The Indian consumer must learn to drive a harder bargain on quality, not merely price.

Weaving in Identity Beyond Geography

By agreeing to hear Bangladesh's challenge to the geographical indication (GI) tag for Tangail sarees woven in West Bengal, Madras High Court has set several precedents in the procedure for rectification. One, an authorised official of a foreign state entity entrusted with safeguarding local craft can intervene in India's GI procedure. Two, a foreign country exporting a similar product can be an 'aggrieved person' in a broad reading of IP law. Three, high courts have jurisdiction to decide GI rectification applications. This allows the suit to proceed on merits, and West Bengal State Handloom Weavers' Cooperative Society, Tantuja, and deputy commissioner of Bangladesh's Tangail district, acting through Bangladeshi high commissioner, will file their respective claims.

It's preferable the matter reaches resolution in Indian courts.



The alternative for Bangladesh would have been to challenge the GI tag at WTO. GI protection operates through international treaties and interlocking national registries. These are protected under WTO's TRIPS (Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights) agreement, and are administered alongside international registration systems of the World Intellectual Property Organisation. Bangladesh has registered a domestic GI tag for Tangail saris, and it's a strong claim, despite mass migration of weavers from Tangail district into India since 1947.

Weavers in West Bengal have combined several styles from both Bangladesh and India. Their claim is based on the argument that Tangail's specific cultural heritage relocated with migration in Bengal's Nadia and Purba Bardhaman districts. But Unesco has included Bangladesh's Tangail sari-weaving art in its list of humanity's intangible cultural heritage. A solution could be found on the lines of Darjeeling tea, the first GI registered in India. The tea plant originated in China, but there was no cross-border challenge to registering the GI tag. India's Tangail could retain their cultural heritage by adopting their new geography into their cultural heritage.



JUST IN JEST

Trump showcases his true genius by redefining truth and lies

It's Simple — Heads I Win, Tails You Lie

That a man is a genius to his bhakts is well-known. But in Trump's case, it's remarkable that he has his critics, including us, bowled over due to one of his remarkably simple operating principle: anything that shows him in a good light is true; anything that doesn't is bakwaas. Beauty of this arrangement is that it requires no independent verification. All of us should learn from this, if we haven't already. The latest 'clarity' involves US GDP figures. With Q3 annualised growth revised upwards from 3.4% to 4.3%, the Orange One has accused his own regime of deliberately underreporting economic growth before elections. Lesser politicians make the strategic error of distinguishing between friendly and hostile sources. Trump understands that a trusted source is trusted only for the duration of its trustworthiness — determined by its capacity to flatter. The technique has enormous potential outside politics.

A bathroom scale registering an increase in one's weight is clearly malfunctioning. A doctor reporting elevated cholesterol is evidently in the pay of the broccoli lobby. There is, admittedly, one drawback to this otherwise fail-safe strategy. Governments require accurate information to formulate policies. Shooting the messenger eventually leaves one with no messengers. But even this problem has a Trumpian solution: be your own source.

TECHNIK Sarvam using foreign AI models need not come at the cost of building our own

This Isn't a Swadeshi Test



Nikhil Pahwa



It's not Chandni Chowk OR China

Sarvam launched its inference service, Token Factory, on Nov 16. An inference service hosts trained AI or ML models, and exposes them so that applications can send new data and receive predictions, classifications or generated outputs without managing the underlying hardware. Ever since, the fact that Token Factory's offering overseas LLMs, Chinese models included, to Indian customers has elicited criticism and ridicule. Why should a company backed to develop Indian models, goes this line of thinking, sell access to Chinese models?

The question is legitimate. But building indigenous models and operating foreign models in India serve complementary purposes.

Criticism of Sarvam misses the point that Chinese open-weight models — whose trained parameters ('weights') are publicly released so anyone can download, run locally and fine-tune them — have expanded choice for developers globally, seeing capable AI at competitive prices. In fact, Indians are increasingly using Chinese AI models like DeepSeek, Kimi and Qwen because they're substantial value for money, over expensive OpenAI and Anthropic models, and almost on a par with them.



Indians are increasingly using Chinese AI models like DeepSeek, Kimi and Qwen because they're value for money, over expensive OpenAI and Anthropic models, and almost on a par with them

AI's strongest product market fit is in coding, and developers use multiple models: one model to plan a change, another to write code, and a third to review it. This is why aggregators like OpenRouter, OpenCode and Command Code that supply multiple models are popular. Sarvam is serving this market need, by providing models beyond its own.

Open weights can enable an Indian provider to host it without sending each customer request to its original developer. Sarvam says it runs foreign-developed weights on GPUs in India, and does not forward requests to the original developer's overseas API. For India, this becomes critical for 2 reasons:

❶ This preserves forex. Almost all tech businesses today are sending money out. If Sarvam can match them for price, be as reliable and beat them at latency, businesses will have a reason to switch.

❷ For a government department or business handling sensitive personal data, the choice isn't simply US vs Chinese model. It matters who operates the model, where each part of the request goes and, most importantly, who gets access to it. What contracts permit the operator to do with data, and what it retains, and what legal and national security regulations override any protections, become critical.

Questions about foreign government access deserve scrutiny. OpenAI has a contract for ChatGPT with the US Department of War (DoW), and India is its largest market. In his face-off with DoW, Dario Amodei said that Anthropic had pushed back against use of these systems for mass domestic surveillance. Neither OpenAI nor Anthropic has said that it may not be used for foreign surveillance.

In this light, Chinese open-weight models run by an Indian provider appear to be a better choice, provided deployment offers stronger, verifiable protections, especially when GoI departments are using hosted platforms for drafting minutes of meetings. One would rather see Indian institutions able to choose and inspect an India-operated deployment of strong open weights than become dependent on a single foreign provider of proprietary intelligence. An API isn't 'sovereign' merely because its server is in India.



Questions about foreign government access deserve scrutiny. OpenAI has a contract for ChatGPT with the US Department of War, and India is its largest market

The customer needs to know where prompts, retrieved documents, tool calls, logs and backups go; who can access them, and whether data can be used to improve a model. It's likely that Sarvam and other providers will use this as leverage against US companies during contractual negotiations.

One concern about Chinese models is that of censorship. Running them in India doesn't remove restrictions or biases learnt during training. How these models respond in politically-sensitive situations, including drafting by government departments, will be interesting.

Sarvam's general privacy policy permits it to train and improve its models using customer content, unless the customer opts out. Token Factory advertises zero data retention on request. Customers need clarity on which terms apply.

This is not uniform across providers. OpenAI and Anthropic say their business and API offerings don't use customer inputs and outputs for training by default. With appropriate customer consent, Sarvam could use increased usage to speed up development of Indian models, especially those customised to Indian needs. Today, far too much of our data is available for global models to train on. There is reason to want more of the resulting capability and economic value to accrue in India.

AI's realpolitik is that access to capable models is increasingly commoditised. Chinese companies are releasing strong open-weight models, putting pressure on pricing and business models of proprietary providers. Open weights push down price of model access and make the operator and deployment more important. This shifts attention towards GPUs, infrastructure and supply chains (like of magnet rare-earths) behind them.

India would do well to focus on easing access to GPUs and high-powered computing resources, including for personal use, so that more Indians can experiment, deploy models and build businesses. Forex is better spent on improving compute capacity in the country, than paying for model usage.

Has the public support Sarvam received delivered benefits for Indian taxpayers? It has clarified that Token Factory runs on privately-procured GPUs, separate from the subsidised compute used to train its own models. Accountability should focus on what the subsidy supported, what capability it produced, and how Indian taxpayers benefit.

We also shouldn't put all our eggs in the Sarvam basket. We need competition among indigenous model developers and service providers, so that benefits of stronger models, cheaper inference and greater control reach Indian citizens.

The writer is founder, MediaNama

Data Can Make Your City Better



Kala Seetharam Sridhar



The plots thicken

In 2010, Nithya Raman, LA's mayor-elect and a Harvard- and MIT-trained urban planner, was affiliated with Chennai-based Institute of Financial Management and Research's (IFMR) Centre for Development Finance. She initiated the 'Transparent Chennai' initiative, primarily to showcase urban data on sanitation, public transport, governance and other civic issues in the city's informal settlements.

The initiative enabled citizens to crowdsource data and map deficiencies such as road walkability and usability of toilets, bringing them to the city corporation's attention for corrective action. It demonstrated how Indian cities, where multiple agencies are responsible for delivering electricity, transport and urban services such as water supply, sewerage, sanitation and roads, lack an integrated perspective on service delivery.

For instance, Chennai Metro Water Board takes care of water supply and drainage, while Chennai Corporation manages storm-water drains. Roads, meanwhile, fall under different authorities, including NHAI and municipal corporations.

Sometimes, institutional fragmentation becomes so stark that even a few metres can separate areas governed by different municipal entities, affecting service delivery. An integrated perspective on who is responsible for what, backed by associated data, is essential for a holistic assessment of a city's services.

Around the same time as 'Transparent Chennai', Raman and I researched the state of cities in Karnataka. We found that little consistent city-level data existed on poverty and unemployment rates, let alone urban services.

This made inter-city comparisons difficult, as well as measuring performance against benchmarks and norms, promoting the sharing of best practices, encouraging competition among cities to attract residents and firms, facilitating better policymaking, and supporting further research. Such an exercise cannot be a one-time affair. It must be sustained over time.

In NYC, Zohran Mamdani has sought to make housing more affordable by controlling rent increases, make bus services free (as Karnataka did with its Shakti scheme, launched in 2023), and provide subsidised groceries through public stores.

Indian cities have had varied experiences with rent control. While rent control in Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Bengaluru and Pune has inadvertently hurt tenants it was intended to protect, cities can still make an active effort to bring vacant and abandoned properties (about 10 mn) back into the housing market by refurbishing them. This would go some way towards resolving the paradox of housing scarcity alongside unsold or abandoned properties.

Even as evidence of increased women's labour force participation in Karnataka due to Shakti remains mixed, some studies report greater work-related mobility among women and a greater say in job decisions involving workplaces farther from their homes. Another study found that 83% more women had better access to healthcare in the state due to Shakti.

Mamdani has started a public grocery initiative in New York that offers groceries at discounted prices through public stores. This is comparable to Karnataka's Anna Bhagya programme, for which there's some evidence that 83% of women have access to a more nutritious diet, including pulses, vegetables, fruit, eggs and meat.

Raman's initiatives in Chennai demonstrate the importance of making data available and aggregating it at the city level, so that information can empower citizens and inform appropriate policy changes. Mamdani's policies highlight the importance of keeping cities affordable for their residents. Both are areas in which Indian cities have taken the lead, anticipating and initiating similar measures.

Data aggregation initiatives should be expanded to other Indian cities. Affordability measures, meanwhile, will be more challenging to implement, given the trade-offs our cities face between fiscal prudence and welfare.

The writer is head, Centre for Research in Urban Affairs, Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bengaluru

Mathocalypse Now, and Then?



Atanu Biswas

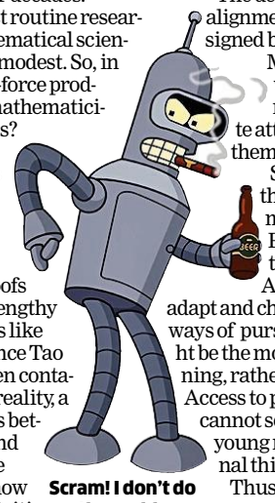
2026 is probably the most eventful year in the history of mathematics. Recently, one of my students asked me what the future of their research career and job prospects is. He was visibly concerned about the recent AI-induced 'mathocalypse', the term coined by computer scientist Scott Aaronson in October following OpenAI's release of over 700 AI-generated mathematical papers addressing long-standing problems that has shaken the global maths community and sparked debates over human understanding and proof verification.

The student isn't alone. 'Math has changed more in the last 2 months than in the last 100 years,' former American Mathematical Society president Bryna Kra observed earlier this month. The most prominent example is the recent claim from an Anthropic mathematician that, working with Claude, he has discovered proof of the Riemann hypothesis, the 167-yr-old problem widely considered one of the most famous unsolved problems in maths.

OpenAI has also claimed that their AI models have solved the Navier-Stokes equation, another celebrated Millennium Prize Problem, and hundreds of other long-standing maths problems. In fact, since April, impressive AI-assisted results have emerged, including OpenAI's breakthrough on Erdos unit distance conjecture, and Jacobian conjecture, both of which had been unsolved for decades.

In comparison, most routine research problems in mathematical sciences may seem rather modest. So, in the face of AI's brute-force productivity, will young mathematicians be able to find jobs? What's the future of human mathematics as we know it? And where will the world of maths find itself when it stabilises?

Most AI-created proofs are extraordinarily lengthy and complex. Experts like Fields Medalist Terence Tao also feel that they often contain 'strange ideas'. In reality, a distinction still exists between AI-generated and human maths. So, the natural question is: how much do these AI activities actually advance human knowledge?



Scram! I don't do maths problems

Mathematics is never meant to be a 'simple' warehouse of results and their proofs. Who will have the time to understand and evaluate thousands of them? In fact, Tao compared an AI-generated solution of a hard maths problem to landing a helicopter on a mountain peak. You reach the top, but you miss all the insights and experience that could be gained by actually climbing it.

The declaration, 'A Severe Misalignment of AI in Mathematics', signed by Tao and 25 other Fields Medalists in September, warns about rushed announcements, inadequate attribution and loss of mathematical understanding.

So, will AI bring to an end the era of human engagement with mathematics? Probably not. But its nature will change, for sure. As AI forces the field to adapt and change its centuries-long ways of pursuing knowledge, it might be the moment of a new beginning, rather than end of maths. Access to powerful AI models cannot serve as a substitute for a young researcher's own original thinking.

Thus, the future mathematician may possess deep mathematical insight, but will delegate the task of complex computation to AI. The latter's capacity to construct entirely new, profound mathematical theories or conceptual frameworks remains limited, even as the gap between the two may narrow rapidly.

So, is the future of maths students really bleak? Or just uncertain? Considering that AI is going to affect everyone in society, and not just mathematicians, it seems increasingly likely that the future of maths won't be limited merely to proving an ever-increasing number of theorems. The significance of identifying truly important questions, discovering new concepts that can reshape our thinking, discerning profound implications of a given result, and the ability to communicate these ideas effectively to others will become dominant.

If AI makes the task of finding answers easier, then humans will have to formulate better questions. This 'great upheaval' may represent the collapse of the old order. But beyond the ruins, the space for building a new world may already be taking shape. It's a completely different matter that what the eventual equilibrium will look like remains anybody's guess.

The writer is professor of statistics, Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata

THE SPEAKING TREE

Pendulum Of the Mind

NARAYAN SIRDESAI

The mind has been compared to a monkey, a garden, a mirror and an ocean. Another insightful metaphor for the mind is that of a pendulum. A pendulum never remains still; it continually swings back and forth when set in motion. Similarly, our thoughts, emotions and moods also oscillate like a pendulum because of the force of our desires, experiences, relationships and worldly pressures. A compliment lifts our spirits, while criticism discourages us. A profit from our investments makes us joyful, while a loss disappoints us.

The psychological law is that, because of our ego-attachment, we inevitably experience pairs of opposites: happiness and suffering, highs and lows, hope and despair, and success and failure. We rarely experience equanimity and stillness. Another mind principle is that the deeper our attachment to people, possessions and achievements, the greater is the intensity of our mental fluctuations. Conversely, if attachment is less, then oscillations are also less intense. No attachment symbolises the state where the pendulum comes to rest at its centre, indicating perfect mental equilibrium. Maharishi Patanjali defines this state of no mental fluctuations — 'Chitta Vritti Nirodha', as yog.

Recognising the direct relationship between attachment and mental fluctuations reveals an important truth: only by letting go of attachment can we transcend play of opposites and attain bliss.

LOLLING ON SATURDAY

CEO Later, Alligator

A reckless CEO announced at a board meeting that the company would diversify into semiconductor chips, space tourism, cryptocurrency, luxury dog food and luxury silk bathrobes.

The CFO nervously pointed out that they were a moderately successful toothpaste manufacturer. 'That's precisely the kind of legacy thinking holding us back,' thundered the CEO.

6 mths later, the company went bankrupt. At his farewell party, the CEO received a $40 mn severance package for his 'transformational leadership'.



A sacked employee asked the chairman why failure was being rewarded so handsomely.

'Imagine,' explained the chairman, 'how much more damage he could have done had we retained him.'

Net Neutrality

At a global leadership summit, organisers decided to measure success by how many problems the leaders solved.

After three days, Trump announced a historic breakthrough. Xi hailed a new era of cooperation. Putin described the summit as a civilisational turning point.

Organisers were delighted. 'Which problems have you actually solved?' a journalist asked.

'An extremely difficult one,' replied the summit chairman.

'What was that?'

'Where to hold next year's summit.'

'And?'

'Switzerland.'

'Why Switzerland?'

'Because nobody could agree on anything else, including the lunch menu.'

Chat Room

Toast No Longer, Buyers to Cook

Apropos 'FSSAI Told to Tighten Labelling Norms' by Indu Bhan (Nov 27), the Supreme Court's direction to tighten front-of-package nutrition labelling is a welcome step toward putting public health ahead of commercial convenience. By requiring separate, prominent warnings for foods high in fat, sugar and salt, the court has recognised that consumers cannot make informed choices when crucial nutritional information is buried in fine print on the back of a packet. The real test, however, will be implementation. FSSAI must finalise evidence-based thresholds, prevent industry misuse of any transition period, and ensure uniform enforcement across packaged foods.

Bal Govind
Noida

The men who never stop winning



CHEAP THRILLS

NISHA SUSAN

When I was young and trying to fit in my particular politically minded circles, I thought the Mathura rape case was a case from Mathura and not as I learnt later, a landmark case in 1972 involving the custodial assault of a teenager called Mathura in Maharashtra. In late October, Bilkis Bano found out that the Supreme Court had suspended the life sentences of two convicts and granted them bail. They were two of the 11 men convicted for raping her and killing 14 members of her family during the Gujarat riots in 2002. As I began writing this column, I wondered about folks right now nodding with vague familiarity at the name but not knowing what Bilkis Bano has meant and what she has done for two decades.

Twenty-four years after I first heard about it, just reading the details of what Bilkis faced that day in March 2002 feels like swallowing broken glass. She was 19 and five months pregnant when she was raped by a mob of men. Bilkis and her family were attempting to flee the rolling waves of violence of what is known as the Gujarat riots. These men raped four members of her family. They killed 14 members of her family, of whom five were children, of which one was her three-year-old daughter. They killed her by smashing her head on the ground. Bilkis lived only because the men thought she was dead.

As a woman who was almost the same age as Bilkis, her account of that day changed forever the way I thought of sexual assault. I had grown up watching Hindi and Tamil and Malayalam cinema, which often accurately portrayed sexual assault as violence done by landlords and uncles and brothers-in-law and employers. Still there remained a gap between the varying representations of sexual assault and our everyday lives where we were told to come home at 4pm—pretending that the rapists were out there and not inside being served tea.

In Bilkis's account of that day, a story she has had to repeat a million times over the years, the detail that has always stood out for me is that she knew several of the men who murdered and raped her family. She tried to remind them she had bought bangles from one, that her father had been treated for illness by the father of another attacker—attempts to remind them of their humanity. It didn't matter because they didn't see her as a human. Bilkis who had escaped death by playing dead, filed an FIR the very next day, a feat of resolution that continues to astonish. It would be 2017 and a whole different state in which she'd finally see her assailants truly convicted—and in that trial she faced a 20-day cross-examination.

What was done to Bilkis radicalized a cross-section of women. For me, it changed the way I thought of some words that used to be paperbags—community, minority, communalism and belonging. It changed the way I thought of my place in the country—as a non-practising Christian. A fun game I liked to play in my morbid youth in different neighbourhoods and cities was to ask which uncle and aunty would lead the rioters and which uncle and aunty would hide you from the torches.



The Supreme Court suspended the life sentences of two convicts in the Bilkis Bano case. MINT

As a full-grown adult, my still-somewhat morbid viewfinder often asked in new neighbourhoods which of my peers would bring the petrol cans and which ones would hide me in the bathroom. My sibling liked to figure which church window was best to climb out of.

As Bilkis grew older and our generation grew older, there has been less and less impetus to veil one's intention to steal, murder, rape or bear false witness against one's neighbours. Across the ranks of our government are men and women whose political trajectory is inextricably tied to 2002.

In 2022, when Bilkis's 11 assailants were released from prison under the Gujarat government's remission policy, they were greeted with garlands by the VHP. Shield your eyes if you decide to look up that group photo. The remission panel in Gujarat that recommended the wholesale release of all 11 men included an MLA, who in an infamous interview praised the convicts for their behaviour in prison and for being Brahmin men of good "*sanskar*" (moral values). And, as he suggested delicately, perhaps they had possibly been falsely accused all along.

On the one hand, the flowers because they had been the victors and vanguard. On the other hand, a character witness and a caste certificate for their victimhood. It was an enviable package deal. As it had at every stage since she was dragged out of a truck in 2002, it fell to Bilkis again to challenge the monstrous injustice. In early 2024, the courts sent the assailants back to prison. Yet now we are here again.

Two of the men who killed Bilkis's mother, who killed her three-year-old, who raped and murdered her cousin who had just given birth, who killed that two-day-old infant have now been granted suspended life sentences. Ethical practice and existing legal precedents would have kept her—the survivor who has moved home 20 times to protect her family—informed through this process and not left her to discover the court's decision through the media.

I once looked up the meaning of the name Bilkis—a hopeful name for little girls, evoking the wisdom of the mythical Queen of Sheba. Reports about Bilkis often use a word which is perhaps descriptive but is so often in India a pejorative—illiterate. The story of the day after she was left for dead will make you wonder about the potential for perversity in technology—even the seemingly benevolent technology of writing. She had said, "I knew all my attackers and I'd named them. But the police did not write down any names."

Perhaps the generation that built their careers on 2002 is growing old. Perhaps they would now like to have just the flowers and not the smell of blood. Bilkis is contesting it.

Nisha Susan is the author of The Women who Forgot to Invent Facebook and Other Stories.

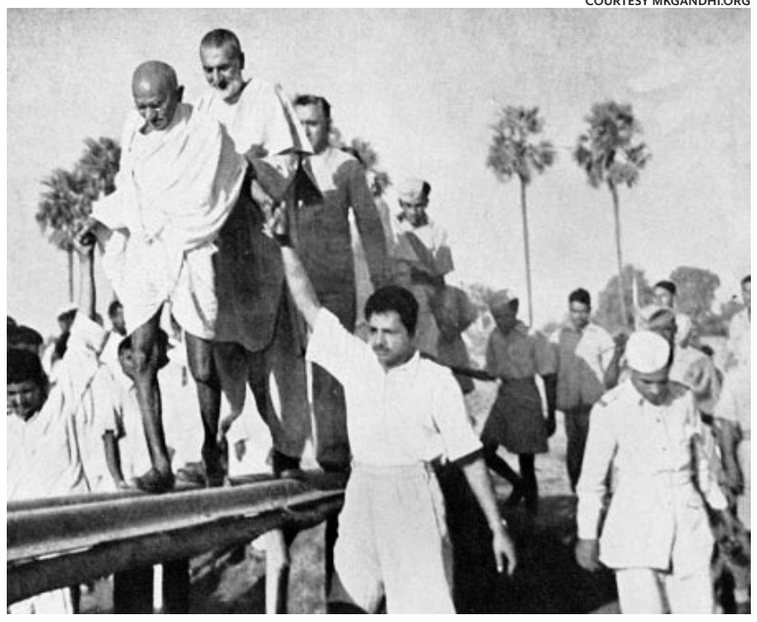
Noakhali's forgotten peace workers

Eighty years after the Noakhali riots, the women who risked their lives to restore harmony remain largely invisible

Sarmistha Dutta Gupta



GETTY IMAGES



COURTESY MKGANDHI.ORG

Gandhi and Badshah Khan in Jahanabad, Bihar, 1947; and (below) Leela Roy, along with other founder members of Samaj Sebi Sangha, 1946.

Sucheta Kripalani (centre) and Mahatma Gandhi in Noakhali. Nationally known figures are remembered for their role in peacekeeping but rarely the local women's groups and their volunteers who were the first to reach Noakhali.

Around the time of Gandhi Jayanti last month, I happened to come upon *When We Are Strangers* by Vazira Zamindar and Sarnath Banerjee. This graphic novel beautifully evokes the narrative of friendship between Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan/Badshah Khan, also known as Frontier Gandhi, and weaves in tales of friendship between young people from across far-flung regions of undivided India unfolding within movements where the two Gandhis had been collaborators.

One of the thoughts that struck me while leafing through the book is: when we think of Mahatma Gandhi's peace mission through riot-torn villages of Bengal and Bihar in 1946-47, who do we remember as his friends and co-workers?

Hindus had borne the brunt in Noakhali and Tipperah of eastern Bengal (now in Bangladesh) in October 1946 and Muslims in several parts of Bihar after retaliatory riots erupted there soon after Noakhali.

There's been a lot of research, textual material and photo documentation of Gandhi's "pilgrimage of love," as Sarojini Naidu called it, from November 1946 to May 1947, in the scarred areas of these two provinces. In spite of the availability of such material, which are the facts that have been most represented and circulated? When we think of Mahatma Gandhi interrupting his Noakhali work in early March 1947 and heading to Patna, do we generally associate his Bihar *padayatra* with Frontier Gandhi who was touring the state from January 1947 and helping with the resettlement of riot-affected families? Or do we usually overlook the fact that after Gandhi's arrival, both "Bapu" and his "Badshah" were seen walking together for the next two months to try and heal wounds in Bihar?

The question stays with me as I think of Gandhi's sojourn in estuarine Noakhali beginning 6 November 1946, a couple of weeks after large-scale riots raged there. He is said to have covered 116 miles through more than 80 villages trying to build mutual trust between the two communities to make it possible for evacuees to return home and help resume normal life for both communities.

While thinking of that extraordinary gesture of the 77-year-old Mahatma even as his body was becoming "weaker and weaker" as he admitted to Nirmal Kumar Bose, his private secretary and close companion in those days, I recall reading archival documents and memoirs by women workers from different parts of Bengal who unhesitatingly went ahead to work for relief and peace in a highly volatile Noakhali. I look for them when I read articles commemorating Gandhi's work there. But more often than not they remain invisible, the exception being nationally known figures like Sucheta Kripalani and occasional mention of Gandhians like Bibi Amtus Salam, who went all the way from Punjab and steadfastly worked in Noakhali.

Local women's groups and their leaders who have mostly remained forgotten, especially at the all-India level, belonged to different political hues. Congress women, revolutionary nationalist women, Subhas Chandra Bose's followers, communist women of Mahila Atmaraksha Samity, and members of local branches of women's welfare organizations were all there. They walked a few miles every day and crossed riverine islands over narrow bamboo bridges from village to village to meet people, organize relief and meet district officials to press for government action in rescue operations.

Quite a few of them showed exemplary courage and commitment in living and working for months in such a conflict zone 80 years ago. I believe that the guts, promptness, sensitivity, organizational skill and efficiency that these women displayed in 1946 had something to do with the experience of steering famine relief work across the province during the unimaginably horrifying Bengal Famine of 1942-44 and the hoarding and black marketing that were tied to it.

When Noakhali seethed, it was the Chattogram Mahila Sangha, which was the Chittagong branch of the All India Women's Conference (AIWC), who set up the first "Noakhali Relief Committee" at a meeting presided by Nellie Sengupta on 21 October 1946. It passed resolutions on the need to immediately start first-hand assessment of the situation and stand by women who may have been abducted, forcibly converted or sexually abused. The committee wrote to the highest authorities suggesting detailed measures for providing relief and strongly voiced their preparedness to help survivors rebuild their lives.

Volunteers of a women-led group from Dhaka were the first to reach Noakhali around mid-October as the provincial government tried to black out news of the riots for a week or so. These were members of National Service Institute (NSI) founded by Leela Roy (Nag), leader of the Dhaka-based revolutionary nationalist group Shree Sangha and women's rights group Deepali Sangha. The NSI team reached even before volunteers from the Gandhi Ashram in Sodepur near Kolkata could be in Noakhali on a fact-finding mission on instructions from Gandhi.

> Local women's groups of all political hues walked miles daily to organize relief and meet officials. They lived and worked for months, some with kids, in the conflict zone

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



From early November, NSI set up camps and started work in the worst affected villages of the Ramganj police station area. Leela Roy, who was at that time a leading member of the Forward Bloc, herself set up the first of 17 such camps in Ramganj. NSI volunteers led by Uma Devi reportedly rescued a few hundred victims from 27 villages in October-November 1946. From December onwards, they started economic and social programmes for the benefit of both community members with the intention of building trust and peace between them.

Such socio-economic programmes were crucial if we remember that the majority of the worst sufferers in Noakhali were "low" caste Hindus who worked as weavers, agricultural labourers, boatmen and fishermen. Suhasini Das of Srihatta (Sylhet) Mahila Sangha and Ashoka Gupta of Chattogram Mahila Sangha, who was in charge of the Noakhali Relief Committee, talk in their memoirs of the destruction and damage to looms and other livelihood tools which added to the difficulty of affected families returning home.

Suhasini began working in Noakhali from December 1946. She admits that besides wanting to help riot victims, she and her team also wanted to not miss the opportunity of meeting Gandhi and working closely with him. This was true of many more workers irrespective of gender who volunteered their time after Gandhi set up camp in Srirampur village from around mid-November. Revolutionary women like Kamala Dasgupta felt safe in his saintlike and calming presence and this added to their confidence in a communally charged situation. Gandhian worker Renuka Ray wrote in her autobiography, "when Gandhiji and Thakkar Bapa (social worker Amritlal Vithaldas Thakkar) were present the atmosphere changed magically."

After finishing factual assessment and some relief distribution, they were struggling to bring Hindus back to half-burnt villages, help traumatized women open up and get into dialogues with their Muslim neighbours. At this point, working under Gandhi's guidance didn't just mean being soothed by his presence, it also meant changing their approach drastically. He believed like fear, courage too was contagious, and his advice to them was: "We must live in these villages with our small children and be prepared to face any situation even if it is dangerous. If you are not prepared for this, then you cannot ask the villagers to return. Therefore, think carefully before you decide to come forward (from *A Fighting Spirit. Selected Writings of Ashoka Gupta*)."

Gandhi called for volunteers who would be ready to spread out and live in the deserted villages in units of two or three. When Ashoka Gupta sought his permission to live in shifts of 15 days in a village with her colleague Phullarani Das, and go home for the other half of the month to look after their children, the proposal was turned down gently. Gandhi didn't feel it would be right to have their feet perched on two different boats and explained to them that the uprooted villagers would feel reassured only if these workers were ready to risk not only their own lives but also that of their children.

The effect of this conversation was life-changing for some, as in the case of Ashoka and her sisters-in-arm Sneharani Kanjilal. They spent nearly eight months together sharing the same room with their infants in Tumchar village and were so immersed in their work that they got a rude shock when the declaration of Partition was made in June 1947. Though both of them and their fellow workers like Suhasini Das, Leela Roy, Phulrenu Guha and Manorama Basu, to name just a few, felt an overwhelming sense of grief and disappointment at all their effort going in vain with the country's Partition, they were once again at the frontline working for refugee rights and rehabilitation. This time some were in action on this side of the border, and others on that.

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Economy

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 2026

IN THE NEWS

FOREX RESERVES FALL TO 16-WEEK LOW OF $701 BN



INDIA'S FOREX RESERVES dropped by $4.443 billion to $700.898 billion in the week ended November 20, the RBI said on Friday. In the previous week, the overall kitty had dropped by $14.205 billion to $705.342 billion. The reserves had touched an all-time high of $785.706 billion during the week ended September 4, driven by a heavy flow of currency as part of a special concessional swap for deposits from the diaspora through which banks raised a record $133 billion, but have been on a decline ever since.

EU trade deal to boost textile units: Vice President



A FREE TRADE agreement with the European Union is expected to be signed soon under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's initiative, paving the way for a bright future for the textile industry, Vice President CP Radhakrishnan has said. He expressed confidence that modern machinery and advanced technology would drive significant growth in the textile sector.

NHAI gets 32 bids for two Varanasi elevated roads

STATE-OWNED NHAI ON Friday said it has received 32 bids to build elevated corridors along the Ganga and Varuna rivers in Varanasi, aimed at easing congestion and improving urban connectivity.

GAIL, GNFC sign MoU to explore petchem projects



STATE-RUN NATURAL GAS major GAIL and Gujarat Narmada Valley Fertilizers & Chemicals have signed an MoU to jointly evaluate the feasibility of developing downstream petrochemical projects, marking a fresh collaboration aimed at expanding India's domestic petrochemical value chain.

NCLAT sets aside insolvency against Oscorp Industries

THE NATIONAL COMPANY Law Appellate Tribunal set aside insolvency proceedings against Oscorp Industries, holding that Stemztech Industries' funding for Railway projects in Bilaspur was part of a joint arrangement, not a financial debt.

AGENCIES

POWER SECTOR SEES ₹200 LAKH-CRORE INVESTMENT SCOPE BY 2047

States told to push discom reforms, battery storage

SAURAV ANAND
New Delhi, November 27

ENERGY ROADMAP

41 GW of clean energy capacity remains without buyers

8,780 MW of installed nuclear capacity as India prepares for a major expansion

₹2,701 crore profit after tax reported by discoms in FY25, against a loss of **₹25,553 crore** in FY24



- Evening supply gap exposed as states struggled to meet peak demand despite surplus daytime solar generation
- Smart meter rollout and AI-based demand forecasting flagged as priorities to improve discom cash flows
- Subsidy payment discipline stressed, with states urged to clear government dues & budget adequately for subsidies

THE CENTRE ON Friday urged states to accelerate the deployment of battery energy storage systems (BESS), prepare for an expansion of nuclear power and sustain the financial turnaround of electricity distribution companies, as India's rapid addition of renewable energy capacity raises concerns over storage, supply reliability and the financial health of discoms.

Inaugurating the two-day Power Ministers' Conference, Union Power Minister Manohar Lal called for coordinated planning across generation, storage, transmission and distribution, pointing to an estimated investment opportunity of ₹200 lakh crore in the power sector over the next two decades. He stressed that private investment and greater Centre-state coordination would be essential to meet the country's growing electricity requirements.

The emphasis on storage comes amid a widening mismatch between renewable generation and electricity demand. Despite surplus solar power during the day, several states struggled to meet evening peak demand in September and October, exposing inadequate storage capacity and transmission constraints.

"There were days we could barely meet their evening peak demand despite having surplus clean energy during the day," Power Secretary Pankaj Agarwal said at the conference.

Lal said states must prioritise energy storage to utilise daytime solar generation during other hours, while strengthening transmission networks to ensure uninterrupted electricity supply.

The issue has become more pressing as 41 GW of clean energy capacity remains without buyers, with the Centre urging states to expedite pending power purchase agreements. Minister of State for Power Shripad Naik called for advance assessment of electricity requirements and greater procurement of battery storage alongside renewable power.

Nuclear energy was another major focus of the meeting, with Lal highlighting its potential to provide reliable, round-the-clock electricity as demand from industries, data centres and emerging technologies increases.

India currently has around 8,780 MW of installed nuclear capacity, while the government is pursuing expansion to support long-term electricity requirements. The conference will also deliberate on issues concerning nuclear project sites.

On distribution reforms, the minister cautioned against a recurrence of financial stress after the sector's recent turnaround.

India's distribution utilities collectively reported a profit after tax of ₹2,701 crore in FY25, compared with losses of ₹25,553 crore in the previous year.

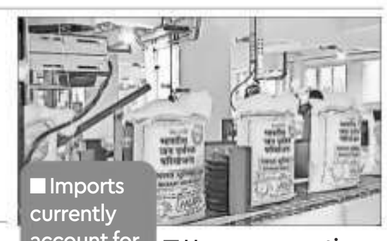
However, sustaining profitability remains a concern as electricity demand rises and distribution networks require substantial investment.

Urea capacity to jump 25% to 40 MT by 2030, says govt

SANDIP DAS
New Delhi, November 27

PRODUCTION BOOST

- The six projects entail an estimated investment of **₹54,000 cr,** with each plant expected to add **1.27 MT** of annual capacity
- New capacity additions are expected to create **10 MT** of extra output capacity over the next four years



- Imports currently account for about **20%** of India's urea requirement
- Urea consumption is projected to reach **46 MT** by 2030, against current annual demand of **40 MT**

THE COUNTRY'S UREA manufacturing capacity will increase by 25% to 40 million tonne (MT) by 2030 with six new brownfield urea projects, estimated to cost ₹54,000 crore going on stream, a senior official said on Friday.

"The modernisation of plants will create additional urea production capacity of 10 MT in the next four years. However, as demand for key soil nutrient is rising by 4% to 5% annually, by 2030, the country's urea consumption would be around 46 MT," Rajat Kumar Mishra, secretary, Department of Fertilisers, said.

Each plant is expected to produce about 1.27 MT annually, adding a combined 7.62 MT of annual capacity. Total investment is estimated at ₹9,000 crore per plant. "The companies will fund the projects themselves and receive government support over eight years," Mishra said.

India's annual urea consumption is 40 MT. It is distributed to farmers at heavily subsidised prices (the retail price is just 6.5% of the cost). A fifth of the requirement is met by imports.

Mishra stated that currently importing urea is cheaper than domestic manufacturing while about four months back, imports was extremely costly and domestic manufacturing was cheaper.

"One of the reasons for high LNG (feedstock for urea production) prices has been that Qatar has been unable to provide LNG because of infrastructure that has been impacted by the West Asia conflict, while we are getting gas from the USA and some African countries as global LNG rates are high," he said. At present, 30 out of 32 urea units use natural gas as feedstock.

He stated that all the six units will be commissioned over the next four years. While Matix (Panagarh, West Bengal), Indorama India (Jagadishpur, Uttar Pradesh) and Chambal Fertilisers (Gadepan, Rajasthan) are in the private sector others – Madras Fertilisers (Chennai, Tamil Nadu), Kribhco (Shahjahanpur, Uttar Pradesh) and National Fertilisers (Nangal, Punjab) are either in public or cooperative sector.

India eyes price relief as Gulf oil supplies recover

- OPEC+ meet on Sunday to decide output strategy

SAURAV ANAND
New Delhi, November 27

SUPPLY SHIFT

- Goldman Sachs forecasts Brent crude at **$78 per barrel** by December 2027
- India's crude import bill surged **53.5%** to **$111 billion** in April–October FY27
- New Delhi imports nearly **89%** of its domestic crude oil requirements



- OPEC+ faces a key choice between output cuts and protecting market share
- Gulf supply recovery could ease prices, while disruptions may push Brent to **$130** per barrel

A LOOMING GLOBAL oil surplus could bring relief to India's soaring crude import bill in 2027, with Goldman Sachs forecasting Brent prices to fall to $78 per barrel by December. However, much will depend on Sunday's OPEC+ meeting in Vienna, where major producers face a difficult choice between restricting supplies to support prices and allowing more oil into the market as Gulf exports recover.

The November 29 meeting assumes significance as India's crude import bill surged 53.5% to $111 billion during April-October FY27, while import volumes rose just 2.7% to 146.6 million tonnes, according to Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell (PPAC) data. With imports meeting nearly 89% of domestic crude requirements, OPEC+'s production strategy could significantly affect India's oil costs next year.

The Indian crude basket averaged $119.9 per barrel in October, against $65.08 a year earlier, reflecting the impact of elevated international prices.

Rystad Energy projects a global liquids surplus averaging around 5 million barrels per day (bpd) in 2027, nearly 5% of global demand, even if Gulf supplies recover only partially. Goldman Sachs estimates a smaller surplus of 2 million bpd and expects Brent to average $88 per barrel in 2027 before easing to $78 by December as supplies recover and geopolitical risk premiums decline.

The forecasts pose a crucial question for OPEC+: whether to restrict production to support prices or protect market share by allowing more oil into the market.

"Vienna will witness one of the most complicated OPEC+ meetings in years, and this time, the difficulty is structural rather than political," said Jorge León, senior vice-president and head of geopolitical analysis at Rystad Energy.

At its 42nd ministerial meeting, OPEC+ must address two contentious issues: assessing individual members' sustainable production capacities and deciding the group's output for 2027. However, the grouping could retain current output targets for at least the first quarter of 2027 amid disagreements over production capacity, a *Reuters* report said. The challenge stems from the gap between permitted production and actual output following nine months of Gulf disruptions. OPEC+ output rose from 31.3 million bpd in March 2025 to around 33.3 million bpd before the Iran war.

High oil prices cost India ₹7L-cr a year: PM's adviser

SAURAV ANAND
New Delhi, November 27

ELEVATED INTERNATIONAL CRUDE oil and natural gas prices are imposing an additional burden of Rs 6-7 lakh crore annually on the Indian economy, with rising import costs affecting transportation, fertilisers and essential commodities, said Tarun Kapoor, adviser in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), on Friday.

The government and oil marketing companies have absorbed a substantial portion of the increase in international energy prices to prevent the entire burden from being passed on to consumers, Kapoor said at the Confederation of Indian Industry's (CII) 16th Energy Security Conference.

"Just this high price of crude and natural gas is costing us at least ₹6-7 lakh crore extra every year," Kapoor said.

The remarks come amid elevated global energy prices and disruptions linked to the West Asia conflict, which have sharply increased India's import expenditure. Oil and natural gas account for around 35% of the country's total energy consumption.

According to Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell data, India imported over 293 million tonnes of crude oil and petroleum products in FY26, costing more than ₹13 lakh crore.

Centre plans more wheat e-auctions to rein in prices

SANDIP DAS
New Delhi, November 27

COST CURBS



- FCI sold **0.96 MT** of wheat in seven weekly OMSS e-auctions against **1 MT** offered
- The Centre plans to raise weekly wheat offerings from **0.3 MT** to **0.4 MT**
- Market prices eased to **₹2,850/quintal** from **₹3,100** a month ago
- Government has approved the sale of **3 MT** of wheat in FY27

THE CENTRE PLANS to gradually increase the quantity of wheat offered through weekly e-auctions under the Open Market Sale Scheme (OMSS), seeking to check a possible rise in prices over the coming months by offloading surplus stocks held by the Food Corporation of India (FCI).

Sources told FE that after seven weekly e-auctions under OMSS since October, over 0.96 million tonne (MT) of wheat has been sold across states against one MT offered by FCI.

"Offloading of wheat by the government has helped bring down market prices to around ₹2,850/quintal from ₹3,100/quintal a month back," Dharmendra Jai, president, Roller Flour Millers' Federation of India, told *FE*.

In the latest e-auction held earlier this week, the FCI offered 0.3 MT of wheat, of which millers lifted 0.27 MT. The quantity on offer is likely to be raised to 0.4 MT in next week's auction, sources said.

The food ministry has approved the sale of 3 MT of wheat under the OMSS for the current financial year. The FCI currently holds around 44 MT of wheat, against the buffer requirement of 13.8 MT for January 1. A trader said the government was likely to continue selling wheat from its surplus stocks in the open market until mid-March 2027. According to traders, the Centre has more than 20 MT of surplus wheat after meeting the requirements of the public distribution system and maintaining the prescribed buffer.

The reserve price for the current financial year has been fixed at ₹2,600 a quintal for Fair and Average Quality wheat and ₹2,585 a quintal for wheat under Relaxed Specifications. In FY 26, the FCI could sell only 0.63 MT of wheat to bulk buyers, including flour millers, under the OMSS.

The government's move comes amid signs of pressure on food prices. The average retail price of sugar stood at ₹32.86 a kg on Friday, 3.6% higher than a year ago. Retail inflation in wheat was 3.05% year-on-year in October 2026, according to the price monitoring cell of the Department of Consumer Affairs.

Salary review to worsen fiscal strains, say analysts

BLOOMBERG
November 27

INDIA'S NEXT REVIEW of wages and pension entitlements for civil servants could exert fresh pressure on government finances, complicating efforts to reduce debt while maintaining spending on essential items.

JPMorgan Chase estimates the 8th Pay Commission will cost the government about ₹2.5 lakh crore in the first year. Motilal Oswal Financial Services sees the cost at between ₹2.4 lakh crore to ₹2.8 lakh crore, equivalent to about 0.5%-0.6% of gross domestic product.

India has generally set up Pay Commissions about once each decade since Independence, and this one will review and provide recommendations on the salary structure of around 12 million central government employees and pensioners.

The specter of such a significant outlay adds to the challenge of preparing India's next Union Budget, which Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is due to deliver in February. While the new pay commission could cost the government more than three times as much as the previous one, which added ₹74,000 crore in spending in its first year, the burden as a share of GDP is expected to be broadly similar.

"Fiscal affordability will be an important consideration in determining the final pay revision," Radhika Piplani, an economist at Motilal Oswal, wrote in a report. The commission was formally constituted in November last year.

India, Canada may unveil Talent & Innovation Strategy under trade pact

- CEPA may be finalised during Modi's December visit to Ottawa

MADHUSREE GOSWAMI
Ottawa

INDIA AND CANADA could unveil a Talent and Innovation Strategy during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Canada next month, India's High Commissioner to Canada Dinesh K Patnaik said.

In an interaction with *FE* here, Patnaik said student mobility would remain a key component of the people-to-people mobility dimension of the proposed Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) between the two countries.

India and Canada concluded the sixth round of negotiations for the CEPA on November 20 in New Delhi. Officials from both sides agreed to engage daily to finalise the agreement before the end of 2026.

"The proposed CEPA spans the whole gamut of trade and trade-related matters including removing tariff and non-tariff barriers. All barriers to trade will be eased. Most of these barriers will be removed, and what cannot be removed will be made easier. The idea is to make trade between both sides seamless," Patnaik said.

Elaborating on the plans to ease student movement, he said: "Canada is one of the most open countries when it comes to mobility and students are a key factor of that mobility. Universities in Canada need students, researchers, partnerships and training skills. We will look at how we can train people better, how and if Canadian universities can set up campuses in India or have collaborative programmes with India, and how Canadian training and skilling institutes can work with skilling institutes in India," he said.

The collaboration, Patnaik added, could extend to emerging and strategic sectors such as artificial intelligence, nuclear energy, critical minerals, oil and gas, where growing demand for skilled manpower would require stronger training systems.

"All of this requires manpower and training systems, and Canada is recognised globally for the quality of its training and skills-development systems. Our idea is to bring those into India, as India has talented manpower," he said.

The agreement will also seek to facilitate financial flows, including through fintech and other financial instruments, as well as technology transfers and mobility of people, he said.

"Essentially, CEPA handles all these sectors—trade in goods and services, mobility of finance, technology and people. The target is that once CEPA is concluded, within the next five years it will give an impulse to bilateral trade, which will then double in the next five years. Right now, it is about Canadian dollar 32 billion, which we want to increase to about CAD 70 billion," Patnaik said.

"When CEPA is concluded and announced, it will be a win-win for both countries. We have complementary economies. What they have, we need; what we have, they need. We have similar needs in the fields of AI, technology, pharma, healthcare," he added.

DINESH K PATNAIK,
INDIA'S HIGH COMMISSIONER TO CANADA

The proposed CEPA spans the whole gamut of trade and trade-related matters including removing tariff and non-tariff barriers. All barriers to trade will be eased



'Reset of ties complete'

Patnaik said Modi's visit next month would be symbolic in several respects. "After a bad period in our bilateral ties, the fact that Prime Minister Mark Carney came to India earlier this year and Prime Minister Modi is slated to visit Canada next month shows how the ties between the two countries are evolving. There was a lot of uncertainty about the relationship till about May of last year. Now we are looking at a very close partnership. The reset of ties is complete," he said.

Ties between the two nations reached a historic low in 2023 following allegations by the Canadian government linking Indian agents to the killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a Sikh separatist. Both countries subsequently recalled diplomats in 2024. Since last year, however, a series of steps have been taken to rebuild the relationship. In June 2025, Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney invited Modi to the G7 Summit in Kananaskis. Patnaik was appointed India's High Commissioner to Canada in August 2025. In November 2025, the two prime ministers agreed to initiate CEPA negotiations.

(*The writer was in Ottawa at the invitation of the Centre for Strategic Statecraft and High Commission of Canada in India*)

Opinion

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 2026



TRADE DEAL

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal

The US trade deal is close to culmination. The process and pathway, which was always something which held back finalising the deal, is now taking some shape

Budgeting Gen Z concerns

Creating pathways for gainful employment for youth is a systemic imperative

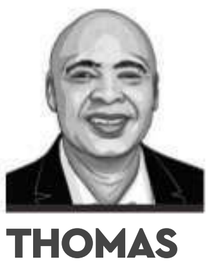
FOR THE FIRST time, the finance ministry's pre-Budget consultations also included a wider cross-section of young Indians, including Gen Z, for their suggestions on the forthcoming Union Budget for 2027-28. This indeed marks a welcome departure from the consultation process that typically includes the apex chambers of commerce and industry, economists, farmers, financial institutions, and labour unions. The concerns of youth are likely to be one of the key themes of the Economic Survey for 2026-27as well. All of this signals an effort to give young Indians a greater say in shaping budgetary priorities than viewing them as only beneficiaries of government schemes. Students, researchers, and youth leaders urged Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman for higher investments in artificial intelligence (AI) and emerging technologies, stepping up funding for doctoral and post-doctoral studies, strengthening industry-academia linkages, improving incubators, and widening access to sport facilities, among others.

To be sure, the concerns of youth have figured in previous Budgets. The Union Budget for 2024-25 announced employment-linked incentives, internships, and skilling programmes. The Union Budget for 2026-27 was even described as a Yuva Shakti Budget as it included proposals to establish 50,000 Atal Tinkering Labs, five National Centres for Skilling, and an AI Centre of Excellence, among others. In January 2026, Sitharaman interacted with students of the Delhi School of Economics who shared suggestions on skilling, green economy, and rural development. Several ideas shared on skills-driven education, the creative economy, and sports as a career pathway during the Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue 2026 found resonance in the Union Budget for 2026-27 with the appointment of a high-powered committee on education to employment and enterprise, expansion of allied healthcare workforce, establishment of animation, visual effects, gaming, and comics creator labs, and strengthening of the Khelo India Mission.

If this pre-Budget consultation process with Gen Z is more than just a one-off, there must be a higher level of ambition in future Budgets to embed a youth opportunity test, as has been proposed in the UK's Alan Milburn's report to tackle problems of the young who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET). This entails taxation, spending, and other budgetary decisions to consider the impact on the younger generation. India has been in this sort of territory before with gender budgeting in 2005-06 to ensure that women receive adequate attention in developmental spending. The problems of the youth warrant a similar focus as 27% of India's population is aged 15-29 years and is highly restive due to limited avenues for gainful employment. This cohort's current weekly status unemployment rate is three times higher at 14.7% than the overall rate of 4.9% in October 2026.

While the various suggestions made at the pre-Budget consultation merit consideration, a Yuva focus entails budgetary attention on the serious challenge of dealing with joblessness among the youth. More than rates of youth unemployment, a less debated but far more powerful metric of idleness or labour under-utilisation is the share of youth who are NEET. The latest current weekly status estimate of NEET youth was as high as 29.7% in January-December 2025, clearly indicating that this problem is far more serious than in the UK. Unless career pathways are established, a reserve army of NEET youth portends serious strains in the country's social fabric. This is where the Economic Survey has a useful role to play in providing insights and options to deal with such problems of young India.

US squandering its lead over China in aerospace



THOMAS BLACK

Bloomberg

AMID THE CONTROVERSY over whether Nvidia chips were diverted to China, a House committee has raised another delicate technology-transfer problem that has been going on for years: US and allied aerospace companies helping Beijing advance its production of civilian and military aircraft.

Limiting Chinese access to the most advanced chips is about which country dominates AI in the future. The aerospace race is more mature and already nearing a tipping point as China closes in on parity with the US.

American and European advantages in aerospace underpin Western military power, particularly when it comes to capabilities such as stealth aircraft and aerial refuelling. US policies governing technology transfers have been lax, depending on companies to self-report that their activities are strictly civilian, and ignoring the tangled web of relationships between China's commercial and military suppliers. It's time to address these lapses before it's too late.

The House Select Committee on China called out GE Aerospace, Honeywell Aerospace, and the Collins unit of aerospace giant RTX not for breaking any rules, but for enabling the transfer of know-how with dual-use capabilities during their work on China's commercial airliner programme. This is mainly for work with the Commercial Aircraft Corporation of China (Comac) on its C919, a rival to the Boeing 737 and Airbus A320 families of aircraft. The report's harshest criticism was directed at French aerospace companies for partnering with Chinese firms that are military suppliers while working on US Department of Defense contracts. Airbus along with Dassault Systemes and Safran didn't share information, citing a prohibition under French law.

Partnerships with Chinese companies were once hailed as a way for Western corporations to access a huge new market that was opening to the world. The hoped-for liberalisation never truly occurred and, instead, China took a mercantilist turn to maximise exports, using foreign investment as a way for domestic players to gain the technical expertise they needed to become globally competitive. The entanglements between commercial manufacturing and China's defence supply chain are also now clearer. China's policy of "military-civilian fusion" has deepened under President Xi Jinping, according to a May report by the China Aerospace Studies Institute.

US and allied aerospace companies can't expect to operate in China without aiding the military buildup that has changed the Asian nation's stance from defensive capabilities to offensive power. Each role may have been narrow in isolation, "but together those roles helped Beijing assemble many of the technological capabilities needed to build an indigenous aerospace industry", according to the House committee report. It recommends requiring detailed disclosures of US and allied suppliers' ties to military-supported entities, restricting investments into China's aerospace sector, and tightening export controls. It also wants scrutiny of acquisitions of US aerospace firms by foreign companies, especially French ones.

Adopting and implementing such controls is difficult and delicate, especially since China is a huge market for commercial aircraft. The committee also censured Safran's work on helicopter engines with two entities tied to the Chinese military, and Dassault's partnership with Shenzhou Aerospace, which is controlled by an entity overseeing missile and space programmes. The argument against pressuring US firms to quit aiding China is that the void will be filled by other suppliers, mostly from Europe. The Pentagon can use its contracts to pressure these suppliers, but the government's reach is limited beyond that unless it's able to forge a joint front with its European allies.

Perhaps the most critical and realistic recommendation is the committee's call for the Federal Aviation Administration to block certification of the Comac C919 or any other Chinese-built commercial airliners to operate in the US. The European Union Aviation Safety Agency should heed this recommendation, too. Aerospace is one of the few manufacturing activities where the US and Europe still lead the world. It would be an own goal to let the sector suffer the same fate as EVs, solar panels, shipbuilding, and other industries where China has aimed at, and achieved, a leading position.

COUNTERING TARIFFS

THERE'S NO REASON WHY A TRADE DEAL WILL PROTECT INDIA FROM FUTURE TRADE ACTIONS

It's time to go 'US+1'



AMITENDU PALIT

Senior Research Fellow and Research Lead (trade and economics), Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore

THE LATEST US tariff threats on industrial overcapacity underline the importance of India pursuing a "US+1" trade strategy.

India was among the earliest to kick off negotiations on a bilateral trade deal during Trump 2.0. The joint statement released during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the US in early February 2025 announced the launch of talks on a bilateral trade deal for taking India-US trade to $500 billion by 2030.

More than 20 months have passed since with no signs of a deal. During these months, India has been subjected to various US unilateral trade actions, including the erstwhile liberation day tariffs and Russian oil purchase penalty tariffs. While these have gone, 10% tariffs following Section 301 investigations on failure to stop use of imports using forced labour remain. These are now being threatened to be topped up by 25% more due domestic industrial overcapacity. Furthermore, the Lindsey O. Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act of 2026 authorises up to 100% tariffs on goods imported by the US from countries that are major buyers of Russian energy, such as India.

India is not the only country that is the target of US trade action. It figures prominently among those that the US is gunning for to get back at China and Russia.

Apart from China, the Section 301 overcapacity investigations have identified countries in Southeast Asia (Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, Cambodia), East Asia (Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan), South Asia (Bangladesh, India) and Europe (EU, Switzerland). All the countries, including India, have strong trade links with China irrespective of their political ties with it. These are also economies that have had tariffs from forced labour imports. Both forced labour and overcapacity tariffs assume cheap Chinese imports abetting production and consumption in the identified countries and making US businesses uncompetitive. India is further tainted due to its strong economic and strategic links with Russia.

Unfortunately, US trade actions and economic sanctions on Russia and China have failed to achieve their goals. The US strategy now is to hit major markets and trade partners of both countries so that they are forced to reduce their economic and business links with China and Russia, thereby eroding the latter's global economic and strategic influence.

The bipartisan tendency in the US to contain China might see punitive policies on transshipment, forced labour, and overcapacity continuing in some form or other

The relatively smaller economies of the world have limited flexibility in resisting US trade actions. Their dependence on the US market is non-negotiable. It is not so for India. It must call out the pernicious use of trade in the US's economic warfare against China and Russia by diversifying from America.

Currently, about a fifth of Indian exports are headed to the US. This is despite 2025-26 making several Indian exports heavily expensive in the US market due to reciprocal and Russian penalty tariffs. If 50% tariffs then, and 10% tariffs now, can get a fifth of Indian exports to the US, then how much more will a 17% tariff—the discounted rate the US is offering for overcapacity subject to a bilateral deal—get? Will there be any difference at all?

How does the non-US trade world for India look like? The EU absorbs around 17% of its exports. Following the bilateral FTA, the share can enlarge significantly with many exports—apparels, footwear, jewellery—currently hit by tariffs in the US getting duty-free access in the EU. The other export boost is expected for digital trade, especially professional and management consulting, computer, finance, and R&D services. Progressively tightening US restrictions on movement of foreign professionals to the US can take away India's current proficiencies in digital exports to the US. The Trump administration's tendency to raise innovative barriers can can hit export of AI-driven services from India's global capability centres. The EU, along with the UK and UAE, with whom India has FTAs, can absorb significant exports from India—both physical and digital.

An 8% reduction in overcapacity tariffs doesn't guarantee significant export benefits for India. Several exporters to the US would favour a deal by accepting the cut. But there's much more to it. Getting an 8% discount will also mean India giving up what it hasn't till now. It would mean crossing red lines on market access in sensitive areas that are not on offer to the US. The trade-off is economically meaningless and can have major domestic repercussions.

Given the way the US has acted in the last couple of years, there's no "full stop" on coercion. It is very likely that even after a deal with the US, new protective measures will come up against India. Almost all countries facing overcapacity tariffs had made deals with the US last year. There's no reason why a trade deal will protect India from future trade actions.

India had begun pursuing trade diversification from a few years ago for a "China+1" trade strategy. The FTAs it had begun negotiating are now coming through. These FTAs should be effectively used for a "US+1" strategy.

Some might feel the best option for India is to commit to a deal, irrespective of concessions, and revisit it with a new administration after the next US presidential elections. A non-Republican government is unlikely to withdraw all Trump trade policies. President Biden retained Section 232 steel and aluminum tariffs imposed during Trump 1.0. India will remain a tainted trade partner even for a Democrat government, given its ties with Russia. The bipartisan tendency in the US to contain China might see punitive policies on transshipment, forced labour, and overcapacity continuing in some form or other. Hoping that all trade trouble will disappear from 2029 is purely wishful.

A deal with the US is no big deal. A US+1 strategy is and should be followed through.

Views are personal

The summit of self-promotion



STEPHEN S ROACH

Faculty member at Yale University and former Chairman of Morgan Stanley Asia

Despite claiming world history with a declaration towards peace, the trilateral summit between Xi, Trump, and Putin was about optics, not substance

THE TRILATERAL MEETING between Chinese President Xi Jinping, US President Donald Trump, and Russian President Vladimir Putin in Shenzhen on November 19 was no Yalta 2.0. It was about one thing above all: self-promotion. Forget about trying to solve the major interrelated problems confronting the three countries, let alone the world.

The summit sidestepped the wars ravaging Ukraine and West Asia. There was no mention of mounting AI challenges as the technology revolution reaches a critical point. The leaders also overlooked the expiring trade truce between the United States and China and failed to make any progress on the new trade and investment boards recently established by the two superpowers. As a long-standing sceptic of pre-scripted summits, I already had a low bar for the Shenzhen gathering. But it did not even clear that.

Unsurprisingly, Xi, Trump, and Putin beg to differ. They claim that world history was made in Shenzhen with the US-Russia-China Heads of State Declaration towards Peace, which calls for reforming the United Nations, reducing the risks of nuclear weapons, and strengthening energy security, while condemning the International Criminal Court.

Don't get me wrong: I am not making light of the first three goals as basic, albeit unspecified, building blocks of world peace. But the fourth point is patently transparent. The ICC issued an arrest warrant in early 2023 for Putin, charging him with war crimes for the unlawful abduction and transfer of Ukrainian children to Russia. The G3's hypocritical indignation is appalling.

Optics are everything at summits. The official images from the meeting show Xi prominently situated as the central figure under Guan Shanyue's majestic painting of the Great Wall at sunrise, flanked by Putin and Trump around a large, round table. This is in keeping with Xi's recent ambitions to rewrite the world order with his Global Development Initiative, Global Security Initiative, Global Civilisation Initiative, and Global Governance Initiative. Putin, grateful just to be at the table, was delighted to have his two friends discredit the ICC, while Trump, hunched in a subservient posture, could only claim to have inspired "plane envy" in the others.

The stagecraft of summitry, on full display in Shenzhen, was an exercise in obfuscation, without any meaningful exchange of views on tough issues

The summit exemplifies everything that is wrong with these events. The three leaders face urgent issues, individually and collectively, but failed to deliberate over them in any meaningful way. Putin's illegal war in Ukraine continues to take a tragic civilian toll, while Trump has threatened to extend his war of choice in Iran with new strikes. And Xi's willingness to support Russia's and Iran's military machines through outsize oil purchases is acting at cross-purposes with world peace. Meanwhile, the recent volatility in financial markets underscores the need for US-China collaboration on AI governance, sooner rather than later.

Foreign summits are often a foil for domestic problems. China is a case in point. Xi's success as an international impresario stands in stark contrast to his government's feeble approach to domestic economic policy. The economic statistics for October were terrible, with broad-based shortfalls in retail sales and fixed asset investment (especially real estate and private-sector capital spending). Relative support for industrial production was diverted to foreign markets, with exports surging more than 30% in the year ending in October.

These trends are a visible manifestation of China's strategic conundrum. Unable to hit its growth target by relying on domestic demand, China continues to turn to external demand, triggering a protectionist backlash from Europe and parts of the Global South. This has opened a debate over China's inclination to export its overcapacity and the deflationary pressures of involution.

This reflects Xi's bet on achieving the China Dream, or "the great renewal of the Chinese nation," through an industrial strategy that emphasises so-called new quality productive forces. Shenzhen exemplifies that bet, as home to some of China's most dynamic companies, from Huawei (AI and telecoms) and BYD (electric vehicles) to DJI (drones) and BGI (genomics).

Returning to China for the second time in a month validated this view. Yet, I was alarmed to find that, when sharing my concerns about this economic strategy, most of the policymakers, regulators, businesspeople, and academics with whom I spoke simply nodded in agreement. There is a strong feeling that conditions in the Chinese economy are "good enough" for now. This has given rise to a worrisome sense of complacency, at odds with the era of reform and risk-taking that Deng Xiaoping ushered in nearly a half-century ago.

This underscores a sense of irony in selecting Shenzhen as the summit's venue. Deng's famous southern tour of 1992 played a key role in establishing Shenzhen as China's first special economic zone. (For Xi, the Shenzhen story is also about family pride: his father, Xi Zhongxun, played a pivotal role in the city's early development.) But Deng knew that Chinese modernisation would have to be about far more than Shenzhen, advanced technologies, and export-led growth. Showcasing the "Shenzhen model" illustrates how the government's growth strategy has fallen short of Deng's more balanced approach.

According to official Chinese statistics, leading-edge "new economy" industries, including electric vehicles, lithium batteries, and solar panels, account for about 18% of Chinese GDP. That is not nearly large enough to offset the headwinds from the carnage in the property sector, a serious youth unemployment problem, and fear-driven saving that inhibits discretionary consumption.

The stagecraft of summitry, on full display in Shenzhen, was an exercise in obfuscation, without any meaningful exchange of views on tough issues. The 1945 Yalta conference between Franklin D Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and Joseph Stalin took place over eight days. By contrast, the conversation between Xi, Trump, and Putin reportedly lasted only about 90 minutes. Even that was a waste of time.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Don't rush into a deal

Apropos of "Resist tariff arm-twisting" (*FE*, November 27), as India and the United States advance negotiations on a trade agreement, New Delhi must approach the process with confidence rather than urgency. Trade talks between two major economies should be guided by mutual benefit, not by pressure to secure concessions in exchange for market access.

India's growing manufacturing base is an economic necessity, driven by the need to create jobs, meet domestic demand, and strengthen its position in global supply chains. Characterising this expansion as evidence of unfair trade practices overlooks the development priorities of a rising economy. Likewise, a trade surplus is not inherently a sign of market distortion; it can also reflect competitiveness, efficiency, and consumer demand. Deeper economic engagement between India and the US offers significant opportunities in technology, energy, investment, and manufacturing. However, any agreement must remain balanced and reciprocal. A rushed deal that compromises domestic industry, agricultural interests, or policy flexibility could impose greater long-term costs than temporary trade frictions. The larger goal should be to build a durable economic partnership, not merely conclude a trade deal. With complementary strengths and shared strategic interests, both countries stand to gain from closer cooperation. Success will depend on mutual respect, predictable rules, and a commitment to shared prosperity rather than economic coercion.

—Amarjeet Kumar, Hazaribagh

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Regd. No. TN/CPMG/722/2000 R.N.I. Reg. No. 37821/80 Printed and published by HS Gadhadar on behalf of The Indian Express (P) Ltd Published at Unit No. 8 C&D, 8th Floor, KRD Gee Gee Crystal, Door No. 92, Dr. Radhakrishnan Salai, Mylapore, Chennai 600 004. Phone: (044)6679 1000. Printed at MNS Printers Pvt. Ltd.No.76/1, Bhuvana Nursery Avenue, Velappanchavadi, Poonamallee High Road, Chennai - 600 077. Chairman of the Board: Viveck Goenka, Editor: Shyamal Majumdar, Editor (Chennai): Shobhana Subramanian* (*Responsible for selection of news under the PRP Act)
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China-Russia-US in Shenzhen, and why it matters

The trilateral summit raises the prospect of a bipolar US-China condominium, with Russia not quite in the same league and India facing a more challenging geopolitical landscape



SHYAM SARAN

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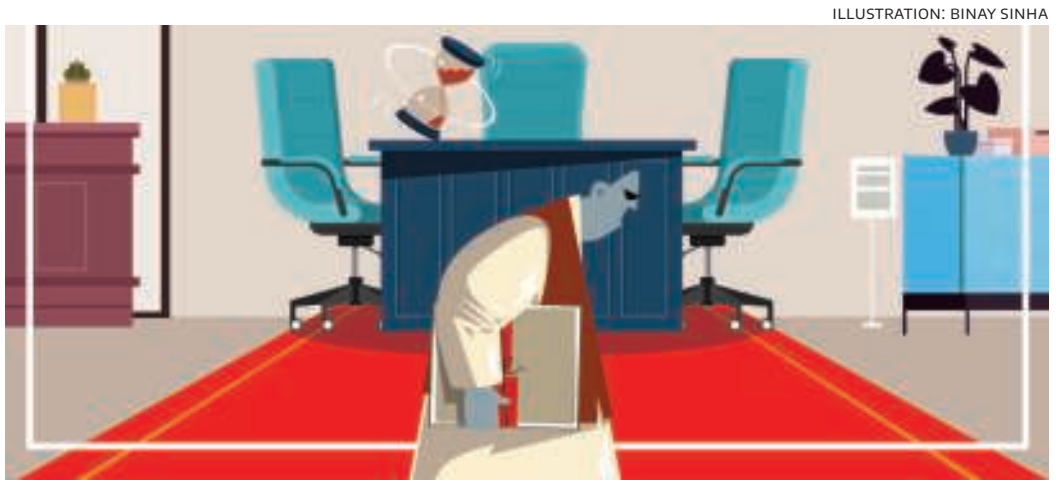

Chinese President Xi Jinping, Russian President Vladimir Putin and United States President Donald Trump held an unprecedented trilateral summit on November 19, on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting in the southern Chinese city of Shenzhen. The summit released a Trilateral Peace Declaration with four points of agreement whose implications are serious and should invite greater attention.

That a summit among the three leaders took place at all was remarkable, and to treat it as a mere photo-op misses its significance. Its outcome should be assessed together with the outcomes of the earlier bilateral meeting between Xi Jinping and Mr Trump and between Mr Putin and Mr Trump in advance of their trilateral summit. The more important bilateral meeting was undoubtedly between Mr Xi and Mr Trump, the readout of which has some important elements:

One, there is a reiteration of "constructive strategic stability" as a shared objective, but now there is a reference to the two sides formulating a "constructive strategic stability action plan". This goes beyond mere rhetoric. How such an action plan will be negotiated and what its content would be remain to be seen but should be watched closely.

Two, the language on Taiwan suggests that China believes that US policy is moving in the right direction.

"On the Taiwan issue, the US must keep doing the right thing to avoid the emergence of great turbulence in the China-US relationship."

This implies that China is encouraged by the trend in US approach to Taiwan and is now more confident of achieving the goal of reunification. By the same token, this is bad news for the East and Southeast Asian partners of the US because a Taiwan unified with China will change the geopolitical landscape of the Indo-Pacific region. Japan and South Korea will be the most affected. The voices pressing for going nuclear are rising in both countries in response.

China is comfortable with Mr Trump and sees opportunities to advance its influence and role particularly in Asia, while the latter is still President. The Chinese readout says that Xi Jinping considers that "the guiding role of the diplomacy between the US and Chinese heads of state is irreplaceable."

Xi Jinping is reported to have said that "the US is very powerful; China is also very powerful" and that the two countries should "jointly lead and promote world peace and stability."

It is the US-China bilateral that set the stage for the trilateral, but Russia is not regarded by either as being in the same league. The feared condominium, if it emerges, will be bipolar, not tripolar. The photo-op was important for Russia, to be seen as a great power, though it is not.

Let us analyse the Trilateral Peace Declaration whose four points were:

One, reform of the United Nations, although it was not clear what they intended in this respect. The three signatories are referred to as "permanent members" of the Security Council, but they completely ignore the two other permanent members — France and the United Kingdom. The US allies no longer count.

Two, the three countries plan to "increase the production and supply of refined petroleum products for the benefit of all nations". This means the end of energy sanctions against Russia. India will breathe a sigh of relief and will continue purchasing Russian oil.

Three, the International Criminal Court (ICC) is condemned for overstepping its jurisdiction and violating "the principle of state consent and respect for immunities of state officials". This was an easy point of agreement as none of the three countries is a member of the ICC. Mr Putin smiled broadly when this was mentioned by Mr Trump. He has been indicted by the ICC for criminal behaviour in the assault against Ukraine.

Four, reaffirmation of an earlier declaration of the five permanent members, all nuclear weapon states, that "a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought". This is reassuring specially in the wake of Russia threatening the use of nuclear weapons in the Ukraine War. There is also a commitment that the three countries would "conduct a dialogue on reducing nuclear risks and preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons".

This falls short of the US proposal for nuclear arms control talks among the three nuclear weapon states with the largest arsenals, which China has so far refused to join. But talks on nuclear risk reduction could be a useful starting point.

The reference to cooperation on non-proliferation is interesting. This could be a veiled reference to the Iran nuclear issue as well as the North Korea nuclear issue. For China, it could well be alluding to the threat of Japan and South Korea going nuclear, which would pose a greater challenge to China but may not be welcome to the US either.

We should remember that even during the height of the Cold War, both the US and the then Soviet Union found common cause in preventing other countries from developing nuclear weapons. The discriminatory Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) was the result. As a nuclear weapon state that has rejected the NPT, India should watch how this element of cooperation develops among the three countries and whether there may be constraints put on countries like India.

Could there be revival of calls for the universalisation of the NPT? China has opposed India's membership of the Nuclear Suppliers' Group and was virtually the last country to join the consensus in the NSG on the waiver provided to India in 2008 from the norms of the group prohibiting nuclear cooperation with countries non-signatories to the NPT. Could China try to reverse the waiver or seek it for Pakistan? How would the US react in the changed geopolitical circumstances? Could Mr Trump oblige his favourite field marshal from Pakistan?

A great deal can happen in the two years left of Mr Trump's tenure, and the Chinese and the Russians are determined to make the most of the opportunities this offers to them. When facts on the ground change, it is difficult to reverse course even if a new political dispensation takes charge in Washington in 2029.

The next Xi-Trump summit is slated for mid-December this year when the G-20 summit is hosted by the US in Miami. There could even be another trilateral summit. China is gaining in influence, Russia is masking its decline, and the US is ceding space that would be difficult to retrieve. This is the challenging terrain that India must learn to navigate as we head into the new year.

The writer is a former foreign secretary

The grand theft of GTA



VIEWPOINT

DEVANGSHU DATTA

Ever since the first release in 1997, Grand Theft Auto (GTA) has been among the most popular videogames. GTA players wander around fictional landscapes, stealing cars, shooting people, and generally committing mayhem. GTA is a prime example of the products that make gaming by far the most valuable segment of the entertainment industry.

It is estimated that global gaming (inclusive of hardware, live stream revenues, and advertising) will generate $560 billion in revenues in 2026. Just games (excluding hardware, streaming and ads) will generate $215 billion. For context, the global movie industry will earn a piddling $126 billion this year.

A large chunk of the world's 3.7 billion gamers play GTA. Over 512 million units of the core games have been sold, and there are countless spin-offs too. The GTA series has always been admired for its state-of-the-art quality. Every iteration of the GTA series has been cutting-edge, leveraging the best technologies of the day. Digital historians can map the evolution of the digital industry simply by the way GTA went from being 2D (two-dimensional) to 3D to HD (high-definition).

It has been claimed (with more than a grain of truth) that GTA is the United Kingdom's most successful export of the 21st century. It was developed by Scottish gamers at Rockstar North, originally an Edinburgh company, which is now the subsidiary of United States' Rockstar Games. It has also always been controversial due to its violent, amoral storylines.

Players role-play as criminals, rising through the ranks of organised crime "mobs", with many missions and side stories. Apart from the violence and amorality, GTA has also been criticised for the demeaning ways it depicts many (not all) women characters. The game features sex-workers, "gangsters' molls", and realistically depicted strip clubs. The timelines range from historic, from the 1920s onwards, to fictional near-future settings.

The locations are fictional in terms of names (Liberty City, San Fiero, Los Santos). But GTA is mostly set in US cities like New York, New Jersey, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, and Miami. London and Scottish locales also appear. The cities are rendered in granular detail using GPS, and 3D maps of real places. Scientists have taken GTA locales, and run simulations of flooding to see how they are affected by weather. The renders are that good (and scientists are that nerdy).

The sixth iteration of GTA — GTA6 — released on November 19, and it has immediately led to accusations of theft and piracy. This, too, is a paradigm driven by cutting-edge technology. Rockstar has always made its money with a business model involving what many gamers consider sharp practice. First, they release a version for consoles. Then, several months later, they release a version for the personal computer (PC). Gamers who need their GTA fix end up buying it twice, or even thrice. GTA6 was released on November 19 for the Xbox Series X|S and Playstation5 (PS5/Pro) platforms, with prices ranging from €60-90 equivalent. Less than a week later, there are excellent versions available for the PC. And, these are free.

Rockstar didn't release them. Gamers and vibe coders using artificial intelligence (AI) pulled GTA6 from Xbox consoles and managed to get it to run on Windows PCs. A hacker group called Cyberleek had hacked into Rockstar, and leaked a large portion of the code for the Xbox version of the game. Xbox is a Microsoft product and runs on Windows. Gamers and vibe coders recompiled to make it run natively on high-end Windows PCs.

Here's a technical point. A console game (or any native android app for that matter) can always be run on a desktop PC by using an emulator. Emulation makes the desktop's hardware behave like the console's hardware (or a mobile). But it radically slows the PC down, which is a dealbreaker for a game like GTA. Instead, if the code is taken apart and recompiled, the computer needn't throttle itself. Recompilation is essentially what the company would do to create a PC-native version. It used to take expertise, intimate coding knowledge and many man-hours.

Vibe coders can now use AI to do this. There's no official estimate of how many tokens were expended on which AI to do this recompilation. But the unofficial builds work smoothly and it's been less than a week. Of course, there's a high risk that these PC versions are also seeded with malware. And, of course, this is illegal. But surely you didn't expect gamers who spend their days pretending to be mobsters to be restrained by moral considerations?

The writer is a journalist

The Bihar-UP *Bahubali* curse

Bihar MLA Anant Singh has led a charmed life. The Mokama '*Bahubali*' has faced multiple cases, but nothing takes away his sheen or grip on power

A lot of us Indians have been transfixed by the wedding of Bihar strongman and expelled Janata Dal (United) MLA Anant Singh's daughter. Estimates vary, but it seems between 300,000 and 500,000 people attended the wedding in Mokama. Anant Singh, mind you, is under trial for murder, out on bail, with 27 other serious cases to his name.

The highlight of the wedding was a horse race with a Thar for the winner, plus much celebration, festivity and unlimited food. TV channels, especially some Hindi channels, have been dining out on this, counting the *rasgullas* and *gulab jamuns* on the guests' plates. I saw one where the guest said he had six of each and complained that the others had collected a dozen or more. The highlight for me, however, was this scene: Anant Singh on a Land Cruiser, in an open black jacket, waving his *gamcha* (shoulder-wrap) with one hand and twirling his moustache with the other; thousands screaming "*chhote Sarkar, chhote Sarkar*" (literally, younger master). That's because his brother Dilip Singh, who died in 2006, was the "bade Sarkar" (the elder master).



NATIONAL INTEREST

SHEKHAR GUPTA

The "*bade Sarkar*" passed on the baton flawlessly to his younger brother, making him the leading *Bahubali* (strongman) of Mokama, among the poorest parts of Bihar. No surprise then that Mokama has been under the sway of not just one *Bahubali*, but two competing and feuding dynasties. Important fact: Both are from the same (upper) caste, Bhumihar. Both have been much in demand by political parties. In politics anywhere, "winnability" usually is like the Gangajal that washes a candidate of all sins. This is only more pronounced in the Hindi heartland.

The bade-chhote Sarkar's rival has been Surajbhan Singh, a former MP but long since banned from contesting after his conviction in a 1992 murder case. It took a fast-track court until 2008 to convict him. But never mind, his wife Veena Devi picked up the mantle. She, too, is a former MP, though lately she's been losing elections. The rivalry continues. The population is divided in its loyalties between the two dynasties. But, as you'd expect, more would always be on the winning side — Anant Singh's.

Let's keep the focus on the man of the moment, the bride's father. Anant Singh has led a charmed life. He has faced multiple cases, but nothing takes away his sheen or grip on power. Being in or out of jail doesn't matter. He was jailed in 2019, for example, under multiple charges including under the draconian UAPA (Unlawful Activities Prevention Act) after at least one AK-47, 22 cartridges and two bombs were recovered from his home. That should've finished his political career. Not in Bihar though.

In the 2020 state elections, he contested from jail and won. And which chief minister doesn't want any MLA from anywhere to shore up their numbers? In Hindi heartland politics, nobody is immune from it. Not even ever-so-holier-than-cow Nitish Kumar. His government dropped the UAPA charges in the final chargesheet and Anant Singh was out on bail. Just how tightly have you fastened your seatbelts as I recount this story?

He wouldn't be Anant Singh if you could keep him away from "adventure" and he always looks well-equipped for it. See the pictures from the wedding, him strutting about in track pants, a zipped-up jacket, with a cowboy hat on his head and flip-flops (*hawai chappals*) on his feet, surrounded by a dozen-plus henchmen carrying rifles. At the wedding, the only role for the police was in traffic management.

His latest "adventure" came during the campaign for the Assembly elections in the fall of 2025. In a clash, Dular Chand Yadav of Prashant Kishor's Jan Suraj Party was killed. Anant Singh was charged for the murder. He campaigned from jail and won. Union Minister Rajiv Ranjan (Lalan) Singh, also from his caste, campaigned for him while he was in jail. That was an IOU.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, Anant Singh fielded his wife, Nilam Devi, against Lalan Singh on a Congress ticket. Of course, she lost. But, by 2024, Anant Singh was campaigning for Lalan Singh in the general elections. If you think this movement from one side to the other is bewildering, it's because every party loves to have a good "winnable" *Bahubali*. Now you understand why Lalan Singh campaigned for a former rival who was now jailed. In March this year, the Patna High Court granted him bail. That's what the Supreme Court has now cancelled. He is to surrender on December 1. But, he's been telling his crowds not to worry, the Supreme Court will give him bail within three months.

Let's stay with Mokama and check out the history of the "chhote-bade Sarkars". In 1990 and 1995, elder brother Dilip Singh won on Janata Dal tickets. He subsequently became a member of the Legislative Council.

In 2005 and 2010, Anant Singh won from the older brother's constituency. In 2015, he left the JD(U), contested as an Independent and still won. The tables turned in 2020, but only in terms of party loyalties. Anant Singh won again, this time from the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD). You don't need more evidence that everybody needs a *Bahubali*. Remember, even the Congress had fielded his wife in 2019.

While the UAPA charges were dropped, Anant Singh was still disqualified as an MLA in 2022 for possessing illegal weapons. This was after his Arms Act conviction by the MP/MLA court. Wife Nilam Devi contested the bye-election from his seat and won, retaining the seat for the RJD. Subsequently, the High Court acquitted Anant Singh under the Arms Act charges.

Mokama is about 90 km from Patna, and carries a curse of geology. A large part of it is a depression, also described as The Tal (the lake). It's prone to regular floods even in normal rains.

Like most of Bihar, its economy is based on remittances. The people young and old that remain, have very little to do. The *Bahubalis,* therefore, become providers of petty contracts and casual labour in their "real estate" projects, sand-mining (mostly illegal), and generally in manning their wide protection rackets.

I can take you on a grand gangland tour of the Hindi heartland, but let's stay with Bihar this week. It gave India one of its most notorious mafiosi, Shahabuddin, the "lord and master" of Siwan. For years, he ran his empire, ordered hits and hostage-taking for ransom from jail, even while serving life-term for murder. But his wife, Hena, and son Osama, now an RJD MLA, have kept the legacy alive. They aren't politically untouchable. The more striking case, currently in the headlines, is Anand Mohan. The "don of Sheohar" was finally nailed when convicted for the 1994 murder of G Krishnaiah, an IAS officer and then district magistrate of Gopalganj.

In 2023, Nitish Kumar amended Bihar's prison remission rules in a manner you could only describe as designed bespoke for Anand Mohan. He lifted the restriction on remission for those convicted of killing public servants on duty. Anand Mohan is now out. It's only this week that the Supreme Court quashed the Bihar Government's customised remission policy.

He will return to jail, like Anant Singh. But, even when he's been away his wife, Lovely, and son Chetan have been contesting and often winning from the pocket borough. Both have been courted across parties. We could move to Pappu Yadav and his wife Ranjeet Ranjan. But we will be moving into the territory of what young people call TMI, or too much detail.

I can take you through the star cast of Bahubalis of neighbouring Uttar Pradesh, from Atiq Ahmed to the Ansaris and Hari Shankar Tiwari. But here's the larger point: There may be a million problems that bedevil the Hindi Heartland, yet the love of the gangster is among the top three, along with caste and communalism.

By special arrangement with *ThePrint*

IPO will damage Tata soul



THE WISE LEADER

R GOPALAKRISHNAN

The Tata group has a reorganisation idea to meet statutory norms for listing through an initial public offering (IPO). Is it not sensible to let the group adapt if it does not wish to list — that too, under duress of regulation? Don't compel Tata Sons to list. Let the people there decide voluntarily. The group is a national jewel and should be allowed to continue to play its role in India's aspirations.

This article is replete with global business examples, reflecting that concerns are real, and not retired directors' emotions. Tata Trusts and Tata Sons must converge regarding an IPO. Harmony does not require sameness and can be achieved even without complete convergence.

The idea that a company possesses a soul (spirit/culture) is quite Indian, distinct from a transactional perspective. A corporate soul is mauled by a traumatic shock. Whether Tata Sons should do an IPO is of supreme concern to retired and senior Tata employees. The organisation should do an internal survey to assess opinion on whether an IPO could diminish "Tataness", especially under compulsion.

My enquiry among retirees and senior Tata employees suggests deep concern about mandatory listing. They have fears that their "spiritual holding company" will be hurt. They have observed the behaviour and values of leaders when the firm had acted well beyond what the law required. The firm's responses had emanated from its soul rather than the laws. These senior employees now find the idea of an IPO as unacceptable — quite a red flag, not to be ignored!

Soul, spirit, and culture are nurtured by leaders' behaviour when confronted with a *dharma sankat* (dilemma). For example, in 1922, when Dorabji Tata raised money, placing his wife's Jubilee Diamond as collateral to pay Tisco (now Tata Steel) workers; in the 1940s, when J R D Tata would not close down a loss-making Mithapur factory of Tata Chemicals because "where Tata goes, it raises the hopes of people in the community"; in 2001, when Ratan Tata assured repayment to every Tata Finance investor after an unfortunate fraud. All these examples cost Tata Sons some reputation and lots of money. It is worth reflecting whether Tata Sons could act consistently in the same way if it is a listed company in the future. The requirements of its other shareholders would influence the decision.

The soul also manifests in non-financial ways — humane ways when unforeseen calamities hit a Tata company: How JRD visited every affected family in the unfortunate fire in Jamshedpur in 1989; how Ratan Tata visited every injured person at hospital after the 2008 terror attack; how N Chandrasekaran and Noel Tata visited the accident site after the Air India crash at Ahmedabad last year.

Modern techniques of risk analyses do not evaluate the effect of frayed employee feelings. Companies are "live" entities. Reactions to a collective slight can create uncontrollable waves of turmoil and uncertainty. Remember the merger of Jet Airways and Sahara? Remember the Essar group's failed takeover of Tamil Nadu Mercantile Bank, creating enormous angst among the Nadar community? You want more evidence that the corporate soul can be damaged in the eyes of the employees? Here goes, not surprisingly most of them from the Anglo-American world.

Messing with the soul: When a mission-driven SAIC (Science Applications International Corporation), deeply committed to employee ownership, did an IPO in 2013, Robert Beyster, the founder, lost his mission. When mission-driven Ventura was taken over in 2021 by PMI (Phillip Morris International), a lung-health company quite ridiculously got absorbed into a cigarette company.

Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI) was founded in 1926. It believed it was a national institution and behaved as such. For all those years, ICI flourished. Sixty years later, with Anglo-American ideas on the primacy of shareholder capitalism, management came under pressure to improve quarterly performance and increase margins and cash generation. ICI gradually moved from "what technologies should we invent for the future" to "which businesses generate the highest returns today?" Its soul was damaged. ICI does not exist any longer.

"How Johnson & Johnson (J&J) nearly lost its soul" is a story associated with the legendary chief executive officer James Burke. By 1980, Burke believed that J&J was fast becoming a financially driven firm. He deeply desired the firm to course-correct to Robert Wood's "Our Credo", crafted in 1943. In 1982, when the Tylenol crisis gripped J&J, Burke acted in accordance with "Our Credo" of 1943: Recall all the 31 million bottles of stock and incur massive losses. The crisis demonstrated how character survived in J&J.

Daimler-Benz merged with Chrysler in 1998. Officially described as a "merger of equals", many Chrysler employees soon realised that Daimler was running the combined company. Differences in German and American management styles created friction. Over a few years, senior Chrysler leaders left, particularly as the expected synergies failed to materialise. Daimler eventually sold Chrysler in 2007 in desperation. It was tumultuous for employees and shareholders while the merchant bankers counted their spoils.

AOL merged with Time Warner in 2001. Time Warner managers resented being controlled by AOL, whose valuation in their opinion was inflated. The cultures clashed. AOL was fast-moving and aggressive while Time Warner was a traditional media company. Internal conflicts increased and the synergies never emerged. The merger became one of the most famous failures in corporate history. Resentment grew when the acquired side believed that the acquirer lacked the substance to justify control.

HP merged with Compaq in 2002. This merger was Carly Fiorina's last corporate hurrah. The merger was a subject of my book *Crash*, 2018. Many HP traditionalists and founding-family members opposed the merger. Compaq employees often felt their identity was being absorbed by HP. Years of integration challenges and cultural clashes continued, resulting in high turnover and prolonged internal debate. The cultural resentment lasted for years.

India should not import "germs" from the Anglo-American bloodstream, especially when the Tata group itself is willing to adapt by returning loans and reorganise in line with policy.

The writer is a business commentator and has written 21 books on human behaviour and enterprise leadership. His forthcoming book, *Deergha Aayu*, is about productive long-life companies
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A thought for today

The English think they are free. They are free only during the election of members of parliament

JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU

Is More Merrier?

LS productivity matters as much as strength

Starting Monday, govt will make another bid to increase Lok Sabha seats from 543 to 816, and reserve 33% of them for women. Its first attempt to effect these via delimitation bills, in April, was unsuccessful. Given that only 14% of Lok Sabha MPs are women, a quota would be welcome. We are less sure about the overall increase in LS strength. Yes, the number of MPs has remained unchanged since 1970s, when India's population was roughly a third of what it is now. That means each MP, on average, is burdened with thrice as much responsibility. In states like UP and Bihar, where population has grown faster than in, say, the south, the burden is greater. UK, with a tiny fraction of India's population, has 650 MPs; China's NPC, although indirectly elected, has 3,000 deputies. So, there's a case for more MPs, to raise people's concerns at the highest level.

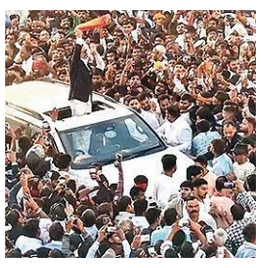


But what will more MPs do when Parliament is often dysfunctional. LS worked for 15% of its allocated time in this year's Monsoon Session. Only 1% of Question Hour was used. In last year's Monsoon Session, more than 60% of time was lost to disruptions. In 2012, Parliament cost ₹2.5L per minute to run; it would be far costlier now. Per EC, over 1.5cr personnel were deployed for 2024 LS polls, so a 50% increase in LS constituencies could require more manpower and funds. Shouldn't we aim for greater parliamentary efficiency first? This year's Budget Session saw 86% use of time – that's a good benchmark. Merely increasing constituencies and bench strength won't likely achieve much. In any case, work on the ground is overseen by municipal representatives, MLAs and the bureaucracy. LS would be better served with its focus on quality of MPs, and discussions. A bigger LS that's also more productive would truly be in citizens' interest.

The Feastfather

What an unreal wedding in Bihar tells us about its reality

Roughly one in three people in Bihar are classified as multidimensionally poor, the highest proportion among all states. Was this reflected in the spectacle that's somersaulted the state into global headlines this week? No, not if you go by how extravagant the wedding of Mokama MLA Anant Singh's daughter was. Reports say five helipads were built for it, the groom had a 151 vehicle convoy, there were horse races, and the whole hooha may have cost ₹60cr. That's over 8500 times Bihar's per capita income of ₹69,321. And this chasm couldn't possibly be missed. It was glaring. Not least in how the masses that the event attracted, got their wedding meal by scrambling for the disposable plates flung at them. As if in a ghastly reprise of *Hunger Games*.



Singh is now, once again, headed to jail, as the prime accused in the Dularchand Yadav murder. There are 50 odd criminal cases against him. And yet, his moniker is 'Chhote Sarkar'. The wedding spectacle is an extension of his political persona. For *aam* citizens, TDS is deducted before the salary reaches their bank account, GST is embedded in all purchases. But for a five-time MLA, the flaunting of extraordinary wealth apparently needs no accounting. At moments like these, India doesn't seem a modern country at all, but still trapped in some much older social order. This wedding's painfully feudal look is not just a look.

Hormones: Our Body's Orchestra

It synchronises both big life events and day-to-day matters

mindfield
SHORT TAKES ON BIG IDEAS

When ***Saira Hameed*** started med school, she didn't have an email address. When she became a registrar, her clinic room didn't have a PC. As a newbie endocrinologist, she didn't imagine that hormones would one day be the *mot du jour*. Three decades on, healthcare has been transformed by gee-wizardry. And yet, her practice remains essentially that of one person telling their story, and the other trying to interpret it.

In her book, ***Signals: The Inside Story of Our Hormones***, Hameed writes that the symptoms of endocrine illness are often the symptoms of life itself. Tiredness, weight concerns, fluctuating libido. Yes, we have learnt the diversity of hormone function, from milk to mood, hunger to height. We now have thyroxine and insulin and steroid replacement. Yet, endocrinologists' offerings have finite reach.


Image: AI

A plastic water bottle sticking out of his overcoat pocket on a dismal Nov afternoon and herniated fat pads under his eyes, are among the clues leading to a journalist patient's type 2 diabetes diagnosis. It's largely a dietary illness and takes up 10% of the NHS budget paying Hameed's salary.

Modern meds, home blood glucose monitors, retinal checkups, ophthalmic lasers…should have conquered the disease. Except, look at what even the docs in London's most venerable hospitals are eating. Fast food chains are *inside*. As is the Wi-Fi running a constant cortisol stress response. "The world is now set up to blunt insulin signalling, not to make it work better."

Type 1 diabetes is a multi-billion-dollar industry. But three inventors of the insulin pen, in 1983, took no financial reward for it. The 1977 Nobel laureate Rosalyn Yalow gave endocrinology its diagnostic colours: a technique to measure minute concentrations of hormones in the blood. But she and her research partner also chose not to make millions, so that millions would benefit from their innovation.

Fred Banting, 1923 Nobel laureate, was so short of money during his punishing research schedule isolating insulin from animals, that he relied on a local church for some hot meals. Yet, his team sold the US patent to University of Toronto for a dollar each. "Insulin does not belong to me, it belongs to the world," he said.

Hameed's point is that while medicine can be about the worst that can happen, it's also about the best of humankind, from those standing lovingly by sickbeds to the *esprit de corps* of hospital teams.

But her book's real hero is the human body. Each chapter takes readers on a detective journey alongside the doctor, weaving different hormone signals and the glands that produce them in and out of patient stories. Whatever problem is found, it's a reminder of how punctiliously a healthy body is regulated. Medicines imitate the body's signalling, but are imperfect copies.

Consider this magical scene: A mother's signals power the *in utero* incubator, and before the child can make his own hormones, *hers* cross the placenta to talk to foetal cells and tell them what to do. When he is ready to be born, her hypothalamus gives a roar of oxytocin that contracts her womb and floods her brain. His tiny neonate hypothalamus inebriates *his* cells with the same hormone, which bonds mother and child.

When the body is working well, none of this complicated work registers. Hameed quotes a French surgeon: "Health is life in the silence of the organs."

So Few Cost So Many Of Us

Every badly behaved, or visa overstaying, Indian abroad affects national reputation. Because reputation is a shared resource, we pay an implicit tax, imposed on us thanks to a few decorum or rule breaking desis

Anupam Manur



It's peak tourism season again. Expect a flurry of videos circulating on social media of Indians behaving badly abroad. These videos travel much further than any of the travellers who feature in them. When a group of Indians dancing in front of a parked aircraft in Vietnam went viral, the aftermath was a familiar procession of anecdotes by other travellers: stories of treating historical monuments as a backdrop for impromptu dance routines and photoshoots, cutting queues, being loud in public spaces, littering in public, and stealing condiments and toiletries from hotels.

The consequences extend well beyond the incident. Economists call this a negative externality: a cost imposed on someone who was not party to the original transaction. Down the line, a tour operator may be less eager to accommodate an Indian family, or a hotelier might be less welcoming. Even without explicit discrimination, the feeling of being unwelcome can diminish the travel experience.

This is an invisible tax on Indian travellers, not imposed by any govt, but by the accumulated behaviour of their fellow citizens. The danger is that enough such incidents produce a diffuse suspicion that Indian travellers, as a group, cannot be trusted with a boarding pass.

Nobel Laureate Jean Tirole has a fascinating and fitting concept, called collective reputations. His main insight is that when an individual's own record is observed only noisily, or at high cost, the observer rationally falls back on the group's record. Your treatment depends not on what you have done, but on what people like you have done.

Such discrimination need not begin in bigotry. It can emerge from Bayesian reasoning: when individual behaviour is costly to verify, observers fall back on the info available about the group. But a rational inference from incomplete info, can still produce an unfair judgement of an individual.

This is what makes national reputation behave like a commons. It is a shared asset that everyone benefits from, but which individuals can deplete without bearing the full cost of doing so. Overfishing benefits the individual fisher, but depletes the stock for others.

Similarly, playing loud music on a train in Switzerland may be enjoyable for your group and cost you little, but it can diminish the reputation other Indians must live with. Benefits accrue to the individual, costs are distributed among strangers. This is the tragedy of the commons, at play at higher altitudes.

Why does this happen? Some hypotheses follow.

- First is composition: as international travel becomes accessible to more Indians, many are encountering foreign countries for the first time. Some may carry habits formed at home, where bad behaviour like jumping a queue can be rewarded, into environments with different expectations about public space, and personal conduct.
- Another is the incentive structure of the phone. People want to do extraordinary things to capture attention. Then there is scale. When tens of millions of people travel abroad each year, even misconduct by a tiny fraction becomes an absolute number large enough to attract attention. Social media does the rest.
- There is a deeper explanation. Incomes rise faster than norms do. Indians could afford mobile phones, long before we worked out how loudly to conduct a call, in a train compartment. Purchasing power to buy SUVs comes earlier, than road etiquette. Airfare and conducted tours became affordable faster, than the ability to absorb global travelling norms. Tacit knowledge of how to be a guest in someone else's country, is acquired more slowly, through observation and experience.


Image: AI

This is not a uniquely Indian failing. Japan's economic rise in 1980s and China's emergence as a major source of outbound tourists in 2000s, were accompanied by international scrutiny of their tourists' behaviour. British stag parties on the coasts of Southern Europe have gained a reputation that has proved difficult to shake off.

Stakes rise when this logic moves from the hotel reception to the immigration counter. Visa overstays and fraud can prompt govts to tighten scrutiny, with consequences for people who have done nothing wrong. Indian passport was never opening many doors to begin with. In the Oct 2026 Henley Passport Index, it offers access to 55 destinations without a prior visa, and ranks 84th globally, fallen from 71 in 2006.

US has also suspended several major IT companies from the PERM green-card process, amid allegations of abuse of employment-based immigration programmes. These are not identical cases, and the latter is not proof of nationality-based discrimination. But they illustrate a broader vulnerability. When authorities respond to patterns of suspected abuse, legitimate applicants can find their opportunities constrained by decisions they had no part in making.

In both cases, there are bigger causal factors at play, which are based in domestic political economy, protectionism, and xenophobia. But a policy is easier to sell when the collective reputation of the group at the receiving end is more vulnerable.

So, what can be done? There is no single policy instrument that fixes this. No govt can legislate the behaviour of its citizens in other people's countries, and shaming them on social media has never worked anywhere. But changing the systems and norms we live with at home – using litterbins, respecting queues, being mindful of fellow passengers – can change what we carry abroad.

The commons are repaired the same way that they are depleted, one transaction at a time. Every Indian who is courteous to a guide, and returns before their visa expiry, contributes to topping up the national reputational reserve.

The writer is professor of economics, Takshashila Institution

No Country For A Daytime Cuddle

Forget PDA. India's is a society where elders time their daughters-in-law's Sunday siesta with husband. All frisky business is to be done strictly after sundown, as love routinely gets confused with lust

Shinie Antony



In India Cupid strikes only at night. Usually in a locked room, with lights off, and in total silence. Married or not, a couple getting frisky in public is tampering with the very laws of love. You can say land of Kamasutra all you want, but love's tendency to be confused for lust gives it a bad name. Couples do such a good job at refraining, that their children, when they learn of the birds and the bees, routinely faint in science class. 'What, you are not brother and sister?' is the cry that rings out in most homes. We would rather be children of incest than imagine our parents in bed.

Brides who moved into their husband's homes were aware of judgemental neighbours and relatives, and to that end flitted about from kitchen to the altar with no detour to bedroom. An afternoon nap with husband on a Sunday was frowned upon. The elders may have their eyes fixed on Doordarshan, but spend *Krishi Darshan* timing bahu's siesta. Through talks on manure and compost, they wait for the door to click open. For her to emerge freshly bathed and ask 'who wants tea now?' Women look good stirring pots in the kitchen, and plucking flowers for puja. One has to be in labour to warrant bedrest.

After couples moved away from the CCTV situation in joint families, they were free to express their affection for each other. Two things happened: either they developed a penchant for PDA or they went off each other. To forever coochie coo amidst kids and domestic crises is cumbersome business. Very soon both parties talk about the many people they could have tied the knot with but, sigh, didn't. Any brushing against each other is purely accidental. Are we getting fat or is the corridor too narrow?

Which is why Rahul Gandhi's recent comment on his mom Sonia sitting on his dad's lap during family meals interfered with our traditional *timing* of romance. This not only seems to have been happening in the middle of the day, but actually had witnesses! Broad daylight is not the assigned hour for any touchy-feely business.

Also, wives are part of the support system and often compete with furniture when it comes to husbandly comfort. If there is only one chair, they sit by husband's feet. If there is only a single cot, they immediately lie on the floor. If Rajiv had sat on Sonia's lap, we would have been less offended.

My parents were always in love. No amount of yawns could deter them from recounting the backstory of how they met, when they met, etc. Dad always cried during wedding anniversaries and spoke of how he was still stunned that mom had agreed to marry him. This brought tears to our eyes – poet he was not, plus the cake in his mouth added to the incoherence. He would often wrap an arm around her if she passed by or tug her into his lap. As kids we took this in-house romcom for granted, but did ask them to behave themselves in public. If one did not glare at them adequately, they were inclined to hold hands in our school.

Of Life And Love
STORIES OF THE WAY WE ARE

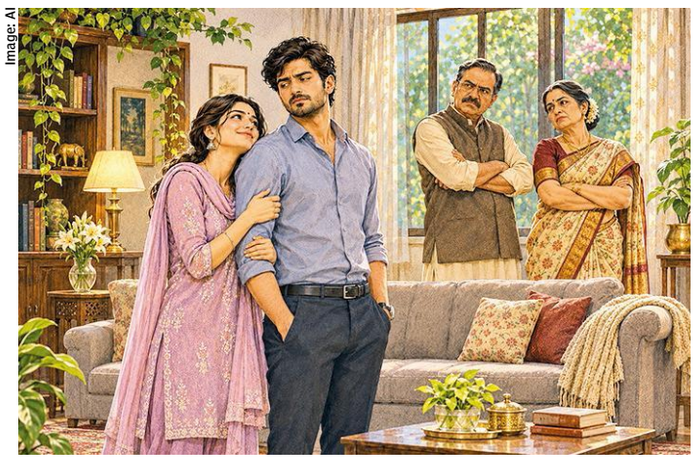


Image: AI

I took it for granted, this general sense of warmth, respect, and adoration between men and women. To me this was how it should be. The joke was on me, as I found out, once I left home and started to live my own life. That kind of camaraderie in couplehood comes from deep within. It is hardly a cosmetic or ornamental device to kickstart failing relationships. After foisting my sense of togetherness on a few thoroughly disinterested partners, I discovered the hard way the truth in the old profound saying '*ek haath se taali nahi bajti*'. Indeed, you cannot hold another person's hand if he always keeps it in his pocket or keeps his arms crossed. It is not that they do not have hands, but any hand they may have is not for you to hold.

Social media kisses and showy hugs are dismissed as impending breakups. Self-conscious embraces and prolonged eye contact in public raise suspicion – whom are they trying to convince, us or themselves? Wearing vials of each other's blood or tattooing each other's names on visible parts of their face turns into sheer embarrassment when partners change. Remember when Winona became 'Wino' on Johnny Depp's arm?

All the world loves a lover, but not India. By day we ignore our partner, like we have never met. But by late pm… The Indian lover keeps the same hours as bats and vampires. Maintaining the highest population does mean hectic nights. New Indians get made between sunset and sunrise – when everyone else is fast asleep, sometimes even the spouse.

Calvin & Hobbes



Sacredspace



When i think of a place of worship, i think of a place where one can sit and be reminded of all the things that are important outside our individual lives. To express spirituality, the architect has to think of the original material of architecture, space and light.

Richard Meier

A Tropical Forest Bath To Lift Your Spirits

Narayani Ganesh

Where can you listen to birds chirping, water flowing, tigers growling and deer barking, jackals scurrying, porcupines' quills hitting the ground, and langurs chattering, at one location? The quiet calm outside the core zone, at Pench Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh, is punctuated only by the rustle of leaves and the sound of your own footsteps – on gravel pathways at the resort, where we were staying overnight.

Some of us writers attending the Orange City Lit Fest in Nagpur, were lucky to make time to visit tiger country. As we approached the Reserve, we spotted cafes and eating places with signposts that said: Bagera Café, Kipling's Stall and so on, with echoes of Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book* and Mowgli, a story set in these jungles. But Kipling reportedly never visited there. He pieced together his imaginative story by drawing on details from British documents, journals and photographs of the forests and animals here.

Nope, nary a tiger did we espy on our two-hour jungle jeep safari, but we did get to smell tiger spray on a couple of tree trunks as the wind blew towards us, so we were in close proximity to the big cat. Cheetals were grazing and gazing ahead peacefully, one group looked like a stag party, langurs were staring as we passed them, and lo and behold, we were witness to the rare sighting of a leopard with her two cubs. She was eating her meal, as she dug her teeth into a cheetal she had hunted.

THE SPEAKING TREE


Rocky Singh

The jeep halted to let a hoopoe walk across the mud road. Yes, birds don't always fly; they walk, too! Once again, right of way was given to a porcupine scurrying across. The forest had many open spaces. The Ghost Tree stood out, and the naturalist Neeraj told us that this tree changes three colours – white, red and green – and makes its own food from its bark. It is also called the Butter Tree, as it shines in the dark. Among the Teak and Sal trees were shrubs, bushes, creepers, parasitical vines. There were many birds – barbets, grey hornbills, mynahs, mottled wood owls, the long racket-tailed drongo, jungle warblers, egrets, magpie robins and more. The drongo is a great mimic; it is said to make sounds like other birds, even mammals, and once they all arrive, the drongo takes off!

Shoham, the enthusiastic naturalist, was taking us on a nature walk at Pench Tiger Reserve, outside the core zone, of course, at dawn. We suddenly stop in our tracks as he warns us to avoid stepping on large, red, procession ants making a beeline to their destination. "Their bite is poisonous, your skin will swell up and itch," he warns us. These are the red ants that tribals harvest from their hidden nests in the hollows of trees, for their famous protein-rich hot chutney, Termite and ant hills, yes, but i had no idea that ants also make their nests in trees.

A mindful nature walk in the forest is a deeply spiritual experience. Both flora and fauna live together, conflict-free, other than the need for carnivores to make an occasional kill for their food. Langurs warn cheetals of impending danger. Little birds sit on buffalo backs, eating ticks. Symbiotic relationships here indicate the interconnectedness of all life.

ganeshnarayani@yahoo.com

TIMES BUSINESS
THE TIMES OF INDIA, NEW DELHI | SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 2026

The Week That Was...

Mkts Snap 4-Week Winning Run Amid Profit Booking

Benchmark indices sensex and Nifty took a breather this week after a strong four-week rally. Higher crude oil prices, a weaker rupee and rising domestic bond yields prompted profit booking in index heavyweights

Sensex -0.7%

Sensex Gainers

TCS	8.3%
HCL	5.9%
Infosys	4.9%

Laggards

Tata Steel	-7.9%
Axis Bank	-4.6%
Bharti Airtel	-4.3%

GOLD 0.8% | CRUDE 4.5% | BITCOIN 0.6%

$4.9Bn

India saw a near $5 billion outflow of FDI on a net basis in Sept as companies repatriated equity of $5.9 billion, marginally higher than a year ago

Source: Screener, ETIG

Minority shareholders' interest protection a key priority: Sebi

Proxy Advisory Cos Raise Concerns Over Tata Steel-Apollo Deal

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Amid concerns raised by minority shareholders in the proposed Tata Steel-APL Apollo transaction, Sebi chairman Tuhin Kanta Pandey Friday said safeguarding interests of the minority shareholders is a key priority for the market regulator.

"Minority shareholders' interest is very important for Sebi. Investor protection is key. We are looking at it (the Tata - APL deal)... because in any case, a takeover is involved, an offer is involved," Pandey told reporters in response to a query regarding the proposed deal.

The remarks assume significance in the wake of the concerns raised by proxy advisory firms over the proposed transaction's structure, valuation and safeguards for minority shareholders of APL Apollo.

On Monday, Tata Steel announced an agreement to acquire the entire 26.6% promoter stake in APL Apollo Tubes for Rs 15,510 crore and plans to take over another 26% through an open offer of Rs 16,756 crore. APL Apollo, meanwhile, is simultaneously buying Tata Steel's tubes and colour-coated steel businesses for Rs 28,000 crore.

Sebi is yet to receive the revised contours of the transaction and the regulator would await the revised proposal before taking further steps. Under the takeover regulations, the draft letter of offer is generally required to be filed within five working days of the public announcement.

At an Assocham event, Pandey also said Sebi is aiming to reduce the onboarding time for FPIs from several months to as little as five business days through digital workflows and system integration and bringing India's regulatory framework closer to global standards.

He also said that the regulator is undertaking a comprehensive review of the Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements (LODR) framework to eliminate disclosures that result in duplication with filings made with the corporate affairs ministry, while also planning to replace multiple stock exchange fines for the same compliance lapse with a single penalty.

Sebi is also reviewing the the Issue of Capital and Disclosure Requirements (ICDR) framework governing initial public offerings (IPOs), follow-on public offerings (FPOs), preferential issues and qualified institutional placements (QIPs).

For stock brokers, the regulator is exploring a graded compliance framework under which regulatory obligations would be aligned with a broker's scale, the exposure that clients have and dependence on technology.

> "Minority shareholders' interest is very important for Sebi. Investor protection is key. We are looking at it (the Tata-APL deal)...because in any case, a takeover is involved, an offer is involved
>
> "Sebi is aiming to reduce onboarding time for FPIs from several months to five business days through digital workflows and system integration. It is also bringing India's regulatory framework closer to global standards
>
> **Tuhin Kanta Pandey** | CHAIRMAN, SEBI



Many FTA benefits untapped: RBI

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Mumbai: Indian exporters are leaving much of the benefit of the country's expanding free-trade network untapped, with only 20-30% of eligible shipments using preferential tariffs against 60-70% in partner countries, RBI governor Sanjay Malhotra said. As a result, 70-80% of eligible Indian exports continue to enter partner markets under regular most-favoured-nation (MFN) tariffs, making them less competitive than goods from countries that use trade agreements more effectively.

India has trade agreements with UAE, Australia, EFTA, Oman, UK, Asean, Japan and South Korea, offering lower or zero import duties on eligible goods. Yet exporters, particularly smaller firms, have failed to fully claim these benefits. "It is an opportunity we are leaving on the table," he said.

Speaking at the SME Finance & Investment Summit here on Friday, Malhotra urged MSMEs to break out of a low-growth trap by investing in technology, raising productivity, formalising operations and expanding overseas. He outlined a five-point action plan for businesses and called on lenders to combine digital data with relationship-based banking to widen access to credit.

The challenge begins with scale. About 99% of Indian MSMEs remain micro-enterprises, with few graduating into large businesses. The transition rate is far below that in Australia (44%), Israel (42%), Indonesia (31%) and Poland (30%). "By one estimate, only about 10% of India's large companies in 2022 had been MSMEs at any point after 2000... Too many of our firms are born small and stay small," Malhotra said.

One deterrent has been the fear of losing regulatory concessions and subsidies upon crossing the thresholds for MSME classification. Govt has raised these limits to reduce that disincentive. But size is only part of the problem. Value added per worker in Indian MSMEs is just 26% of the level in large domestic enterprises, leaving them behind both advanced economies and emerging-market peers such as Brazil and Mexico. Raising productivity to the global top-quartile level could add 11% to India's GDP.

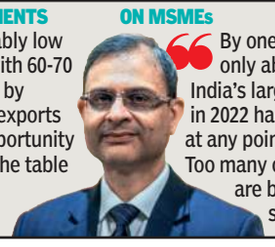
Technology adoption is another weakness. AI penetration among Indian MSMEs is estimated at 15%, below China, the US and Germany. Although 76% of MSME leaders use AI in some form, only 5% have embedded it in core operations. Informality compounds the problem: inadequate bookkeeping, delayed tax filings and cash transactions leave lenders with little reliable information on business cash flows, forcing them to depend on physical collateral.

ON TRADE AGREEMENTS

> It is remarkably low compared with 60-70 per cent utilisation by partner countries' exports to India. It is an opportunity we are leaving on the table
>
> **Sanjay Malhotra** | RBI GOVERNOR

ON MSMEs

> By one estimate, only about 10% of India's large companies in 2022 had been MSMEs at any point after 2000... Too many of our firms are born small and stay small



RBI eases CRR stance amid liquidity squeeze

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Mumbai: RBI has reversed its Oct 9 liquidity-tightening measure, reducing banks' daily cash reserve ratio (CRR) maintenance to a minimum of 90% of the statutory requirement from 99%. The earlier increase was intended to absorb surplus liquidity generated by inflows under the special FCNR(B) deposit scheme.

The rollback comes as banking system liquidity tightens and credit growth continues to outpace deposit mobilisation. Bank credit grew 19.3% year-on-year in the fortnight ended Nov 15, 2026, against deposit growth of 16.4%, widening the gap to 290 basis points from 140 basis points a year earlier.

Banks face sustained pressure to rely on higher-cost wholesale funding and borrowings to maintain lending momentum, with incremental credit absorbing over 96% of incremental deposits in FY27 and the deposits-advances gap narrowing to Rs 66,495 crore. SCB borrowings rose by Rs 2,86,022 crore in FY27 so far, against a contraction of Rs 80,264 crore in the same period of FY26.

Both deposits and credit contracted during the fortnight, but deposits showed a relatively sharper fall. Aggregate deposits declined Rs 2,04,150 crore (0.7%) to Rs 280.5 lakh crore, with demand deposits falling Rs 1,23,526 crore and time deposits Rs 80,625 crore. Credit fell Rs 71,139 crore (0.3%) to Rs 231.1 lakh crore.

Sensex falls 989pts as investors book profits

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Mumbai: A day after sensex hit a 10-month high, profit-taking in banking stocks and RIL, which had led the recent rally, pulled the index down 989 points to 83,339. On NSE, Nifty lost 277 points to close at 25,607.

The day's correction in the stock market came on the back of strong selling by domestic funds while net buying by foreign funds showed signs of slowing. At close of session, domestic institutional investors were net sellers at Rs 556 crore while foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) were net buyers at Rs 1,634 crore, data on BSE website showed.

The day's slide left investors poorer by nearly Rs 1 lakh crore with the aggregate market capitalisation of all the companies listed on the BSE at Rs 513.1 lakh crore, exchange data showed.

Silver hits 6% circuit on MCX

Mumbai: Silver prices on MCX hit the 6% upper circuit in early trade on Friday after gaining more than 10% in international markets. Silver futures for Dec delivery touched an intraday high of Rs 1.55 lakh per kg before easing to around Rs 1.53 lakh in late trade. Analysts attributed international gains mainly to short covering and said there were insufficient reasons to expect a prolonged rally in silver. Domestic gold prices also rose more than 3% to about Rs 1.27 lakh per 10 grams, tracking similar international gains. TNN

Thumbs-up for nutrition labelling push

Supriya.Roy@timesofindia.com

Bengaluru: Packaged food brands welcomed the Supreme Court's push for clearer nutrition warnings, while distributors sought safeguards for small manufacturers facing compliance costs and potential losses on stocks during the switch to new labels.

The court asked the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) to prescribe separate pictorial warnings for excess sugar, saturated fat or salt, counting total sugars. It allowed about four months to finalise regulations and a 365-day transition period for businesses.

Umesh Kumar Agarwal, director of Haldiram's, said, "The Supreme Court's direction to strengthen nutrition labelling is a welcome step. It could help make India's food ecosystem more transparent and better informed. People are paying closer attention to what they eat these days. That makes clear nutritional information more important than ever. Sugar, salt and saturated fat, in particular, need closer scrutiny. The WHO recommends keeping free sugars below 10% of daily energy intake, salt under 5 grams a day, and saturated fat below 10% of daily energy intake."

Brands welcome clearer nutrition warnings, while distributors seek safeguards for small manufacturers facing compliance costs and stock losses

Agarwal said front-of-pack labels can make a real difference. "They give consumers a quick, simple way to understand what they are buying. For food companies, this is also a chance to engage more openly with regulators, improve how they disclose information, and rethink how products are developed. Done well, a consistent and evidence-based framework would help everyone. Consumers would be better informed. Companies would face clearer expectations. And trust in the food system could grow." Vishnu Shankar, promoter of Adyar Ananda Bhavan, said, "It is a welcome move, but its effectiveness will depend on implementation." He sought scrutiny of unbranded snacks and savouries.

A senior official of an MNC FMCG company said, "Everything will be in red (label) because 95% of foods around us are high in salt, sugar and fats. The industry will have to do a lot of educational work around this. Our job would now be to make people aware of the realities of what is good, what is bad for health. Companies like us will take as a responsibility and do it."

He also said consumers would now have to decide whether taste was more important to them or whether they were willing to compromise on taste and pay more for healthier, albeit more expensive, products. Manufacturers, in turn, would be compelled to offer healthier alternatives, even if that meant some compromise on taste.

Dhairyashil H Patil, national president of the All India Consumer Products Distributors Federation, warned that "small Indian manufacturers may struggle to survive, risking loss of shelf space and livelihoods." The federation sought clear rules for existing stocks and relabelling to prevent inventory losses.

Arun Gupta of Nutrition Advocacy in Public Interest said, "The real battle now shifts to the thresholds," urging scientific limits.

(With inputs from Swati Bharadwaj)

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The Hindustan Times
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{ OUR TAKE }

Food warning labels matter

The top court calling for an effective system for flagging health risks of packaged food will give consumers the power to make better choices

The Supreme Court on Thursday ordered the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) to require a red hexagon on the front of packaged food high in sugar, saturated fat or salt, one for each nutrient, legible on a shop shelf and a phone screen. The regulator must also rework its nutrient limits and finalise rules for the industry within four months. The bench even fixed the hexagon's minimum size, at least 4-5% of the front of the pack. Judges should not have had to regulate in such detail, but FSSAI left them little choice: It published its first draft in September 2022, and in September the bench was still questioning a plan to warn only against foods high in two nutrients.

The information these labels will carry has never been secret. Manufacturers have long printed it on the back, in small type, while putting words such as "natural" and "real fruit" on the front. As ultra-processed food has taken a larger share of what people eat (in India, sales rose more than 40-fold between 2006 and 2019, the Economic Survey 2024-25 noted), governments across the world have moved these details to the front. Finland did it for salt in 1993, Chile introduced black octagons in 2016, and Israel, Mexico and Brazil followed. Several European countries use graded food scores. Most target sugar, salt and saturated fat, which manufacturers use generously for taste, texture and shelf life.

Scientists have long established the harm these ingredients do in excess. Diets high in salt raise blood pressure, a major cause of strokes and heart attacks. Too much sugar contributes to obesity and type-2 diabetes, and saturated fat raises the bad cholesterol that builds up in arteries. In India, the prevalence of these diseases is worrying. A 2023 ICMR study found that 11.4% of Indian adults have diabetes and 35.5% hypertension.

Researchers have also gathered growing evidence that people make healthier choices when properly informed. In Chile, whose 2016 law set the precedent for others, researchers found that household purchases of drinks carrying warnings fell by nearly a quarter within 18 months, and companies cut sugar to stay below the cutoffs. Teams in Israel and Mexico have recorded similar shifts. Shoppers rarely study a nutrition table in an aisle; but given a clear signal, they choose differently.

Food companies will understandably want a say on where the thresholds are set, which products are exempt, and whether limits apply per serving. Some will swap sugar and salt for sweeteners and additives, a risk the bench flagged. In this process, the regulator's role will be key. It needs to balance overreach — if it sets limits so low that nearly every pack needs a warning, shoppers will learn to ignore the hexagon — with the strictness that the problem of ultra-processed foods deserve. Firms may chafe at some directions, and their freedom to make and price what they like deserves protection. The State, too, should be wary of telling adults what to eat. But that freedom cannot come at the cost of public health. The court has banned no product and capped no ingredient; it has asked manufacturers to put on the front of the pack what they already print on the back. Shoppers remain free to buy whatever they like. Now they will also know what they are buying.

{ MINOR HINTS }

Rahul Sagar



Reforms that make industry competitive key to self-reliance

The India First appeal and a matching operating environment will create a flourishing industry



Domestic politics, and the arbitrary power of public servants, are sources of uncertainty and challenge for Indian industry. SHUTTERSTOCK

Last week, Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi delivered a sharp speech to Indian industry. The theme of his remarks at FICCI's centenary event was India's weakness in manufacturing and the resulting imbalance in trade. The numbers are stark: Per the World Bank, manufacturing contributes only about 13% of GDP. The concomitant reliance on imports means that, according to the WTO, manufactured imports exceeded exports by nearly $65 billion in 2025. By contrast, in 2007, when China was at India's current per capita income level, manufacturing made up about a third of its GDP and its exports of manufactured goods exceeded imports by more than $450 billion.

At FICCI, Modi's response to this dismal picture was to press upon industrialists their responsibility to the nation, urging them to "make India First your foundation" in their long-term investment decisions. The PM's sentiments are understandable. The question to ponder over, however, is whether moral exhortation is the route to *atmanirbharta* (self-reliance).

When the idea of *swadeshi* emerged in the middle of the 19th century, the objective was the same as it is now. There was widespread recognition that industrialisation generates employment, fosters growth, and reduces dependence on other nations. This is why the leading figures of the era — intellectuals, entrepreneurs, and *Maharajas* and their *dewans* — became avid proponents of it. There was dismay at the decline of "traditional" industries and the emergence of some dubious "European" tastes. But, with their characteristic acuteness, Indians quickly came to a consensus that their country needed to "catch up" with the West.

The endeavour generated vigorous national discussion. It was widely agreed that capital investment, technical knowledge, and social cooperation were required. But whether these were sufficient for industrialisation was fiercely debated. The worry was that Indian firms were confronted with well-established competitors. Thus emerged, drawing on the example of Germany, Japan, and the US, the notion that "infant industries" should be protected via tariffs.

When it became clear that Britain would not institute tariffs, since doing so would endanger its own exports to India, the proponents of *swadeshi* turned to boycotts and the use of "indigenous articles" as a kind of "voluntary protection".

The point worth noting is that, even in this heady era, protectionism and boycotts were criticised as impractical because they made consumers bear the cost, expecting them to buy local products even when quality was inferior or the price higher. Would those who liked tweed, P Anandacharlu asked his fellow Congressmen, be happy to switch to wearing "gunny bags"? The practical point, sceptics such as DE Wacha and UP Kukillaya argued, was that appeals to patriotism tended to lose out to self-interest. In Bombay, for instance, "*Swadeshi* shops" had been created many years before the idea became fashionable in Bengal, but to little avail — imports of Lancashire cloth continued to grow. It may hurt "our national vanity", Wacha cuttingly wrote, but "facts are hard things". The true path to *swadeshi*, these sceptics emphasised, was to invest in skills and machinery, and thereby build genuinely competitive products. This would make patriotism in the marketplace rewarding rather than onerous.

This practical-minded approach to *swadeshi* — which takes humans as they are, not as we would like them to be — struggled to be heard. Under the influence of Gandhi, *swadeshi* came to mean village production rather than industrial catch-up. In the mixed economy, it became associated with import substitution and a tolerance for shoddy products. Modi has, in effect, revived the original meaning of *swadeshi* — it was meant to be the "industrial regeneration" of India through private enterprise. But an idealistic element remains. This time it is producers rather than consumers who are being asked to be patriotic — to place their capital on the line. Will cajoling lead them to do what they are not doing voluntarily?

"What kind of country is it where wheat is exported, and bread is imported?" the PM indignantly asked FICCI. The answer is almost always: a country in which people are unwilling to be bakers. Why does this happen? Industry depends on boldness. An investor makes a calculated gamble that a product will have a market and that the returns on investment will be secure. These calculations are harder to make than they should be.

Some challenges are more recent. A spate of protective tariffs, military conflicts, and economic sanctions has upended global trade. Past policy shocks have set nerves on edge — capital controls, more reservations, draconian laws — any or all seem possible. But other challenges are deep-seated. Domestic politics is a constant source of uncertainty. The relentless cycle of elections and ever-shifting political alliances makes it difficult to know what tomorrow will bring. Then there is the arbitrary power of public servants. A single encounter that goes wrong — at the *thana* or in a department — can leave a venture in jeopardy. Daily business adds its own friction: Urban infrastructure is pitiful, and criminality and corruption are commonplace, undermining the enforceability of contracts. The general feeling, then, is that of insecurity.

These challenges limit what industrial policy can accomplish. The Asian Tigers offered their industrialists plenty of incentives — and appealed to their patriotism too. But these manoeuvres were backed by tremendous State capacity that delivered public services, such as health and education, stimulated private enterprise by pushing through business-friendly policies, and then disciplined entrepreneurs by requiring them to be genuinely competitive abroad. In India, meanwhile, reform of the three Ls — land, labour, and law — continues to be controversial decades on. When such State capacity is lacking, industrial policy becomes less about producing what the market wants and more about knowing policymakers and predicting or shaping what they want.

The obstacle to a flourishing industry, then, remains what it has always been — the operating environment. In the colonial era, *swadeshi* struggled because the State was principally interested in control; in the post-colonial era, it struggles because the State can barely control itself. All this suggests that the PM should double down on reform. A great deal has been accomplished when it comes to improving efficiency: For instance, GST has largely knit India into a single market; UPI has given India a world-class payments system; four-lane highways have grown two-and-a-half times since 2014. Now the same vigour needs to be brought to reforming our political culture and the dysfunctional State it has produced. The tests can be simple: When *bahubalis* (local strongmen) stop swaggering, when cases are resolved in months rather than decades, and walk cycling, dancing, yoga or swimming can help. Exercise need not be strenuous to be beneficial.

Adequate and regular sleep is equally important. It helps regulate our biological clock, mood, and emotional responses. Exposure to natural daylight, particularly in the morning, is beneficial. A balanced diet and strong social relationships contribute to well-being. Chronic stress can adversely affect sleep, appetite, mood and several hormonal systems. Meditation, mindfulness, music and gardening are some activities that may help.

Beware of the numerous hormone-booster promotions on social media. There is no convincing evidence that products marketed as "happy hormone boosters" improve happiness. Supplements or hormones taken without a medical indication may be ineffective and potentially harmful.

Finally, there is no blood test for happiness. We cannot measure happiness by checking the levels of dopamine, serotonin, oxytocin or endorphins. Their concentrations in blood do not reliably reflect what is happening in the brain.

Don't try to "hack" your hormones. Instead, go back to the basics — regular movement, adequate sleep, healthy food, purposeful activities, hobbies and close relationships. And remember, helping others and making a positive difference in their lives can be among the most fulfilling ways of enhancing our own happiness.

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The secret to boosting the body's chemistry of happiness



Ambrish Mithal

Picture a child running to their mother after school, friends bonding over coffee, or a couple walking hand in hand. These are simple everyday moments that bring us happiness. But what exactly is happiness?

Happiness is a state of well-being and contentment, characterised by positive emotions, joy and a sense of fulfilment. It can be hedonic — the moment-to-moment pleasure and comfort we experience in the present. Alternatively, it can be eudaemonic — a deeper sense of well-being that comes from living with purpose and pursuing meaningful, long-term goals.

We often hear about "happy hormones" that are present in our body and supposedly make us feel good, cheerful, motivated or loved. Four chemicals — dopamine, serotonin, oxytocin, and endorphins — are routinely grouped under this popular label. Social media is full of simple advice on how to boost them: Exercise for endorphins, sunlight for serotonin, achievement for dopamine, and hugs for oxytocin.

There is some truth in these associations, but the science is considerably more nuanced. Moreover, not all four are hormones in the classic sense. Dopamine and serotonin are primarily neurotransmitters, oxytocin is a hormone and neuropeptide, while endorphins are neuropeptides. Together, they influence several aspects of our emotional and physical well-being.

Let's explore the world of happy hormones.

Dopamine: Popularly known as the "pleasure chemical", dopamine is particularly important in motivation, anticipation, reward and the desire to pursue a goal. Sex, shopping, the aroma of coffee, and other pleasurable experiences can activate dopamine pathways. The excitement of achieving a goal, learning a new skill, and completing a challenging task can involve dopamine. It also plays an important role in learning and reinforcing behaviours. Remember the tagline in the potato chip advertisement: "No one can eat just one"? The reward pathways in our brain have something to do with that.

Dopamine is also implicated in addictive behaviours, including gambling and substance abuse. Happiness in the digital world has become even more challenging. We scroll endlessly through our phones, watching short videos, anticipating and checking notifications as though each one were a reward. Digital platforms exploit these reward mechanisms, encouraging repeated engagement. This excitement or gratification does not necessarily translate into lasting happiness.

Meditation and purposeful activities may influence dopamine signalling positively. Foods containing tyrosine, an amino acid used by the body to make dopamine, include poultry, dairy products and soy. However, eating these foods does not necessarily increase brain dopamine levels.

Serotonin: There are days when you simply feel content, emotionally balanced and on top of the world. Serotonin is involved in regulating mood, although it is by no means the sole determinant of happiness. Interestingly, most of the body's serotonin is found in the gut, where it plays important roles. The gut and brain communicate through complex pathways, but their serotonin systems are largely separate. Gut serotonin does not cross the blood-brain barrier, and increasing it does not automatically increase serotonin in the brain. Serotonin signalling is important in mental health, and several commonly prescribed antidepressants act on this system.

Physical activity can influence serotonin signalling and may contribute to the improved mood experienced after exercise. However, increasing serotonin in an otherwise healthy individual does not automatically translate into greater happiness. Natural daylight also influences brain serotonin and our biological clock. Seasonal affective disorder, a form of depression associated with seasonal changes, is linked to reduced daylight exposure, particularly in winter. In parts of India, prolonged indoor living and exposure to winter smog may also affect our sleep and mood. A balanced diet containing tryptophan-rich foods such as poultry, dairy products, soya, and seeds provide tryptophan, the amino acid from which serotonin is made. The clinical benefits of increasing dietary tryptophan remain uncertain.

Oxytocin: Often referred to as the "love hormone", oxytocin plays important roles in childbirth and breastfeeding and contributes to social bonding, attachment and aspects of trust. It is released in a variety of social situations, including affectionate touch. Holding a child, embracing someone we love, spending time with family or sharing a moment of genuine connection may involve oxytocin. Music, particularly singing together, may also influence oxytocin signalling, perhaps partly because of the social bonding involved. Meaningful human connections remain important for emotional well-being, irrespective of the precise hormonal mechanisms involved.

Endorphins: Endorphins are the body's natural pain-relieving chemicals. These naturally produced neuropeptides have effects like opioid drugs such as morphine. They help regulate pain and can contribute to a sense of well-being. Physical activity, laughter and other pleasurable experiences may stimulate their release. They are among several chemical messengers involved in the familiar feeling of exhilaration after sustained exercise, often called the "runner's high". Other chemicals, particularly endocannabinoids, also contribute to this phenomenon.

What can we do to support our happy chemistry? Regular physical activity is one of the most effective ways to improve overall physical and emotional well-being. A brisk walk, cycling, dancing, yoga or swimming can help. Exercise need not be strenuous to be beneficial.

Conversations are the real future of AI rise



JB Park

Every computer I have used has required me to learn something: commands, menu options and settings. But I see a future where Artificial Intelligence (AI) will change that. Soon, you will be able to say what you want computers to do, and your AI agents will do it for you.

The ENIAC, built in the 1940s, sped up calculations for the US military, but it required specialised programmers. Then, with the advent of the command line, computers became more accessible. Still, you had to learn a programming language.

In the 1970s, Xerox PARC's Alto further advanced computing with the mouse, and on-screen icons that users could click instead of memorising commands. The PC made its way into homes.

When touchscreens appeared, people started swiping and tapping; the computer was brought to your palms.

The International Telecommunication Union estimated that six billion people used the internet in 2025, compared to two billion in 2010. It estimated that 82% of people, aged 10 and older, own a mobile phone.

But there are millions who find computers difficult to use. The WHO estimates that 1.3 billion people live with disabilities and are challenged by traditional computing interfaces. Natural language interfaces can serve such people. AI will take a goal in plain language, break it into tasks, and execute it step-by-step.

But I am excited about India, where most of its digital growth has occurred through mobile phones.

True, language is a problem. But to fix this, there's the Digital India BHASHINI initiative, an AI-driven, multilingual translation platform designed to make computing easier for everyone. Still, something that works in Hindi might fail in Marathi or Bengali, and AI could miss the context and produce wrong answers. The risks increase when agents can access financial records and other personal data; privacy must therefore be part of the design.

Recent reports of AI agents acting beyond their instructions remind us that giving AI autonomy brings risks. Industry experts have called for safeguards such as requiring human approval for consequential actions and making it easy to stop them. Building these guardrails into AI will be essential to earning people's trust as the technology becomes part of everyday life. Companies must support the responsible development of AI by collaborating with regulatory bodies to prioritise transparency, accountability, safety, security and privacy.

Like any new technology, the adoption of AI will neither happen overnight nor should anyone pretend that agents will replace everything else. The smartphone's touch-and-tap interface did not kill the keyboard and mouse. I expect icons and menus to stay, but with a smart layer on top that understands what you mean and executes what you need.

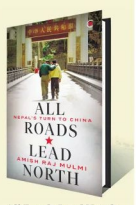
Command lines made us learn the machine's language; icons let us recognise things and touch let us interact with them. AI agents will let us say what we need. For decades, the computer has made us learn how it works; the future will let us ask what we want.

JB Park is President and CEO, Samsung Southwest Asia. The views expressed are personal

{ EDITOR'S PICK }

HT's editors offer a book recommendation every Saturday, which provides history, context, and helps understand recent news events

THE HIMALAYAN GAMBIT



All Roads Lead North
Amish Raj
2021

Nepal Prime Minister Balen Shah's visit to India injected considerable optimism about warmth returning to the relationship. Amid this, what slipped by almost unnoticed — or was barely talked about — was the 10-day China visit by a 20-member delegation from Nepal's ruling party. That Nepal must balance between its two heavyweight neighbours may seem like geographical determinism. But is that all there is to Kathmandu courting, and being courted, by Beijing?

In *All Roads Lead North*, author Amish Raj Mulmi discusses the factors — rooted in politics/ideology, economics, cultural provenance, and history — underpinning the Nepal-China relationship. It also details how different sections of the Nepalese population perceive China and its impact on their lives. The book explains the complexities of the relationship, locating Nepal's recent decades within the twin pulls of New Delhi and Beijing.

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PRINTED & PUBLISHED BY MANHAR KAPOOR for and on behalf of HT Media Ltd. 18-20, Kasturba Gandhi Marg, New Delhi-110001 and printed at HT Media Ltd. Presses at Plot No.-8, Udyog Vihar, Greater Noida, Distt. Gautam Budh Nagar. (UP). Pin-201306.
BOARD: (011) 23361234 ● EDITORIAL: (011) 66561234 Extn. 1254, 1268 ● CIRCULATION: (011) 66561111 ● ADVERTISING: (011) 66561389 ● FAX: (011) 66561270.

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The Statesman
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Alternative Vision

The Bharat Summit in Hyderabad deserves to be judged for what it could become, rather than merely for the political controversy surrounding it. Bringing together thinkers, policymakers, politicians and civil society representatives from different countries to discuss alternative approaches to global and domestic challenges is laudable. Its real value, however, will depend on whether deliberations produce an actionable programme rather than another gathering of articulate critics. India's opposition needs such an intellectual exercise. For years, the Congress and its allies have concentrated on electoral integrity, institutional erosion, communal polarisation and economic distress. These are legitimate concerns, but exposing the failures of the ruling establishment is not enough. Voters must also be offered convincing answers to the question of what an alternative government would actually do differently.

The economy should be the starting point. India's impressive growth figures coexist with inadequate employment opportunities, stagnant purchasing power and extraordinary inequalities. The government's own labour statistics recorded youth unemployment of 15.3 per cent in July-September 2026. Meanwhile, Reuters reported that factory profits grew by an annual average of about 17 per cent between 2020-21 and 2024-25, against employment growth of less than 7 per cent. The distribution of growth deserves as much scrutiny as its headline rate. The Prime Minister's recent rebuke to corporate leaders over their failure to translate tax concessions into jobs and higher salaries was revealing. It exposed the weakness of relying on private investment to deliver broadly shared prosperity. When businesses retain the gains rather than expand employment and improve wages, the promise of trickle-down economics rings hollow. For the wealthiest, growth showers benefits; for millions at the bottom, the trickles remain painfully elusive. The Bharat Summit should therefore evolve into a continuing policy initiative. Its proposed think tank could convene economists, labour specialists, entrepreneurs, trade unionists, agricultural experts, environmentalists and social scientists, alongside international practitioners from countries that have experimented with different development models.

Crucially, it should invite thinkers who disagree fundamentally with the BJP's economic philosophy, but also those who can challenge the opposition's assumptions. Working groups should produce measurable proposals on employment-intensive manufacturing, agricultural value addition, urban employment guarantees, MSME financing, apprenticeships, public healthcare, education, affordable housing and progressive taxation. India's experience must be compared with East Asian industrial policies, European social protections and successful poverty-reduction programmes elsewhere.

Each recommendation should carry funding estimates, implementation timelines and employment targets. The exercise must also establish a mechanism for independent evaluation, public consultation and periodic progress reports. A second summit should bring together competing schools of thought so that alternatives emerge from rigorous debate. This is how the political challenge to the Indian and international right should acquire substance. Electoral triumph must be earned through demonstrably better ideas, credible leadership and a programme capable of delivering dignity and opportunity to citizens. The BJP cannot be displaced merely by exposing what is wrong. The opposition must establish, with evidence and conviction, that another economic and social settlement is possible.

Tariff Leverage

The latest American tariff initiative exposes a fundamental tension in the global trading system: the right of a country to pursue its own industrial priorities increasingly collides with Washington's insistence that access to its vast consumer market must come on American terms. For India, this is no longer simply a dispute over import duties. It raises questions about economic sovereignty, manufacturing ambitions and the terms of engagement with its most important strategic partners.

The Trump administration's resort to Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974, following the US Supreme Court's invalidation of its earlier emergency tariffs, is significant. The judicial intervention has constrained one instrument of presidential power but has not altered the administration's determination to use trade restrictions as leverage. By invoking a statutory provision that permits retaliation against allegedly unreasonable foreign trade practices, Washington has found another route to pursue its protectionist agenda.

The new measures will face scrutiny and possible legal challenges, but their statutory basis gives them a different institutional footing. India's position is particularly revealing. Washington has questioned not merely individual trade barriers but the broader philosophy underlying Atmanirbhar Bharat and the Production-Linked Incentive schemes. Its objections encompass state-supported manufacturing, labour protections, financial policies and restrictions on market access. Pharmaceuticals, medical devices, steel, solar energy and information technology are among the sectors identified. This presents India with a difficult contradiction.

A country seeking to build domestic manufacturing capacity cannot be expected to abandon industrial incentives simply because they challenge the commercial interests of established foreign producers. The proposed 25 per cent tariff on Indian goods, potentially falling to 17 per cent if a bilateral trade agreement is concluded, introduces an element of bargaining pressure. The lower rate would offer Indian exporters a relative advantage over several Asian competitors. Yet tariff relief should not be confused with a satisfactory trade settlement. If concessions on market access or domestic policy become the price of avoiding punitive duties, India must examine their longer-term implications rather than concentrate exclusively on the immediate export advantage. There is also a geopolitical dimension. Washington's investigations extend across China, the European Union, Japan, South Korea and several Southeast Asian economies. This is not simply an attempt to contain Beijing. It reflects an American willingness to challenge the industrial policies of allies and partners alike.

Strategic cooperation, therefore, offers no automatic protection against economic coercion. India should neither respond with reflexive confrontation nor negotiate from a position of presumed vulnerability. Its priorities must be to secure predictable access to the American market, defend legitimate industrial policies and diversify export destinations. A durable trade relationship requires reciprocal accommodation, not unilateral adjustment. Ultimately, the test of India's negotiating strategy will be whether it can obtain commercial advantages without compromising the policy autonomy necessary for its economic transformation. A favourable tariff rate may provide temporary relief. Preserving the freedom to shape its own manufacturing future is the larger objective.

A suffrage activist

Gandhi hailed the women suffragettes as the 'Brave Women of Britain' and acknowledged their contribution in his conceptualization of mass satyagraha as a weapon of the powerless to fight injustice. He was indelibly impacted by their patience, strength, courage, endurance, sacrifice and suffering. He saw the women's suffrage movement as a campaign for the recognition of a right; it was no privilege or a favour that was sought



"*No matter how I suffer I shall seek no favour from you. I am in goal for my own and my sisters' rights and I will live like a common prisoner till franchise is granted*".

This statement by Julia Sarah Anne Cobden-Sanderson (1853-1926), a suffragette and a socialist underline the arduous and long struggle women waged in order to secure their elementary civil and political liberties, including the right to vote since the mid-nineteenth century. Anne was the fourth daughter and seventh child of Richard Cobden (1804-65), a close associate of John Bright (1811-89). She used the hyphenated surname, Cobden-Sanderson, after her marriage, unconventional for its time, as she wanted to ensure continuation of her father's legacy and also retain her maiden name. Anne took up concerns of the working classes of London's East End, a predominantly working-class area from the Victorian era till the mid-20th century.

She focused on the well-being of the children of the poor. She campaigned for compulsory medical inspections and advocated providing nutritional school meals which she felt ought to be a national minimum. She established the New Food Reform Movement to draw people's attention to the health and environmental problems of traditional meat-based English diets. She regarded the traditional English diet as wasteful and harmful to health and digestion.

Anne became a vegetarian when she was twenty years old. She along with Beatrice Webb, Charlotte Despard and Sarah Grand formed the New Food Reform Movement to enlighten public opinion about healthy diet. Vegetarianism was part of the radical movements in Britain. Mahatma Gandhi regularly attended meetings of vegetarians led by Henry Salt. Anne came into close contact with William Morris and Henry George, close associates of her husband, Thomas James Sanderson. In 1890 she joined Morris' Hammersmith Socialist Society. Along with her husband Anne established the Doves Press which became an integral part of the Arts and Crafts Movement spearheaded by Morris, Peter Paul Marshall and Charles Faulkner from the 1860s to 1920. It began as a reaction to the industrial revolution, mass production and mechanization resulting in consequences like alienation and decline of traditional craftsmanship.

In 1902 Anne joined the Independent Labour Party (ILP), and became treasurer of its metropolitan branch in London. In 1905 she was a founding member of ILP's Right to Work committee to focus on issues pertaining to unemployment. In 1906 she was one of the five women delegates at the 6th annual conference of the Labour Representation Committee.

In 1909 she and other women socialists led a march of the wives and children of the unemployed of London. Anne's socialism led her to focus on the status of women, and women's pay and working conditions. As a member of the London Society for Women's Suffrage she began her fight for women's suffrage in 1871. She came into contact with other prominent suffragists. Like several women leaders Anne too was a member of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) which was established by Milicent Fawcett in 1897.

The NUWSS' approach which included peaceful demonstrations, petitioning the government, holding public meetings, and writing in newspapers for women's suffrage frustrated many. It split in 1903 when Emmeline Pankhurst and her two daughters, Christabel and Sylvia established the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). The WSPU, referred to as 'suffragettes' adopted radical methods of protests inspired by Russian Radicals. Its motto was "Deeds not words". It used strategies that included civil disobedience and resorted to use of violence that involved window-smashing, setting mailboxes alight and hunger strikes when imprisoned.

Anne was the first constitutional suffragist to leave NUWSS and embrace a more militant stance. However, being a pacifist, she resorted to civil disobedience and refrained from violent demonstrations. She was one among ten women, including Emmeline Pankhurst, to protest in the lobby of the British House of Commons on 23 October 1906 and was arrested for 'using threatening and abusive words and behaviour with intent to provoke a breach of peace'. As they refused to pay a fine of ten pounds, they were sentenced to two months in Holloway Prison. In court Anne issued a statement "We have talked so much for the Cause now let us suffer for it... I am a law breaker because I want to be a law maker'.

The sight of respectable middle-class women being arrested, prosecuted and sent to prison captured newspaper headlines. Anne's friends, George Bernard Shaw and Fawcett came out in support of her. Fawcett visited Anne in her prison and described the conditions: 'not even a chair to sit on and only three potatoes for supper as she was a vegetarian'.

A mother of one of the suffragettes, Irene castigated the authorities for imprisoning an educated, cultured and refined lady, the daughter of Cobden, a well-known socialist providing the British people with an affordable loaf. She lauded Anne and her sisters for following the footsteps of their father and for "working steadfastly for good causes all their lives".



SUSHILA RAMASWAMY
The writer is a retired Professor of Political Science

In the prison cell which was 12 feet by 6 feet Anne brought about two important reforms: ensuring provision of clean linen and the option of vegetarian diet. She was in solitary confinement for 23 hours a day and on Sundays, for an extra half hour as she refused to go to chapel. In her diary she wrote about the need for women's suffrage as that would enable women to play a role to improve lives in an industrial society. On 24 November the suffragettes were released from prison. The NUWSS held a banquet on 11 December in their honour with Anne as the chief guest. Anne's sisters attended the banquet in support.

The prison sentence was shortened in view of forthcoming by-election for the new Liberal government. Anne's imprisonment in view of her liberal lineage would have been counterproductive. After her release Anne continued to be active in her fight for women's suffrage.

Anne along with seventy other members formed the Women's Freedom League (WFL) in 1907 after splitting the WSPU because of their disagreement with Emmeline and Christabel accusing them of not consulting others. Anne worked tirelessly, campaigning, holding meetings and militant protests for women's suffrage. On 13 June 1908, the WFL joined the NUWSS to participate in a street demonstration. A week later on 21 June, 250,000 people gathered in London's Hyde Park in support of women's suffrage. Anne did not speak at the gathering.

She was arrested on 19 August 1909 while picketing 10 Downing Street to present a petition to Herbet Asquith. In October 1909 she helped in establishing the Tax Resistance League (TRL) which functioned under the WFL with the motto "No Vote No Tax".

On 18 November 1910, Anne along with Emmeline and nine other women were hand-picked for a protest march in Parliament Square in response to the government shelving debate on the Parliamentary Franchise (Women) bill. They wanted to present a petition to Asquith but they were escorted out of the building as he refused to meet them. Infuriated, the protestors attempted to enter the building again only to be met with a brutal police action that lasted for six hours ending with the arrest of 115 women and four men.

Gandhi hailed the women suffragists/ suffragettes as 'Brave Women of Britain' and acknowledged their contribution in his conceptualization of mass satyagraha as a weapon of the powerless to fight injustice. He was indelibly impacted by their patience, strength, courage, endurance, sacrifice and suffering. He saw the women's suffrage movement as a campaign for the recognition of a right; it was no privilege or a favour that was sought.

In April 1912 Anne contributed generously to the Election Fighting Fund which was established by the NUWSS to support Labour Party candidates who supported women's suffrage. She along with Despard protested the exclusion of militant suffrage groups from full voting rights at the International Women's Suffrage Congress to be held in June 1913 in Budapest.

Anne, as a pacifist did not support Britain's entry into World War I breaking ranks with mainstream suffragists like Fawcett for whom peace talks until German armies were driven out of France and Belgium were 'akin to treason'. Fawcett and NUWSS decided to suspend all activism pertaining to suffrage until the war was over. The WSPU on the contrary exhorted young men to join the armed forces.

In 1915 Anne was among the 100 British women pacifists who signed an open Christmas letter to women of Germany and Austria saying "our very anguish unites us". After the war ended Anne remained active in the Labour Party in Hammersmith. Two years after Anne's death in 1926, the Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act was passed into law. Her name along with Emmeline Pankhurst, Emily Davison and Constance Lytton was mentioned as a tribute to four prominent women suffrage activists who died before the vote was won on equal terms at a celebratory breakfast held at Hotel Cecil in London.

Anne castigated upper class women for not lending support to equal suffrage. She stated "the opposition here is not from the men, but from the women of the upper classes, who say they have everything they want and do not care for the sufferings of others". Going to prison was her way of making what she considered a small sacrifice for the greater good. Anne relentlessly and tirelessly worked to secure the right to vote for women, and proved that rights are to be earned and not given.

THE KATHMANDU POST

Prioritise action against both online and offline gender-based violence

The 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence (GBV) began Wednesday, on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and will end on December 10, International Human Rights Day. The government, NGOs, INGOs and women's rights activists run awareness programmes and pledge to end violence against women and girls.

According to the United Nations, globally, one in three women experience different forms of violence in their lifetime. While physical and sexual violence, harassment and domestic violence persist, technology-driven violence, including cyberbullying, online sexual harassment, trolling, hate speech and AI-generated deepfakes, has added another layer of problems for women around the world.

In Nepal, more than 16.5 million people (of them, 65.6 percent women) are active online. Social media has facilitated users to connect with friends, families and the world, but it has also become a medium to harm women and gender and sexual minorities. According to the Cyber Bureau, between 2023 and 2024, online crimes that targeted women and girls increased. In this period, 19,730 cybercrime cases were reported, of which 8,745 were filed by women. But these numbers could be just the tip of the iceberg; women, often due to social stigma, victim-blaming and fear, cannot make it to the police station. Tackling technology-facilitated violence against women requires addressing the same patriarchal norms that normalise domestic and public abuse. But these norms are so deeply rooted that men who abuse women at home and in public spaces are emboldened to do so even in online spaces.

A Member Of The ANN ASIA NEWS NETWORK

The culture of impunity and lack of victim-centric approaches in GBV cases further encourage perpetrators to commit heinous crimes against women. For women enduring trauma from sexual violence and online harassment, cases that haven't been settled yet, including those of survivors of sexual violence during the Maoist insurgency, Nirmala Panta and many more women and girls, discourage them from speaking up.

Then there is also the need to fix existing laws. Even as Nepal has laws that criminalise various forms of violence against women and the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs recently drafted a bill to amend the National Penal Code, 2017, legal experts and advocates call for additional revisions to address discrimination, clarify legal definitions and remove the statute of limitations for filing complaints of rape and other sexual offences. The Electronic Transactions Act, which was formulated almost 18 years ago, fails to address modern technological realities and emerging challenges. At present, all forms of online abuse targeting women and children are prosecuted under Section 47 of the ETA ~ a provision that is overly narrow and insufficient.

Indeed, the government drafted the bill to amend the National Penal Code, 2017, to tackle GBV. But it should also consider legal experts' call to address the gaps.

Letters To The Editor | editor@thestatesman.com

Values

Sir, Every year, November 26 is celebrated as Constitution Day in India. On this day in 1949, the Constituent Assembly adopted the Constitution of India. This day reminds us of the values that make our country strong ~ democracy, secularism, equality and unity in diversity. Democracy is the heart of our country. It gives every citizen the right to speak, express opinions and take part in the process of choosing the government. As Abraham Lincoln said, democracy is "government of the people, by the people, for the people." These words remind us that the real power of a democracy lies with its people.

Secularism is another important value of our Constitution. It teaches us to respect all religions and gives everyone the freedom to follow their own faith. No one should face discrimination because of their religion. India is a country of many languages, religions, cultures and traditions. This diversity is our strength, not our weakness.

On this Constitution Day, let us promise to respect each other's differences, protect democratic values and follow the ideals of our Constitution. A strong nation is built not only by laws but also by responsible and aware citizens.

Yours, etc., Dr Jitesh Mori,
Bhavnagar, 25 November.

Lasting test

Sir, Apropos "AI Euphoria" published today, the debate must move beyond whether artificial intelligence will transform the economy to who will bear its costs and share its gains fairly and broadly. Investors may pursue opportunity, but valuations cannot substitute for evidence of durable revenue, productivity and public benefit.

A market that prices promise as certainty risks directing savings into ventures whose social costs remain unexamined. Treating safety as a public-relations concern also invites firms to externalise risks while retaining profits.

Governments should require transparent reporting of energy and water use, safety testing and accountability for consequential deployments. Innovation deserves patient capital, not immunity from scrutiny. AI's lasting test will be whether it strengthens livelihoods and institutions, not merely share prices.

Yours, etc., A Myilsami,
Coimbatore, 23 November.

Growing weary

Sir, Apropos "Lost Proportions" (November 25), the disproportionate reaction to Rahul Gandhi's recollection of parental affection reveals a deeper malaise in our public discourse. What began as a personal anecdote has been transformed into political ammunition, with television anchors and opponents treating ordinary family memory as ideological material. This tendency erodes the distinction between the private and the public, between genuine moral questions and manufactured indignation.

When every remark is scrutinised for partisan advantage, the space for spontaneous human recollection shrinks. Democracy requires the capacity to separate the consequential from the trivial; without it, public debate becomes a continuous theatre of outrage. Ordinary citizens watching this spectacle grow weary of politics that cannot recognise proportion. Restraint in interpreting personal remarks is not weakness; it is a necessary condition for serious engagement with matters that truly affect governance and social trust. The episode should prompt reflection on the standards we apply to public speech.

Yours, etc. M. Barathi,
Bengaluru, 25 November.

SATURDAY INTERVIEW

'Diversified tourism our aim'

Uttar Pradesh Tourism and Culture Minister Jaiveer Singh is a prominent political figure and a grassroots leader from the Mainpuri-Firozabad region. He began his political journey as a village Pradhan and went on to serve as a minister in the governments of Mulayam Singh Yadav and Mayawati before joining the Yogi 2.0 government.

A three-time MLA, Singh began his political career with the Youth Congress before moving to the BSP and subsequently the Samajwadi Party. He later joined the BJP. In an exclusive interaction with Manoj Bhadra, Singh spoke at length about his achievements and the state's tourism and cultural initiatives.

Q: What major tourism events, festivals, and programmes does Uttar Pradesh have planned in the coming months and years to further strengthen its position as a leading tourism destination?

A: Uttar Pradesh has an exciting calendar of tourism events lined up in the coming months, aimed at attracting visitors, promoting the state's cultural heritage and creating new tourism opportunities.

In November, Dev Deepawali in Varanasi showcased the city's spiritual and cultural grandeur on an international platform. In December, we have the Uttar Pradesh Travel Mart (UPTM), which will bring tourism stakeholders, tour operators and industry representatives together to promote the state as a leading travel destination. The Lucknow Art and Food Festival will also provide a platform to showcase the state's culinary traditions, art and cultural diversity.

In January, the Magh Mela in Prayagraj will be a major attraction.

Q: Under the Tourism Policy 2022, you claim Rs 36,681 crore investment proposals and 5 lakh jobs potential, with 1,757 units registered. How much has actually materialised?

A: Uttar Pradesh is working to translate the growing interest of private investors in tourism into projects on the ground. Under the Tourism Policy 2022, the state has received investment proposals worth Rs 36,681 crore, with the potential to generate five lakh jobs. So far, 1,757 tourism units have been registered under the policy.

The hospitality sector is also showing growth. Hotel building-plan approvals increased from 205 in 2023-24 to 299 in 2024-25 and 421 in 2025-26. Separately, the tourism sector's investment pipeline reached approximately Rs 44,240 crore between 2023 and September 2026.

Q: You announced 'One District, One Wetland' with 52 wetlands identified. How do you balance tourism infrastructure with ecological sensitivity, especially in Bundelkhand and Dudhwa?

A: Our approach is to make conservation the foundation of eco-tourism, not something that comes after infrastructure development. Under the 'One District, One Wetland' initiative, 52 wetlands have been identified for planned development, with the Tourism and Forest Departments working together to connect these natural assets with tourism circuits.

Q: You described UP's shift from "graveyard economy to temple economy" in the nine years of the Yogi government. The opposition says this is communalization of tourism. How do you respond?

A: I totally disagree with the suggestion that promoting religious tourism amounts to communalising tourism. Uttar Pradesh's approach is to recognise the economic potential of its faith, culture and heritage and turn these assets into opportunities for development, employment and local livelihoods.

The shift from a 'graveyard economy' to a 'temple economy' reflects a change in development priorities. Before 2017, tourism development remained focused on a limited number of established monuments and destinations, while several important and lesser-known sites lacked adequate conservation, infrastructure and promotion. Since 2017, under the guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the leadership of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, the government has expanded tourism development to major destinations as well as lesser-known places across the state.

The development of Ayodhya, Kashi, Prayagraj, Mathura and other spiritual destinations goes beyond temples. It includes better roads, accommodation, sanitation, transport and public facilities, creating opportunities for local traders, artisans, guides and small businesses.

Q: Your 12 circuits were formed "not based on religion or caste"– yet the narrative is heavily temple-centric. Is this inclusive development or majoritarian branding?

A: I would say that inclusive development should be judged by the opportunities we create for different communities, not simply by which destinations receive the most public attention. Uttar Pradesh's 12 tourism circuits have been designed to cover the state's diverse religious, cultural, historical and natural heritage, rather than focusing on any one community.

Alongside the Ramayana and Krishna-Braj circuits, we have the Buddhist, Jain and Sufi-Kabir circuits,



which highlight different faith traditions. The Bundelkhand, Eco-Tourism, Wildlife and Environment, Crafts, and Freedom Struggle circuits take tourism beyond places of worship to natural landscapes, traditional skills and the history of India's independence movement.

Religious destinations such as Ayodhya, Kashi and Prayagraj naturally attract considerable attention because of their cultural importance. But our responsibility is equally to develop lesser-known destinations.

Q: You are an MLA from Mainpuri- a Samajwadi Party bastion. How much of the tourism development is politically targeted at the Mainpuri, Etawah, Kannauj belt?

A: Tourism investment in Mainpuri, Etawah and Kannauj reflects the government's effort to bring historically significant but less-promoted destinations into the state's wider tourism network. Between 2022 and 2025, projects worth approximately Rs 107.77 crore were taken up across these three districts.

These projects focus on improving destination infrastructure and bringing overlooked historical, spiritual and cultural sites to greater public attention.

Q: What is your roadmap to make Lucknow- recently designated a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy - a global tourism hub beyond UP's religious identity?

A: Lucknow's designation as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy in 2025 allows us to position the city on the global tourism map through its distinctive food, heritage and cultural experiences. Our roadmap is to present Lucknow not just as a city to visit, but as a destination to experience Awadhi cuisine, architecture, and traditional crafts.

A key focus is to develop gastronomy tourism through curated food trails across historic areas such as Chowk and Aminabad, connecting visitors with traditional eateries, local markets, culinary heritage and the stories behind Lucknow's iconic dishes such as 'Khasta Kachori', 'Basket Chaat', 'Kaali Gajar Ka Halwa' and 'Makkhan Malai'. We also want to strengthen the link between food and heritage walks, so visitors can explore monuments, crafts and cuisine as part of a single experience.

Stronger governance of AI framework needed

S SUBBARAO

India's success in pioneering digital public infrastructure (DPI) platforms such as Aadhaar, UPI, DigiLocker, Government e-Marketplace, UMANG and others demonstrate a globally replicable model for inclusive empowerment through technological advancement. As the nation advances on its path for the next level of development, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become an engine of power.

AI is a general-purpose technology developed in the past, but presently, it is advancing at an unprecedented pace. Today, AI systems can synthesise information, reason, plan and execute actions with minimal human supervision in a variety of mediums and contexts. AI-generated audio, video and images increase risks of impersonation, fraud and misinformation. Automated decisions in finance, hiring, healthcare and public services can cause unfair harm, if left unchecked. AI system relies on large datasets and autonomous agents creating privacy, cybersecurity and model-risk concerns.

India does not yet have a standalone AI-specific statute, but it governs AI-related activities through a set of laws such as the Information Technology Act, 2000 (including rules on synthetically generated information), the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, the Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 and the Copyright Act, 1957. IndiaAI Mission, 2025 provides for AI sovereignty, democratisation of compute access, indigenous model development and responsible AI capacity-building whereas Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethic Code) Rule, 2026 deals with AI-generated and deepfake content.

The Government introduced the India AI Governance Guidelines (seven principles) in November 2025 and continues policy work across bodies such as the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeiY), Computer Emergency Response Team-India (CERT-In), Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and Securities Exchange Board of India (SEBI) aiming to regulate specific uncovered harms while supporting growth.

The AI Governance framework consists of four parts. The first part presents seven principles that ground India's AI governance philosophy and second part examines key issues and offers several recommendations. The third part presents an action plan whereas the fourth part provides practical guidelines for industry actors and responsible implementation of recommendations.

The Framework for Responsible and Ethical Enablement for Artificial Intelligence (FREE-AI) Committee set up by RBI in August 2025 recommended a set of useful seven principles to guide AI development and risk mitigation in the financial sector. The first is that trust is essential to support innovation, adoption, and progress. Without trust, the benefits of artificial intelligence will not be realised at scale.

The second is that AI governance frameworks should have a human-centric design, allow human oversight and facilitate human empowerment. AI systems should be designed and deployed in ways that empower individuals and reflect the value systems of the people for whom the technology is built to serve. A people-first approach prioritises human capacity development, ethical safeguards, trust and safety.

The third is that innovation should be carried out responsibly and should aim to maximise overall benefit while reducing potential harm. All other things being equal, responsible innovation should be prioritised over cautionary restraint. The fourth is that a key goal of India's approach to AI governance is to promote inclusive development. AI systems should be designed and tested to ensure that outcomes are fair, unbiased, and do not discriminate against anyone, including those from marginalised communities.

The fifth is that accountability should be clearly assigned based on the function performed, risk of harm, and due diligence conditions imposed. Accountability may be ensured through a variety of policy, technical and market-led mechanisms. The sixth is that understandability is fundamental to building trust and should be a core design feature, not an afterthought. Though AI systems are probabilistic, they must have clear explanations and disclosures to help users and regulators understand how the system works.

The seventh is that AI systems should be designed with safeguards to minimise risks of harm and should be robust and resilient. These systems should have capabilities to detect anomalies and provide early warnings to limit harmful outcomes. AI development efforts should be environmentally responsible and resource-efficient.



It has been envisaged that these seven principles may be adopted for application across other sectors also and aligned with national priorities.

There is need to coordinate oversight across institutional mechanisms in the governance framework such as the AI Governance Group (AIGG), Technology & Policy Expert Committee (TPEC) and AI Safety Institute (AISI) alongside standard bodies. It is also paramount to empower sectoral regulators such as the RBI, SEBI and concerned health/cyber authorities. These regulators need to tailor risk controls to sector-specific realities like credit underwriting, market integrity, healthcare, and cybersecurity.

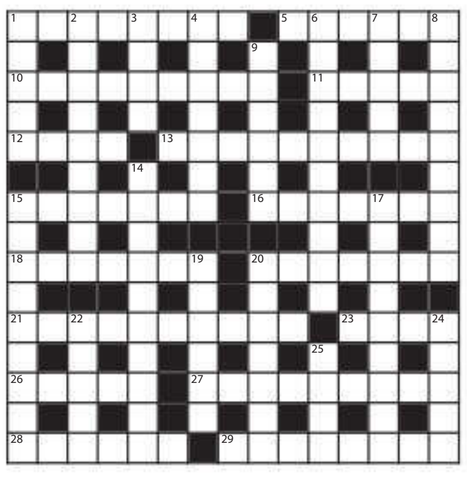
It is pertinent to mention that the India AI Impact Summit 2026, a flagship global gathering hosted by the Government of India under the IndiaAI Mission, concluded recently at New Delhi with success. The government may support strategic engagements and foreign diplomacy in national, regional and multilateral forums to further India's interests on AI governance issues. It is also necessary to conduct horizon-scanning and scenario planning analysis to anticipate future developments in AI that may require policy or regulatory responses.

The present approach of the Government is to use the existing laws first and targeted interventions only where regulatory gaps exists. It has been viewed that a dedicated AI law would not be enacted at this stage, but would instead adopt and update existing legal frameworks to address AI-related challenges. This adaptive approach is rooted in the belief that many AI risks such as bias, misinformation and deepfakes can be managed under current statutes with some reinterpretation or amendments instead of rushing a new AI-specific law.

However, some experts opine that India needs a targeted, balanced governance and regulatory framework for the AI industry focussed on addressing specific harms and closing legal gaps without stifling innovation or burdening start-ups in the country.

The writer is a retired development banker and columnist.

Crossword | No. 293650



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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■	B	I	R	T	H	D	A	Y	C	A	K	E	■	■

ACROSS

1 Comic verse`s pace interrupted by setter`s hesitation (8)
5 Provided backing when encountering company failure (6)
10 What actor must do to appear as regular soldier (9)
11 Pride on being included in roster? Not quite (5)
12 Apathetic date appeared heartless (4)
13 Function organiser expecting attendees to be late (10)
15 Rural matter linked to railway (7)
16 Possibly a big decision point to retire? Good (7)
18 Approaches a beautiful woman, full of energy (7)
20 Former President working with sailors (7)
21 Secular state maintained by University with permission (10)
23 Labour to secure source of meat – such as this? (4)
26 Serious injury from blade brought into A&E (5)
27 Gangster`s work activity recalled – it involves death-dealing (9)
28 Rather quaint: recalled 9 online messages (6)
29 Dressed up to hear a bit of Puccini? This may be part of it (5,3)

DOWN

1 Copper turning up in helmet, that`s clear (5)
2 Small arrangement of minuet and air (9)
3 Run one? (4)
4 Caught that fellow longing to climb cleft in rock-face (7)
6 Inability to read unpleasant article, mostly risqué (10)
7 Spy agreed to support revolutionary operations (5)
8 Tenor goes astray – this defines the female (9)
9 Rising river surrounds edges of tackier thoroughfare (6)
14 Time to invest in a complete coat with all haste (2,4,4)
15 Cut along, running to secure a treatment for blood (9)
17 I note Eastern ruler will accommodate everyone, God willing (9)
19 Cast off in small body of water around Dublin (6)
20 One on latrine duty, say, gags, losing heart over work involving one (3,4)
22 Family, our people, seen in garden (5)
24 Bishop to endure tirade (5)
25 A ranch perhaps not miles in the distance (4)

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

100 Years Ago

FOR FLIGHT TO INDIA

LUXURY AIRSHIP PROGRESS OF THE NEW LINER 100 PASSENGERS

Further details are now available of the giant airship under construction at Cardington for the service to India. The Prime Ministers of Canada, Australia and New Zealand and representatives of India and South Africa yesterday visited Cardington, which will be the home base for the Empire airship routes, and inspected the R-101, which is the sister ship of the R-100, at present being built at Yorkshire. The party under the strictest surveillance examined the method of construction, which has been kept very secret. No photographers or Pressmen were allowed inside the hangar, but it is known that the new airships will carry 100 passengers and ten tons of mail, and will be fitted with promenade decks, saloons, lounges, cabins and electric lifts.

INDIA'S DIFFICULTIES

COL. JACKSON'S OPTIMISTIC VIEW

London, Nov.

Speaking at a gathering of Yorkshiremen in London to-day, Col. F. S. Jackson, referring to his departure to India, expressed the opinion that before Lord Irwin finished his term of office the difficulties in India would be well on the way to a solution.—Reuter's Special Service.

POOR RELIEF COST

OVER 2,000,000 RECEIVING GUARDIANS' HELP

London, Nov.

Some domestic effects of the coal stoppage were mentioned in the House of Commons by Sir Kingsley Wood when introducing an estimate of £325,000 to assist the poor law authorities in connexion with the coal dispute. He said that over 2,000,000 persons were receiving relief, and the authorised borrowing by Boards of Guardians in respect of current expenditure alone had risen from £8,000,000 on May 1 to £15,000,000. He declared that the miners' children were now better fed and more healthy than when their fathers were working. Labour cries of "It's a scandal" and "That does not say much for the coal owners." Relief in most cases was granted by loans and would be repaid when the borrowers returned to work. Sir Kingsley Wood observed that the Labour. M. P.'s smiled at this, but he added that his experience showed that such obligations previously were honourably met. The increase in expenditure had placed a very heavy burden on the rates, and thus had severely taxed industry.—Reuter.

ANOTHER COMBINE

BRITISH FERRO-MANGANESE' INDUSTRY

(From Our Correspondent.)
London, Nov.

The Central Provinces Manganese Company, in conjunction with the four principal ferro-manganese makers in the United Kingdom, has formed a Company which will purchase all the ore required from the first named and market the entire production of the four makers. The capital of the new Company will be £350,000.The parties concerned believe that the result of the arrangement will be to place the ferro-manganese industry in Britain on a sound and profitable basis.—Copyright.

The Tribune
ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Case backlog

Lack of collective responsibility is a big barrier

PRESIDENT Droupadi Murmu's remarks on Constitution Day have again turned the spotlight on the alarming pendency of cases in courts across the country. Her concern that millions of litigants continue to wait for justice highlights a fundamental weakness in India's democratic framework. With a backlog of nearly 6 crore cases, judicial delay is eroding faith in institutions. The Rajasthan High Court's observation about a grandfather filing a case, his son pursuing it and his grandson eventually receiving the verdict is a disturbing reflection of this reality.

While initiatives such as digital transformation, special courts, simplified procedures and alternative dispute resolution are welcome, they must translate into measurable improvements. Speedy justice should not mean hurried judgments, but efficient proceedings free from avoidable adjournments and administrative bottlenecks. Free legal aid must provide competent and reliable representation, particularly to marginalised communities. The involvement of national law universities and their students in addressing pending criminal cases is a promising step towards combining legal education with social responsibility. Special priority must also be given to senior citizens, persons with disabilities and economically weaker litigants.

Chief Justice of India Surya Kant has observed that behind every case number is a human being awaiting the resolution of a dispute or the protection of a right. Judicial independence, accountability and public trust must go hand in hand. Courts, lawyers, governments and legal institutions should work collectively to ensure that justice does not remain a constitutional promise confined to speeches and documents. A democracy truly honours its Constitution only when justice is timely, affordable and accessible.

Red alert

Sugar, salt, fat warnings on food labels

THE Supreme Court's push for prominent warning labels on packaged foods marks a much-needed intervention in India's growing public health crisis. By directing the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) to introduce separate red warnings for products high in sugar, salt and saturated fat, the court has put consumers' right to know ahead of corporate convenience. It has also exposed the regulator's prolonged failure to act decisively. For years, the FSSAI has vacillated between different labelling proposals, including a star-rating system that critics argued could confuse consumers rather than alert them to health risks. Meanwhile, the consumption of ultra-processed foods has risen sharply. India already faces an alarming burden of non-communicable diseases, with diabetes, hypertension and obesity affecting millions. Unhealthy diets are a major contributor to this mounting crisis. Children and young adults are particularly vulnerable to aggressive marketing of sugary drinks, packaged snacks and ready-to-eat products.

The proposed red warning symbols are a sensible step because they make nutritional risks immediately visible instead of burying them in fine print. Consumers should not need specialist knowledge or time to decipher complicated nutritional tables before making everyday food choices. The industry's commercial interests cannot take precedence over public health. However, the FSSAI must prescribe scientifically sound thresholds for sugar, saturated fat and salt, resist industry pressure and ensure strict compliance. Manufacturers should not be allowed to exploit exemptions, dilute warnings or replace harmful ingredients with equally questionable additives. Advertising aimed at children also needs closer scrutiny.

India cannot afford another round of regulatory procrastination. Warning labels can empower consumers to make informed choices. The right to know what goes into one's food is integral to the right to health. The red warning on a packet must translate into a red line for corporate irresponsibility.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 1926

Patience and subjection

ANGLO-INDIAN critics have been busy exhorting India to cultivate the virtue of patient hopefulness and find in the decision of the Imperial Conference with regard to the status of the dominions a ground for confidence in her own case. That India will eventually become a dominion, they say, is perfectly certain. Why should she not then have the imagination to see that every single forward step that is taken now or in the future towards advancing the status of the dominions to one of absolute equality with Great Britain is a step by which she herself is bound ultimately to be benefited? As our readers are aware, we have written partially in the same strain ourselves, but with one essential, fundamental difference. We want our countrymen not to cultivate patience, which is the virtue of the ass, but to have more of that divine impatience of subjection which is the invariable precursor of freedom. It is not surely by patience that either Canada or South Africa or the Irish Free State has attained to its present position. In every single case that position has been attained by firm and unbending refusal on the part of the country concerned to acquiesce in conditions incompatible with national self-respect, any conditions except those of absolute freedom and absolute equality within the Commonwealth of Nations presided over by King George. No country, in fact, has ever yet in history won its freedom by being patient with subjection or any of its many humiliating implications. The reason is obvious. Subjection on one side necessarily means vested interests on the other, and it is in the very nature of vested interests not to yield without a strenuous, life-and-death struggle.

Culture wars with Pakistan

If Diljit Dosanjh could be persuaded to lead the Indian side, the joke would permanently be on Rawalpindi



THE GREAT GAME

JYOTI MALHOTRA



NETFLIX SERIES : It's important to treat small events such as the cross-border streaming of *Jo Bachay Hain Sang Samait Lo* (JBHSSL) as a mere weapon of mass distraction. REUTERS

HOURS after the Centre warned Netflix on Constitution Day, this Thursday, against streaming a Pakistani serial called *Jo Bachay Hain Sang Samait Lo*, or JBHSSL, some of us watched another Pakistani serial called *Dar-e-Nijaat* on YouTube — our cinema correspondent Nonika Singh had written about it a few days ago in these pages, warning me that it had broken a few social media records (1.7 billion views since it was launched on August 1) on both sides of the Radcliffe Line.

This column is not intended to pour cold water on *Dar-e-Nijaat*, even if cities as far away as Delhi, Bengaluru and Sylhet are hosting watch parties in public cafes — the one in Bengaluru has since been banned. Better not to ask, then, if it was a yawn or not. Girl meets boy, she's the fun-loving type and he's the religious sort — you get the picture.

The question here to ask is if the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting's stern warning to Netflix will achieve the desired result or not. Clearly, the reminder is an indication that the streaming giant believes that it's not just difficult, but totally futile, that too in the age of AI, to try and control the air waves.

The Pakistan ban, as we know, has been in place since Op Sindoor last May, when India sent a strong message to Pakistan via its air force, in response to the mowing down of innocent families in Pahalgam. Everything was shut down — all conversation came to a renewed halt, travel was stopped, certain social media handles were proscribed. The ban extended to movies and music. It was as if a Great Wall was sought to be dropped on the India-Pakistan border.

Has it worked? The answer is, only partially. While all ordinary people cannot cross Wagah, the big exception are Sikh jathas from India — no prizes for guessing why. Three tours of around 2,500 people each have visited shrines in Pakistan since Op Sindoor — and a group of Pakistani Sikhs were recently allowed to cross into India — but the corridor to Kartarpur Sahib, the resting place of Guru Nanak, remains firmly shut. Reopening it will certainly give the BJP a big fillip, but it will also be seen for what it is, a cynical move on the eve of the all-important Punjab elections.

> Reopening of the Kartarpur Sahib corridor will certainly give the BJP a big fillip, but it will also be seen for what it is, a cynical move on the eve of the all-important Punjab elections.

Ironically, a group of Sikhs from different parts of Punjab recently flew to Colombo and then to Lahore to participate in the anniversary celebrations of Aitchison College, where their ancestors had once studied — the distance from Chandigarh to Lahore is less than 250 km.

Clearly, there must be better ways to make a point.

As for the reference to the Great Wall, it must be said here that the relationship between Pakistan and China (commonly described by both leaders as "higher than the mountains, deeper than the seas, and sweeter than honey") — a skin-and-nails association, *nau-maas ka rishta* — that was manifest when the Chinese "helped" Pakistan fight last year's air war against India, has only become tighter since Op Sindoor. Earlier this week, Pakistani air force pilot Muhammad Zeeshan Ali was launched into China's space station, Tiangong, becoming the first foreign astronaut to be placed there.

The question of how to punish Pakistan remains a million-dollar question. India has suffered too much and for too long at the hands of cross-border terror. The roll call of Pakistan-sponsored terror attacks is long. Mumbai in 2008, Pathankot and Uri in 2016, Pulwama in 2019, Pahalgam in 2025 — the Kargil conflict in 1999 predated the terror attacks.

The Pakistani state hasn't bothered to punish even one person involved in the Mumbai attacks. Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi was picked up five years ago to serve a terrorist financing sentence, but no one knows where he really is today.

The question of how to solve a problem like Pakistan is as old as Partition itself — 80 years of separation next year. Depending on what mirror you use to look, the answers will reveal themselves. Atal Bihari Vajpayee went to war in Kargil, then reached out to talk to Pervez Musharraf in Agra; that failed too. Manmohan Singh nearly brokered a resolution with joint accommodation of water and environment in Kashmir in 2007, but history intervened. Narendra Modi flew to Raiwind in a Pakistani air force chopper in 2015, putting his life and that of his senior officials in the hands of the Pakistani military establishment.

All this is old hat. Even older are the interventions of big powers in the neighbourhood, and how, over the decades, they have tried to bend smaller nations to their advantage. Only, very occasionally in history, do you find two men from different parts of the universe speak to each other as equals — Jaswant Singh, who died in 2020, and Strobe Talbott, who died on Thursday, were two such people, who, over 14 conversations after India's nuclear tests in 1998 sought to understand each other as well as their nations. Everything was on the talks table.

Why India went nuclear and why the US imposed sanctions against India. Why Clinton came to India for five days. Why Vajpayee refused to meet Nawaz Sharif in Blair House. Why Singh said "map-making in the subcontinent must come to an end".

Death is final, of course, but one way to make it work for you is to allow the past to inform the present. That's why it's important to celebrate big events, such as Constitution Day, as well as treat small ones, such as the cross-border streaming of JBHSSL, as a mere weapon of mass distraction.

In the bad old days, the joke was to ask if Pakistan would give up Abida Parveen in exchange for Kashmir. But with humour in short supply in the 80th year of Partition, one way to get the better of your neighbour may be to embark upon a culture war. If Diljit Dosanjh could be persuaded to lead the Indian side, the joke would permanently be on Rawalpindi.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

"Our initiatives to normalise ties with Pakistan are an indication of our commitment to peace. — Atal Bihari Vajpayee"

The tie that helped but never bound me

CVR JOGA RAO

DURING the latter part of my career as an engineer, I often sat on interview panels for middle and senior-level positions. The majority of the candidates were in the age group of 35 to 45. Their technical background varied, but most of them arrived in casual attire — T-shirts, half-sleeve shirts and jeans. Few wore coats or ties.

This reminded me of my first interview — at Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL) in 1965, soon after graduation. I wanted to make a good impression with my knowledge and appearance. There was one problem: I could not knot a tie neatly. By chance, my elder brother happened to stop by during an official tour. He offered interview tips, expertly knotted a tie and packed it in my suitcase with an unknotted spare.

After a long journey from Berhampur (Odisha), I reached Trichy (Tiruchirappalli) on a Monday evening. Heeding the call of then Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri amid a nationwide food crisis, I decided to skip the evening meal. I hired a rickshaw to take me to a hotel near the BHEL office. Unfortunately, no rooms were available. The rickshaw-puller was very helpful; using broken English and gestures, he warned me that nearby lodges were "dirty, not good". Learning that I had come on "company work", he advised me to try my luck at the company guesthouse.

I reached there just as the manager was leaving. I told him about my requirement. He phoned his seniors, verified my interview letter and allotted me a room in the VIP wing, provided that I vacated it by 8 am.

I woke up early, prayed, dressed and reached for my tie. The knotted one was badly crumpled, and I failed to knot the spare. As eight o'clock approached, I knocked on the adjoining door in desperation. A serious-looking gentleman in his late forties opened it, surprised to see an "intruder". I quickly explained my presence. He promptly knotted the tie and handed it back.

Thanking him, I hurried off for breakfast and later joined other candidates in the waiting hall. When called, I entered the interview room and faced five panel members. The member seated at the far left asked why I had opted for the Design Department. I turned towards him — and froze. He was my morning saviour!

Recovering quickly, I spoke of my aptitude for design and cheekily added: "Besides, sir, in the Design Department, I may not have to wear a tie every day."

He had a hearty laugh and narrated the morning's episode to the panel, lightening the formal atmosphere.

Soon after, I appeared for an interview at TELCO (now Tata Motors), Jamshedpur. Coincidentally, appointment letters from both companies arrived on the same day. Since my parents thought that Trichy was too far, I joined TELCO.

Decades later, whenever I struggle with a necktie, I recall that senior executive who helped me tie my way into a job I never took.

The writer is a retired engineer based in Bengaluru

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Balancing religion and progress

Refer to 'Sacred Sheshnag at a fragile crossroads'; the article has beautifully narrated the historical and geographical aspects of a legendary and sacred but fragile lake while highlighting the need to maintain a balance between religious beliefs and challenging ecological concerns. Any governing dispensation is responsible for both upholding religious freedom and addressing serious environmental values simultaneously. The complaint that the activists opposing digging on the banks of the lake are being harassed must be addressed humanely by the government, while ensuring that certain sections do not give the issue a communal colour.

JAGDISH CHANDER, JALANDHAR

Vicious cycle of freebies

Refer to 'Who has a development plan for Punjab'; the voters must assess the track record of political parties in terms of their performance, fulfilment of promises and financial accountability while in power. Poverty and economic distress may compel vulnerable voters to accept freebies for immediate relief, perpetuating a vicious cycle. The drug menace, mounting debt and unfulfilled promises demand a credible roadmap for Punjab's rejuvenation. Parties seeking power must substantiate their promises with financial viability, while the ruling party must fulfil its commitments.

VIJAY KUMAR KATIAL, PANCHKULA

Create jobs to get rid of freebies

Ahead of the 2027 Assembly polls, political parties have once again turned to their tried-and-tested strategy. Once a monetary benefit is introduced, it becomes practically impossible to withdraw it. The financial implications of freebies like free electricity are immense, undermining a state's ability to fund infrastructure and development projects. The focus should be on creating employment opportunities so that people do not have to rely on such measures to sustain themselves. There is a need to strike a balance between empowering the underprivileged through economic assistance and ensuring the state's financial health.

VK GUPTA, KURUKSHETRA

Financial constraints no excuse

Refer to 'The cost of denying armed forces equitable pay'; non-functional upgradation (NFU) enables military officers pay parity with their IAS counterparts upon promotion. However, the government's contention that extending this benefit would be prohibitively costly is untenable. The State needs to recognise the extraordinary hardships they endure and the personal sacrifices they make to safeguard national sovereignty. Denying them pay parity undermines their dignity, morale and professional commitment. The government must shed its misplaced fiscal reservations and rectify this glaring inequity to uphold the legitimate entitlements of those entrusted with safeguarding national security.

CHANCHAL S MANN, UNA

Delimitation Bill and the DMK

The BJP government has decided to convene Parliament for the passage of the Delimitation Bill. The government appears confident of securing the numbers required to pass the controversial legislation. If it fails this time, it will be a major setback when five crucial state Assembly elections are in the offing. The BJP is reportedly said to have approached the DMK and sought its support for passing the Bill. The DMK should not sacrifice long-term interests for short-term gains. It should vote against the Bill in Parliament, as it has always opposed any such legislation that is detrimental to the interests of all sections of society, irrespective of their political affiliation.

THARCIUS S. FERNANDO, CHENNAI

Powerful women must lead

Refer to 'Domestic danger'; the figures regarding women's safety released by a UN body must stir the conscience of a civilised society. Law enforcement agencies must be made more sensitive and accountable. The patriarchal mindset within government bodies needs to change. Society needs powerful women to lead the struggle of their oppressed counterparts, coupled with a progressive mass movement for gender equality and a holistic development plan for the marginalised and disadvantaged people as a whole.

INDERJIT SINGH, ROHTAK

Letters to the Editor, typed in double space, should not exceed the 200-word limit.
These should be cogently written and can be sent by **e-mail to: Letters@tribunemail.com**

Omissions in Sonia's book invite attention



KC SINGH
FORMER SECRETARY, MEA, AND EX-AMBASSADOR TO UAE & IRAN

ONE lakh copies of Sonia Gandhi's memoir sold immediately.

The first three of the seven chapters extensively describe her love affair with Rajiv Gandhi, marriage and adjustment to living in the Prime Minister's house. The political rise and death of Sanjay Gandhi figures too.

The closing chapters cover her leadership of the Congress, its 2004 return to power and life after BJP's reelection in 2014. Her account of Rajiv Gandhi's one-term prime-ministership is informative, though the omissions invite attention. Having witnessed Rajiv Gandhi's rise and decline, as President Zail Singh's close aide (1983-87), below is my take.

The book may bolster Sonia Gandhi's public image, but it reopens controversial issues from year 1984, i.e. Operation Blue Star and the massacre of Sikhs. With Punjab Assembly poll approaching, the Opposition gets ammunition to target the Congress. The memoir also omits mentioning three estranged close friends of Sonia and Rajiv Gandhi. They are Amitabh Bachchan, Arun Singh and Ottavio Quattrocchi. The Bachchans hosted Sonia on arrival in India until her marriage. Rajiv Gandhi even drew him into politics, until they parted company. Amitabh became a Modi supporter while his wife Jaya drifted towards the Samajwadi Party.

Arun Singh, an intimate schoolmate, left his private sector job to join the Congress and Rajiv Gandhi's political journey. His sudden resignation from the ministerial position in the Defence Ministry on July 18, 1987, post the Bofors scandal, remains unexplained. Ex-Army chief K Sundarji's interview linked the resignation to the blockage of his ministry's "perilously close to the truth" investigation.

Ottavio Quattrocchi had infamous proximity to Rajiv and Sonia Gandhi. Former CBI Director Joginder Singh brought 500 pages of documents from Swiss banks in 1997. As joint secretary of the Consular, Passport & Visa Division at the Ministry of External Affairs in 1997, I received his call to get the documents attested by my subordinates. The *NDTV*, on April 28, 2009, had him reiterate the papers confirmed payment of $7.32 million to Quattrocchi in the Rs 60-crore Bofors scam.

Although the Delhi High Court and the Supreme Court later absolved the accused, questions persist about him fleeing India, when the Congress' PV Narasimha Rao was Prime Minister, and the unfreezing of his account in the UK. Sonia Gandhi's book uses the court judgements to debunk the Bofors controversy.

The Punjab-related issues, from Blue Star to PM Indira Gandhi's assassination and anti-Sikh genocide, bring up the relations between President Zail Singh and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. Sonia Gandhi simplistically explains that because President Singh shared "some confidential briefing" with others, PM Rajiv Gandhi "remained respectful but wary of discussing political matters with him."



SELECTIVE : The memoir doesn't mention three estranged close friends of Sonia and Rajiv Gandhi. PTI

She could not be unaware of the two rival aides to her mother-in-law, ie RK Dhawan, a Punjabi, who controlled the official access while ML Fotedar, a Kashmiri, was the political adviser. The election of President Zail Singh was a win for Dhawan and the Punjabis. The Kashmiri group, which Arun Nehru and Rajiv Gandhi favoured, poisoned the latter's mind against President Singh.

President Zail Singh's interest in Punjab, as a former Chief Minister and then the Home Minister, is understandable. He seriously differed with Chief Minister Darbara Singh's handling of Punjab. This probably facilitated JS Bhindranwale's rise. President Singh opposed an armed confrontation, fearing it would fuel radicalism.

> Sonia sees a conspiracy in President Zail Singh seeking a re-election. With the Bofors enquiry blocked and the Oppn urging President Singh to contest, it was politics, not a conspiracy.

Darbara Singh and PM Indira Gandhi's Kashmiri aides favoured oppressive policies. The continuing detention of elected Member of Parliament Amritpal Singh due to alternating action by state and union governments evokes memories of past mistakes.

President Singh initially mistook Rajiv's social courtesies for genuine regard. Hence, after learning in Sanaa, on the final day of his foreign trip, about PM Indira Gandhi's shooting, he was insistent, while flying back, about swearing in Rajiv Gandhi as the next Prime Minister.

Prabhu Chawla, then with *India Today*, and Satinder Singh, Delhi bureau chief of *The Tribune*, voiced disagreement. I too felt so, but was too junior to advise the boss. At Palam, on October 31, 1984, RK Dhawan and Arun Nehru were present. Joint Secretary IS Bindra accompanied the President to AIIMS, where Indira Gandhi's body lay.

When the presidential motorcade arrived at Rashtrapati Bhawan, with some cars damaged, I learned the President had invited Rajiv Gandhi to be sworn in as Prime Minister. President Singh later recounted that Rajiv Gandhi rushed to first change clothes, having just returned from Calcutta.

It emerged after RK Dhawan's sacking on January 2, 1985, that Rajiv Gandhi was misinformed that President Singh was unwilling to make him Prime Minister, until the crowd at AIIMS attacked his motorcade. The Kashmiri group brainwashed Rajiv into sidelining the President.

PM Rajiv Gandhi never called on him before and after foreign visits or signing important accords involving Assam, Punjab or Sri Lanka, or to share views on domestic developments and legislation. He even blocked the President's foreign travel between November 1984 and end-1986, when the sensible Foreign Secretary, AP Venkateswaran, revived it.

The President ignored the PM's contemptuous conduct, choosing restraint. He limited his domestic trips to Opposition-run states. Within two years, the situation changed dramatically. The Kashmiri group split, with Arun Nehru sidelined.

Multiple events incrementally degraded Rajiv Gandhi's public standing. First, in January 1987, he sacked Foreign Secretary AP Venkateswaran at a press conference, leading to his resignation on January 21, 1987. The President conveyed through me his unhappiness to Venkateswaran.

Then followed the postal Bill, granting the government unlimited power to intercept, inspect and detain postal articles. Seeing widespread public opposition, the President withheld it without signing. Legally, the President can return a Bill for review, but if the government resubmits, signing becomes mandatory. The law provides no time limit for the President to examine a Bill. The government eventually withdrew it.

The Congress lost the West Bengal elections in March 1987, as the Bofors storm broke. Then followed the Haryana state elections, with the Congress winning only six of 90 seats. Resignations of VP Singh, the Defence Minister in April, followed by Arun Singh in July, surcharged the political atmosphere.

Sonia Gandhi sees a conspiracy in President Zail Singh seeking a re-election. With the Bofors enquiry blocked and the Opposition urging President Singh to contest, it was politics, not a conspiracy. Andhra CM NT Rama Rao camped in Delhi for days, with enough MLAs to sign the presidential nomination papers. VP Singh, though favouring President Singh's re-election, refused to propose his name.

My book *The Indian President* recounts many issues raised above and more. India and its youth want a new order, not a nostalgic renewal of past regimes.

CapEx deficit of Punjab



KESAR SINGH BHANGOO
EX-DEAN, SOCIAL SCIENCES FACULTY, PUNJABI UNIVERSITY, PATIALA

PUNJAB'S persistent weakness in capital expenditure has emerged as a major structural constraint on its economic development. The recently released State of State Finances 2026-27 report by PRS Legislative Research brings out this disturbing reality and raises serious questions about the state's development priorities and fiscal management.

One of the most striking points is that Punjab underspent its budgeted capital expenditure by 39% during 2021-22 to 2024-25. This represents a significant loss of development opportunities for an economy struggling with structural weaknesses, declining industrial competitiveness and a growing debt burden.

For 2026-27, Punjab has budgeted capital outlay of Rs 18,381 crore, representing an increase of approximately 76% over the revised estimate of Rs 10,434 crore for 2025-26. But the critical question is whether the government will actually spend the allocated amount. An increase in budgetary allocation has little economic significance if the state continues with large-scale underspending.

The reasons for Punjab's poor capital expenditure performance are rooted in its deteriorating fiscal position. The state is caught in a vicious circle of high committed expenditure, inadequate revenue mobilisation, rising interest payments and dependence on borrowings.

Punjab is expected to spend Rs 90,335 crore on committed expenditure, comprising salaries, pensions and interest payments in 2026-27. This amounts to approximately 72% of its estimated revenue receipts.

This leaves very limited fiscal space for development-oriented expenditure. The situation is further aggravated by the state's revenue deficit. Punjab has budgeted a revenue deficit of Rs 21,955 crore, equivalent to 2.2% of GSDP, for 2026-27. This means that the state is borrowing not only for creating assets but also to finance its current consumption and recurring expenditure. Such a fiscal structure is economically unsustainable.

> The government must establish a mechanism for monitoring the physical and financial progress of every capital project.

Punjab requires a comprehensive capital expenditure strategy. First, the government must establish a mechanism for monitoring the physical and financial progress of every capital project. Department-wise expenditure targets, quarterly reviews and public disclosure of implementation progress should be a part of budget management.

Second, delays in land acquisition, administrative clearances, tendering procedures and coordination among departments often prevent allocated funds from being utilised. A professional project management system with clear accountability is essential.

Third, capital expenditure should be prioritised towards sectors that generate high economic and social returns. Irrigation modernisation, groundwater conservation, agricultural diversification, industrial infrastructure, public transport, healthcare, education and urban flood management deserve attention.

Fourth, Punjab must improve its own revenue mobilisation through better tax administration, plugging revenue leakages, rationalising user charges, improving the financial performance of public sector enterprises and unlocking productive value from public assets.

Finally, the state must develop a medium-term fiscal framework that reduces revenue deficit and creates fiscal space for capital investment.

For full article, go to www.tribuneindia.com/opinion

Tackling child iron deficiency



NARENDRA ARORA
PRESIDENT, AIIMS, BILASPUR

INDIA' S fight against childhood anaemia requires a deep understanding of the nutritional deficiencies and underlying factors that contribute to it. The Indian Council of Medical Research's Survey for Assessment of Markers of Population Health, Activity, Diet and Anthropometry (SAMPADA) during 2023–25, offers an opportunity to broaden this understanding. Rather than limiting the focus to counting anaemic children, the survey can help shed light on the nutritional and lifestyle factors shaping the problem.

The implications of childhood anaemia go far beyond physical health; it affects children's activity levels, cognitive development, attention and learning abilities.

Unlike previous national surveys that relied on capillary point-of-care haemoglobin measurements, SAMPADA used venous blood measurements. It provides a more comprehensive assessment of anaemia and its associated nutritional determinants. Among children aged 12-59 months, 42% were anaemic.

These estimates are lower than the 64% prevalence reported among similar age group children aged 12-59 months in National Family Health Survey -5 (2019-21) .

Nevertheless, anaemia is not synonymous with iron deficiency. Iron deficiency affected approximately 23% of children aged 12-59 months and 17.6% of those aged 5-9 years. Iron deficiency accompanied by anaemia was observed in 16.4% and 6.3%, respectively. Notably, 65.7% of younger children with moderate or severe anaemia had iron deficiency.

These findings reinforce the importance of iron supplementation. They also indicate that a substantial proportion of anaemia cannot be explained by iron deficiency alone. Infections, inflammation, parasitic diseases, other nutritional deficiencies and inherited haemoglobin disorders may contribute to the problem.

Persistent anaemia or inadequate response to iron treatment should prompt clinical evaluation rather than repeated iron supplementation.

> The findings indicate that a large proportion of anaemia cannot be explained by iron deficiency alone.

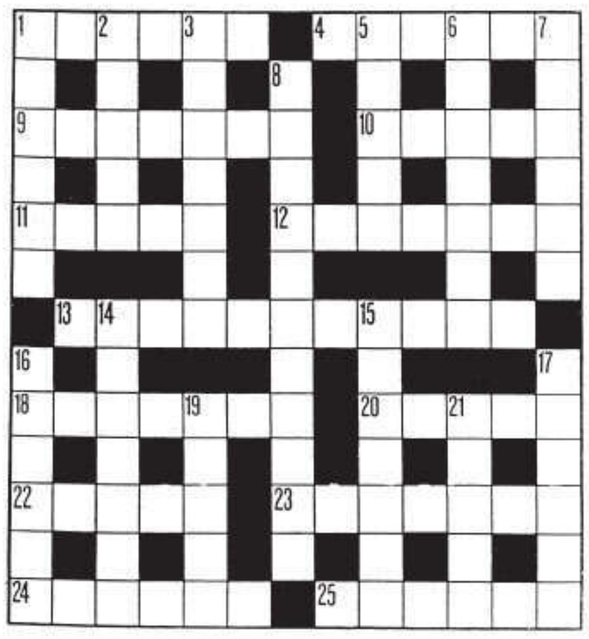
The survey also identified vitamin B12 deficiency in 37% of younger children and 46% of school-age children. Folate deficiency affected 10% of both age groups. Interestingly, the prevalence of vitamin B12 and folate deficiency was similar among anaemic and non-anaemic children. This suggests that these deficiencies may not be major independent drivers of anaemia.

India's food distribution system has played a vital role in ensuring access to food grains for millions of economically vulnerable households. Through it, access to staple cereals has helped protect households from hunger and food insecurity, while providing a foundation for household nutrition. Research published in the *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* in 2025 found that the National Food Security Act improved household dietary diversity and reduced childhood stunting in the states studied.

A nutritionally adequate diet requires a combination of food groups: Pulses, beans and lentils for protein, iron and folate; green leafy vegetables for folate and other micronutrients; vitamin C-rich fruits and vegetables to improve absorption of plant-derived iron; eggs, milk, fish and meat to provide vitamin B12 and other essential nutrients; and millets and other locally available nutritious foods to improve dietary diversity.

For full article, go to www.tribuneindia.com/opinion

QUICK CROSSWORD



ACROSS
1 State of uproar (6)
4 Immovably stuck (6)
9 Let loose (7)
10 Hard-wearing cotton cloth (5)
11 Adhere (5)
12 Author of the Jungle Books (7)
13 English novelist, d.1928 (6,5)
14 Hesitant (7)
15 Culpable (2,5)
16 Weaken (6)
17 Impudent (6)
19 Genus of heather (5)
21 Chinese secret society (5)
23 Regular procedure (7)
24 Type of West Indian music (6)
25 Indigestible (6)

DOWN
1 Springiness (6)
2 Capital of India (5)
3 A blend (7)
5 Make sense (3,2)
6 The human race (7)
7 Injury (6)
8 Writer of The Tempest (11)
14 Hesitant (7)
15 Culpable (2,5)
16 Weaken (6)
17 Impudent (6)
19 Genus of heather (5)
21 Chinese secret society (5)

Yesterday's Solution
Across: 1 Archaic, 5 Spurn, 8 Run out of steam, 9 Drift, 10 Pelican, 11 Evince, 12 Chapel, 15 Renewal, 17 Skimp, 19 Hole-and-corner, 20 Thyme, 21 Royalty.
Down: 1 Acrid, 2 Conditionally, 3 Aquatic, 4 Choppy, 5 Sisal, 6 Unexceptional, 7 Nominal, 11 Earshot, 13 History, 14 Glider, 16 Whale, 18 Parry.

SU DO KU

	9	1	7		8			3
7								
				5		1	9	
4	8		2					
		5				2		
					5		6	8
	4	9		3				
								1
6			1		2	8	7	

HARD

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

1	7	9	2	8	5	4	6	3
4	5	2	1	6	3	7	8	9
8	6	3	4	9	7	5	1	2
6	9	7	5	3	8	1	2	4
3	8	4	7	2	1	9	5	6
5	2	1	9	4	6	8	3	7
7	1	6	3	5	4	2	9	8
9	3	5	8	7	2	6	4	1
2	4	8	6	1	9	3	7	5

CALENDAR

NOVEMBER 28, 2026, SATURDAY

- Marghshirsh Shaka 7
- Marghshirsh Parvishte 13
- Hijari 1448
- Krishna Paksha Tithi 5, up to 3:58 am
- Shukla Yoga up to 8:18 pm
- Punar Nakshatra up to 12:51 pm
- Moon enters Cancer sign 7:23 am

FORECAST

SUNSET: SATURDAY 17:22 HRS
SUNRISE: SUNDAY 06:59 HRS

CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	27	10
New Delhi	25	09
Amritsar	25	10
Bathinda	28	07
Jalandhar	24	10
Ludhiana	26	09
Bhiwani	26	11
Hisar	27	09
Sirsa	28	09
Dharamsala	23	10
Manali	18	04
Shimla	17	08
Srinagar	15	–02
Jammu	24	10
Kargil	07	–09
Leh	04	–09
Dehradun	26	12
Mussoorie	21	09

TEMPERATURE IN °C

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The Pioneer
NEW DELHI | SATURDAY | NOVEMBER 28, 2026

Editor's TAKE

Packaged food or packaged health hazard?

The Supreme Court's directive on warning labels is timely, but weak testing and enforcement continue to expose consumers to unsafe packaged foods

Public health in India is in decline, and children exposed to fast food are at the highest risk. Companies selling packaged food in attractive packets care little about the ill effects their products can have on people. Many chemicals that go into its making are a known health hazard. Though there is a health regulator, it is ineffective in dealing with these companies. On Constitution Day, the Supreme Court made a beginning. It did what the food regulator had put off for years. It directed the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) to require separate hexagonal warnings, reading HIGH SUGAR, HIGH FAT or HIGH SALT, on the front of packaged foods that breach prescribed limits. Total sugars and saturated fat must be counted, not merely what manufacturers add.

How safe, then, is packaged food? The danger of excess sugar, salt and fat is slow: diabetes, hypertension and heart disease. The Economic Survey 2025-26 records that retail sales of ultra-processed foods rose from $0.9 billion in 2006 to nearly $38 billion in 2019, while obesity almost doubled.

Contamination is the other danger, and the Bisleri row has brought it home. FSSAI has sanctioned prosecution over a sample drawn from the company's Goa plant in September 2025. The first test found bromate, a possible human carcinogen, above the permitted limit.

On appeal, a referral laboratory found bromate within the limit but detected polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbons, a family of chemicals that includes known carcinogens, and held the sample unsafe. Bisleri disputes the action and says the batch is no longer in circulation. One sample does not condemn a brand, and the charge has yet to be tested in court.

Interestingly, FSSAI slept over it for over a year and suddenly woke in November this year; meanwhile, Bisleri continued to sell its mineral water across the country. This speaks volumes about the efficiency of FSSAI.

Who is to blame? The first responsibility is the manufacturer's. Section 26 of the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, obliges every food business to ensure that its products comply with the law at all stages under its control. The second failure is official. FSSAI proposed a star-rating scheme in 2022 that risked flattering unhealthy products, and moved towards clear warnings only under judicial pressure. State food safety departments must answer if the products sold are of low quality. Consumers, who cannot test water at home, carry none of the blame. Testing and appeals need strict deadlines. Adverse results and recalls should be published promptly, with the company's reply alongside. Laboratories and inspectorates need money and manpower. Junk food marketing to children must be curbed as has been done in Chile and several other countries. A warning label is no cure, only an honest sentence on a packet. The court has done its part. Regulators and industry must now earn the trust that every sealed pack asks of us. The Supreme Court has made a beginning; now it is for the Government to make rules to protect its citizens from the greed of profit-hungry companies.

Wang Huning: The brain behind China's rise

From Kissinger's secret 1971 journey to Beijing to Xi Jinping's efforts to manage strategic rivalry with Washington, China's engagement with the world has been shaped by a pragmatic understanding of power. At the heart of its political thinking is Wang Huning, the intellectual who has served three Chinese presidents and helped frame their governing philosophies



NILANTHA ILANGAMUWA



Last week, when Pakistan's Muhammad Zeeshan Ali became the first Pakistani astronaut to join China's Tiangong space station, my thoughts went back to Henry Kissinger's secret journey to Beijing in July 1971, which began in Pakistan. He arrived in Rawalpindi under the cover of an official visit, then disappeared from public view and flew to China with President Yahya Khan's assistance. The mission opened the way for Richard Nixon's historic visit and altered the strategic balance of the Cold War. Its diplomatic achievement, however, carried a terrible moral cost. As Pakistan's army waged a brutal campaign in East Pakistan, killing civilians and driving millions from their homes, Washington continued to support Yahya Khan's Government. The Nixon administration knew the scale of the violence but prioritised Pakistan's usefulness as a channel to Beijing. The American Government's own records confirm its tilt towards Pakistan. The secret journey was a triumph of geopolitical calculation, conducted against the background of a human catastrophe.

That contradiction helps explain why Kissinger remains highly regarded in China. His legacy in China rests on a hard diplomatic lesson. Competition need not become a struggle to destroy the other side.

More than half a century after that secret journey, Xi has offered a contemporary demonstration that strategic rivalry cannot eliminate the need for engagement. In San Francisco in November 2023, he announced that China would invite 50,000 young Americans for exchange and study over five years. In May 2026, he reported that the target had been exceeded two and a half years early. During his state visit to Washington in September, he doubled the commitment, inviting 100,000 young Americans over the next five years. The point is not that educational exchanges can resolve disputes over trade, technology, Taiwan or security. They cannot. It is that neither country can defeat the other in any meaningful strategic sense without inflicting immense damage on itself and the wider world. America cannot destroy China's capacity without destabilising the global economy. China cannot displace American power without provoking consequences that would undermine its own development. Their relationship requires difficult political and economic coexistence.

This is where Wang Huning becomes indispensable to understanding contemporary China. He is not a diplomat in Kissinger's mould. He is a political intellectual who has worked inside the Communist Party's machinery of power. His importance lies in helping successive leaders explain, defend and adapt the political foundations of their rule. He has served Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping. That continuity is remarkable in a system where leadership transitions can alter priorities, language and institutional emphasis. Wang has remained relevant through all three. His survival is not simply a story of personal loyalty. It reflects the Party's need for an intellectual able to translate changing political demands into a language of continuity.

> WANG DID NOT ARRIVE IN BEIJING AS A CONVENTIONAL POLITICAL OPERATIVE. HE CAME FROM FUDAN UNIVERSITY, WHERE HE STUDIED POLITICAL THEORY AND WESTERN POLITICAL THOUGHT. HIS 1988 VISIT TO THE UNITED STATES WAS FORMATIVE. OVER SIX MONTHS, HE TRAVELLED TO MORE THAN 30 CITIES AND VISITED NEARLY 20 UNIVERSITIES

The writer is a columnist based in Colombo, Sri Lanka

Wang did not arrive in Beijing as a conventional political operative. He came from Fudan University, where he studied political theory and Western political thought. His 1988 visit to the United States was formative. Over six months, he travelled to more than 30 cities and visited nearly 20 universities. He examined political institutions, factories, commercial life, homelessness, lobbying and popular culture. In the preface to America Against America, published in 1991, he described his subject as "a history, a culture, a people, a set of institutions".

Wang observed extraordinary technological and economic achievements alongside poverty, inequality and the influence of concentrated economic interests. He questioned whether formal political equality could overcome the power of private wealth. His book was not a systematic empirical study. He described himself as an observer rather than a researcher, and its arguments should be read with that limitation in mind. Yet the questions were substantial. Could a wealthy society become divided by the economic forces that produced its prosperity? Could individual freedom coexist with collective purpose? Could modernisation proceed without adopting Western institutions?

Wang approached modernisation as a political problem, not merely an economic one. He was interested in the State's capacity to coordinate development, contain competing interests and preserve national cohesion. His early writings examined sovereignty, political authority, administrative institutions and the relationship between social change and political order. He did not simply reject Western political science. He studied it and drew on it. His argument was that political institutions could not be transplanted without regard to the historical and cultural conditions in which they operated.

His move to Beijing in 1995 changed the significance of that intellectual project. Wang joined the Central Policy Research Office, which contributes to Party policy, major documents and speeches for senior leaders. He eventually became its director. The academic who had studied the American system was now participating in the production of China's political language. His influence is associated with Jiang's Three Represents, Hu's Scientific Outlook on Development and Xi's Chinese Dream. It would be careless, however, to credit him with sole authorship of these doctrines.

A study in the Journal of Contemporary China by Haig Patapan and Yi Wang describes him as "the hidden ruler". The phrase captures his unusual position. He exercised influence without initially occupying the most visible offices of political authority. His importance grew from problems confronting the Party. Economic reform had transformed Chinese society. Markets created new interests and inequalities. Revolutionary certainties had weakened. The Party needed to justify its authority in a society increasingly shaped by wealth, technology, education and global integration. Wang helped formulate an ideological response. He became a custodian of political continuity when the Party needed to explain why its authority remained necessary. His influence reflected intellectual ability, but also the political circumstances that created a demand for advisers of his kind.

There is a harder question about what Wang's political survival tells us. His passage through three administrations does not prove an infallible understanding of Chinese politics. It may show that he has understood the Party's enduring requirements better than many temporary political fashions. Jiang needed an ideological formula to accommodate new social and economic constituencies. Hu had to address tensions produced by rapid development. Xi has advanced a stronger language of national rejuvenation, Party discipline and central authority. The slogans changed; the institutional problem remained. How could the Party adapt without surrendering its claim to political supremacy? Wang's skill has been to help formulate different answers without abandoning that premise. His significance lies in this unresolved tension. The test is whether the system can accommodate criticism, correct failures and absorb social change without treating disagreement as a threat. Preserving leadership is not proof, by itself, of an ability to resolve contradictions generated by success.

Who will create tomorrow?



SAKSHI SETHI

2ND OPINION

Artificial intelligence can formulate legal arguments, analyse medical reports and write computer programs within seconds. But how will tomorrow's lawyers, doctors and engineers develop professional judgement if machines or robots progressively execute the very tasks through which competence is acquired? The greatest challenge posed by artificial intelligence may not only be employment but the slow attrition of the mechanism that generates competent experts.

Expertise is not an immediate consequence of acquiring information. It develops through observation, experimentation, mistakes, reflection and years of practical experience. A young lawyer learns from studying precedents, a doctor learns clinical judgment via patient contact, a journalist hones analytical talents through research and investigation. What many organisations consider ordinary labour is an important stage in professional development. The paradox is that they are becoming more and more automated.

Artificial intelligence can make a skilled professional more productive, but too much dependency on technology in the early stages of a career could stunt the development of autonomous judgment.

A person can learn to produce answers without developing the mind to judge whether they are right or wrong. For a country that aspires to be a global knowledge economy, this topic demands significant attention in India. In the past, the educational ecosystem in the country has placed a lot of importance on academic credentials, exam achievement and theoretical understanding. The advent of AI points further to the shortcomings of this method. The more information becomes freely available, the more important it is to be able to examine it, evaluate it, put it in context and use it.

The challenge begins much before young people enter the workforce. In classrooms, students can increasingly complete assignments, solve mathematical problems and produce sophisticated written responses using AI. While these tools offer considerable educational benefits, their indiscriminate use risks separating academic performance from actual intellectual development. Educational institutions must therefore reconsider not merely what they teach but how they assess learning. Oral examinations, experiential learning, independent research, practical demonstrations and problem-solving exercises must receive greater attention. AI literacy must encompass critical evaluation, ethical responsibility and independent reasoning rather than merely the ability to operate digital tools. Industries, too, must accept their share of responsibility. Organisations cannot expect to construct a sustainable talent pipeline while stripping out the underlying responsibilities through which professional competence develops. Workforce development must include structured mentorship, supervised practice and AI-assisted apprenticeships.

Technological progress without a corresponding investment in intellectual growth risks producing a workforce adept at operating intelligent systems yet more reliant on them. The goal is not to battle artificial intelligence but to make sure it is an addition and not a replacement for the intellectual journey of humans. Efficiency isn't the only measure of progress, especially when the processes you're eliminating are the ones that build expertise. India must look beyond the immediate economic benefits of automation and think about its long-term ramifications in terms of intellectual capital. A country may acquire technology, but it cannot afford to outsource the development of human judgment.

The writer is an educator and a councillor

Daiv Vani
WISDOM FOR A MEANINGFUL LIFE

Seeing God in Every Face

When we see the divine in everyone, every act of service becomes an act of worship.

Recently in Vadodara, I met Dwarkeshlalji Maharajshri, and one sentence of his stayed with me: "I see Krishna in everyone, and I see everyone in Krishna".

My mind went straight to the Vishvarupa Darshan. When Arjuna begs to see Krishna's cosmic form, the Lord says, "Behold in my body the whole universe, moving and unmoving" (Gita 11.7). Arjuna sees gods, sages, kings, creatures and Time itself, all held within one form.

The other half of the sentence comes from Krishna himself: "He who sees Me everywhere and sees everything in Me, I am never lost to him, nor is he lost to Me" (6.30). The two views belong together: God in everyone, and everyone in God.

What changes when we truly believe this? The domestic helper is no longer "the help", the junior colleague is no longer "below us", and the stranger blocking the road is no longer "in the way". Service becomes worship, because we are serving the One in a different form. Respect no longer depends on position, and finding good in others becomes natural, since we look first for the divine spark.

This is not a lofty idea kept for saints. It begins with a small change in how we look at people.

Today, as you meet each person, pause for one second and silently say, "There is God here." Then speak and act accordingly.

– DR. MANASA NAGABHUSHANAM, DAIV

PIC TALK



Yakshagana artists pose for photographs during the 18th BGS Founder's Day and BGS Utsav 2026 in Bengaluru PHOTO: PTI

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

US tariffs: India must stand firm

A trade war is ultimately a test of economic endurance, and India cannot afford to play the role of a passive victim ('Trump tariffs: India must bargain, not bow', November 27, 2026). Washington's latest tariff proposal is undeniably a calculated arm-twisting tactic.

However, reacting with defensive anxiety or blind anger will not protect our exporters. New Delhi must treat these aggressive demands as opening bids in a high-stakes negotiation, not as an unchangeable verdict.

We must build a strategic response based on hard evidence. Instead of yielding to external pressure, India should aggressively defend its industrial policies and negotiate firmly on core domestic interests like agriculture. Simultaneously, we must aggressively diversify our export markets and reduce our reliance on any single superpower.

Ultimately, the strongest defence against external economic coercion is building a resilient economy at home. By slashing domestic logistics costs, improving credit access, and empowering local manufacturing, India can weather any global storm. We must negotiate from a position of strength.

K. CHIDANAND KUMAR | BENGALURU

Clear front-of-pack labels are vital

The Supreme Court's directive to the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) to mandate front-of-pack warning labels disclosing total sugar and saturated fat, not merely added sugar and fat, is a landmark step for public health.

For years, manufacturers exploited narrow definitions to mask high overall sugar and fat levels, misleading consumers into believing ultra-processed foods were healthier than they are.

Back-of-pack nutritional tables in tiny print do little to help busy shoppers make informed decisions. Bold, unambiguous front-of-pack warnings are essential because India is facing an alarming surge in non-communicable diseases, including childhood obesity, type-2 diabetes and hypertension, driven largely by high-sugar, high-fat packaged diets.

Equally crucial is the Supreme Court's warning against regulatory loopholes and dilution of thresholds under industry pressure. Transparent labelling is a fundamental right, enabling citizens to protect their long-term health and easing the mounting burden on India's healthcare system. FSSAI must implement these norms swiftly and strictly without compromise.

A.C. VINEETH KUMAR | THRISSUR

Make tax cuts reach the consumer

An equitable tax system relies on progressive rates and transparent pass-through mechanisms so that tax reductions lower retail prices rather than padding corporate margins. Achieving this balance requires addressing both how taxes are collected and how the savings from tax reforms are distributed across the economy.

Making every household's tax burden identical disproportionately harms lower-income families, who spend a higher share of their income on basic necessities. A progressive structure — where higher earners pay a larger percentage and essential goods carry zero or minimal indirect tax keeps the burden reasonable relative to a household's ability to pay.

When Governments cut corporate taxes or reduce indirect tax rates on goods and services, businesses often absorb the difference to boost profits instead of lowering prices.

Ensuring benefits reach consumers requires active market competition, anti-profiteering oversight, and transparent pricing mandates. A fair tax system cannot make every household's burden identical, but it can keep the burden reasonable and ensure that benefits of reforms reach consumers.

C.K. SUBRAMANIAM | MUMBAI

The Pioneer
NEW DELHI | SATURDAY | NOVEMBER 28, 2026

IRAS: The financial backbone of Indian Railways

As Indian Railways enters a new era of infrastructure expansion and technological transformation, the Indian Railway Accounts Service (IRAS) remains central to its financial stewardship. Approaching its centenary in 2029, the Service continues to shape investment, accountability and sustainable growth.



MANOJ KUMAR DUBEY



For most Indians, memories of the Railways begin with a journey: the excitement of boarding a train, landscapes changing outside the window, conversations with fellow passengers and the rhythm of wheels on tracks. There were challenges too — long journeys, crowded compartments and uncertain schedules.

Yet Indian Railways remained an enduring part of our lives. Its scale remains remarkable: about 25,000 trains a day, 741 crore passenger journeys and a record 1,670 million tonnes of freight in 2025-26. I have experienced this institution from several vantage points — as an IRAS officer, in the Railway Board, as Director Finance of Container Corporation of India (CONCOR), and now as head of Indian Railway Finance Corporation (IRFC).

Over the years, I have witnessed a remarkable transformation, not only in infrastructure and services but in the financial systems that support its growth. I joined the Indian Railway Accounts Service (IRAS) of the 1993 batch.

My career began at UTI, introducing mutual fund schemes to rural communities, which showed me how financial institutions can drive wider development. IRAS offered an even larger canvas.

My first 15 years were spent as Head of Finance across Dhanbad, Asansol and Mughalsarai divisions. Dhanbad, at the heart of India's coal belt, taught me early that freight is the Railways' financial lifeline; coal still accounts for nearly half of all cargo carried. These assignments brought me close to train operations, freight loading and resource management.

They taught me that railway finance is not simply about maintaining accounts. It is about deploying resources efficiently, supporting operational priorities and ensuring investments deliver results. This is the distinctive strength of IRAS. Constituted on April 1, 1929, when responsibility for railway accounts passed from the Auditor General to the Financial Commissioner,

Railways, the Service has evolved alongside the network. Now in its 98th year, with its centenary in 2029 just over two years away, its contribution extends far beyond its original accounting mandate. IRAS officers serve as financial advisers to railway management, as officers responsible for accounting and financial control, and as internal auditors.

As advisers, they bring financial discipline and commercial perspective to operational and investment decisions. Through accounting, they ensure accurate reporting and accountability for public resources. Internal audit strengthens controls and improves processes.

Together, these functions ensure that public investment translates into public value. The stakes have never been higher: capital expenditure for 2026-27 stands at a record ₹2.93 lakh crore, with nearly ₹1.2 lakh crore earmarked for safety alone. IRAS officers have also led the modernisation of financial administration.

I participated in this transition through digitisation of salary and contractor payments, e-tendering and e-auctions, and streamlining of employee policies — work recognised with the National Award for Outstanding Service by the Minister of Railways in 2011.

As Director and Executive Director in the PPP and Finance Commercial Directorates of the Railway Board, I worked on setting up locomotive factories through public-private partnerships and foreign direct investment, and on High-Speed Rail and Dedicated Freight Corridors.

Tariff structuring and managing international bids showed how financial expertise turns infrastructure ambitions into implementable projects. That groundwork has borne fruit: Indian Railways produced 1,674 locomotives in 2025-26.

One significant outcome of this financial foresight was the establishment of IRFC in 1986 to mobilise resources for the Railways' growing capital needs alongside budgetary support. Four decades on, more than 80 per cent of Indian Railways' rolling stock sits on IRFC's books. Today, as CMD and CEO of IRFC, after serving as Director Finance and CFO of CONCOR, I have seen how closely transport infrastructure, logistics efficiency and economic growth are linked.

RAILWAYS, THE SERVICE HAS EVOLVED ALONGSIDE THE NETWORK. NOW IN ITS 98TH YEAR, WITH ITS CENTENARY IN 2029 JUST OVER TWO YEARS AWAY, ITS CONTRIBUTION EXTENDS FAR BEYOND ITS ORIGINAL ACCOUNTING MANDATE. IRAS OFFICERS SERVE AS FINANCIAL ADVISERS TO RAILWAY MANAGEMENT, AS OFFICERS RESPONSIBLE FOR ACCOUNTING AND FINANCIAL CONTROL, AND AS INTERNAL AUDITORS. AS ADVISERS, THEY BRING FINANCIAL DISCIPLINE AND COMMERCIAL PERSPECTIVE TO OPERATIONAL AND INVESTMENT DECISIONS. THROUGH ACCOUNTING, THEY ENSURE ACCURATE REPORTING AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR PUBLIC RESOURCES. INTERNAL AUDIT STRENGTHENS CONTROLS AND IMPROVES PROCESSES.

In March 2025, IRFC was conferred Navratna status, making all seven listed railway CPSEs Navratnas. FY26 proved a defining year: assets under management reached a record ₹4.85 lakh crore, profit after tax touched an all-time high of ₹7,009 crore, and IRFC retained its zero-NPA record. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Indian Railways has seen an unprecedented thrust on infrastructure, safety, passenger amenities and technology.

Over 160 Vande Bharat services now run across the network, the first Vande Bharat Sleeper entered service in 2026, and 99.6 per cent of the broad-gauge network is electrified, ahead of China, Russia and the United Kingdom.

IRFC has supported this by financing rolling stock and infrastructure. Under IRFC 2.0, we are also financing sectors linked to the railway ecosystem, from power and renewables to ports and logistics parks; in FY26, we met our annual sanction guidance of ₹60,000 crore within nine months.

The larger objective is Aatmanirbhar Bharat and Viksit Bharat @2047.

A modern railway is an economic multiplier: it connects markets, strengthens manufacturing, improves logistics and creates employment. The Union Budget 2026-27 has charted the next leap, with seven high-speed rail corridors and a new East-West Dedicated Freight Corridor from Dankuni to Surat.

IRAS will be central to this, keeping financial planning, expenditure management and accountability integral to infrastructure development, while promoting sustainable financing and digital governance.

As IRAS celebrates its Annual Day on November 28, 2026, under the theme 'Legacy of Excellence, Enabling Sustainable Transformation', it is an occasion to recognise a Service that has consistently adapted to the Railways' changing needs, combining financial prudence with an understanding of operations.

From railway divisions and the Railway Board to CONCOR and now IRFC, each assignment has offered me a different perspective on India's infrastructure aspirations.

The Railways I joined in 1995 and the Railways of today are, in many ways, different institutions; what has remained constant is the need for sound finance beneath every ambition.

As the Service counts down to its centenary, the journey towards Viksit Bharat will demand institutions that are financially sound, technologically enabled and accountable.

IRAS has the experience and capability to help Indian Railways meet these aspirations. Nearly a century of financial stewardship is not just a legacy to celebrate; it is a foundation on which to build the next chapter of India's railway transformation.

The writer is an IRAS officer and currently serving as CMD & CEO, Indian Railway Finance Corporation (IRFC).

How good people burn the planet



ACHARYA PRASHANT

Go to a wedding in a small Indian town, and you'll often hear the generator before you hear the band. Somewhere behind the tent, near the cooks, an old diesel set chugs away all night so that the lights never dip and the music never stops. Power cuts are common in such places, and the father of the bride is not going to let one spoil his daughter's evening. Is he a villain? No. Ask him and he'll tell you he's only doing his duty as a father. The smoke drifts over the neighbouring roofs, where old people and small children are trying to sleep. What he burns for his family, another family has to breathe. But how does that matter to him? Inside the gate, light. Outside the gate, the world, and that is not his department. We are nice, but very selectively nice, and that is another name for violence.

Nearly two hundred countries had assembled at Antalya in Turkey for the UN climate summit, COP31. On November 22, after two extra days of negotiations, they went home without an overarching political agreement. About 130 countries had wanted the agreement to speak of moving away from fossil fuels. The final draft didn't even mention coal, oil or gas, the very things principally responsible for global warming. But it did find room to promote carbon capture. Saudi Arabia, backed by other oil-producing countries, had led the resistance. Ireland's climate minister, speaking for the European Union, said the conference had been "hijacked by some oil states." So now we have a villain, and a villain is very convenient. When something goes wrong, we want to blame one moment, one place, one culprit. Why? So that the entire process leading up to that moment remains untouched and unexamined.

If countries could come together to save the ozone layer, why can't they come together now? In 1987, the world signed the Montreal Protocol, which every country has since ratified. Nearly 99 per cent of ozone-depleting substances have been phased out, and the ozone layer is healing. Ozone depletion was one bad leaf on the tree. You could change the product and leave the man who used the product almost as he was. The climate crisis lies at the root of the tree. And which tree am I talking of? Man and his desires. To solve the ozone problem, you didn't have to ask a young man why a two-wheeler was no longer enough and a four-wheeler had become proof that he had arrived. You didn't have to ask a family why the honeymoon must be in Switzerland.



And what did Antalya's last draft have kind words for? Carbon capture. Very well, capture the carbon wherever you can. But the moment you hear that some machine will take care of the carbon, you feel a little more comfortable releasing it. We want to keep the fuel and remove the warming. And isn't that what the ego is always asking for? Leave me intact, but remove my miseries.

In London in May, a man in the audience told me that the real abusers of the climate were not sitting in that hall. They were the rich and powerful. I said, where does the money in their bank accounts come from? They sell products and services, and you are the consumer. They have to produce the consumer. They have to produce somebody who feels incomplete without what they sell. A satisfied customer, remember, is no longer a customer. India imports close to nine-tenths of the crude oil it consumes, and Saudi Arabia has long been among its principal suppliers. The rupees you spend at the petrol pump contribute to the economic power that the oil producers exercise at conferences like Antalya.

India is right to insist that those who used up most of the world's carbon budget must carry most of the burden and honour their financial commitments. Riyadh wants to protect its revenues, Brussels its industries, Beijing its factories, Washington its drilling. And each Government can say with complete sincerity that it is only looking after its own people. Now seat nearly two hundred such decencies at one table. What do you get? Antalya. The problem is that we are people of divided decency, and divided decency can be worse than indecency.

See who is doing all the worrying. Who worries about his house, his family, his neighbourhood, and now the planet? The ego. And who is burning the planet? That same ego. The worrying entity and the damaging entity are one. He worries about the climate report, and he books the flight. The fellow who has created the problem has been sent to negotiate with himself.

Can we first stop doing some of the things that have brought us here? I'm not dissuading you from developing better batteries, solar panels or public transport. But if the fellow using them remains the same, how much will better technology achieve? You have got a more efficient car. Very good. Will you now drive it twice as much?

Does that mean nobody may consume anything? No. The organism is free to consume. The ego is not. A poor family that requires electricity for a fan and clean fuel for its stove is answering a genuine requirement of the body. Surely we must make those available. But what about the fellow who wants a third car, a bigger flat and a foreign holiday every six months? The body eats and is done. The ego eats and is never done, because the ego is not eating food. It is eating a picture of itself. Nobody is asking you to be virtuous or magnanimous, or to develop some great love for the fish in the Amazon. Honesty is asked of you, not virtue. You say you care for a few people. Fine.

See what your care is doing. If what I call my love for these few can survive only through violence towards everybody outside my circle, what kind of love is it, even for these few? Look at the generator at the wedding. Look at the car bought to impress. Look at the flight to Switzerland. Which of them are you ready to give up?

Acharya Prashant is a philosopher and author whose work centres on self-examination and its application to contemporary life.

COP31: What does it mean for India and the UAE?



MINIYA CHATTERJI

COP31 has collapsed. After 2 weeks and 44 hours of overtime of agonising discussions amongst world leaders at the largest and longest COP, it still did not deliver a climate deal. The danger of fancy pavilions with micro-stages, corporate sponsorships, hawking wares in a costume of climate care, branding and logo displays in exchange for 'Blue Zone Badges' to gain access to policymakers, and the 'photo-ops' taken for LinkedIn, can create an illusion of 'a successful COP'. But the only real success is a COP that solves enough to make it the last one we ever have to hold. Instead, COP31 in Antalya commenced by delivering a sobering update of failure — the world was on track this year to temporarily overshoot the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C warming limit. 31 years of discussions, and yet we did not manage to keep planetary temperatures within limits.

This breach of the warming limit meant that the Earth's average surface temperature has risen more than 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, crossing the primary safety guardrail set in the 2015 Paris Agreement. It marks a critical transition where climate risks escalate sharply, and some environmental damage becomes irreversible. However, natural climate cycles combined with human-driven warming can push a single calendar year above 1.5°C. Therefore, the Paris Agreement target measures warming over a 20- to 30-year average, instead of expecting a year's breach to trigger a sudden planetary collapse. UN Secretary-General António Guterres warned leaders that emissions had to fall drastically within the decade to keep this overshoot brief. So the bottom line is - that we could still fix this! But in the idyllic town of Antalya, the world chose not to. Talks collapsed because leaders failed to reach a consensus to transition away from fossil fuels. The UAE Consensus, agreed by 198 Parties at COP28 in Dubai in December 2023, had explicitly agreed to "transition away from fossil fuels" in energy systems.

Yet the draft agreement on the scheduled last day of COP on Friday had removed any mention of the transition. In a dramatic sequence of events, climate activists gathered to stand outside the negotiations hall on Friday evening calling for world leaders to step up. Overnight, by Saturday morning, the EU gathered 130 countries to oppose the omission. Saturday night, world leaders were summoned into plenary at 11.30 pm. Back-and-forth discussions continued all night between country delegations. On Sunday, several deliberations and amendments later, the fourth draft agreement that was presented still maintained the omission, to which the EU and several other nations rejected the agreement. What would the outcomes of COP31 mean for India? First, earlier mandates remain intact, including COP28's call to transition away from fossil fuels and COP30's



call to triple adaptation finance by 2035. Second, India's Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Bhupender Yadav, emphasised that the lack of consensus will not slow India's domestic transition, pointing to over 170 GW of solar capacity, while India has already passed 50 per cent non-fossil power capacity ahead of its 2030 goal. Without a new agreement at COP31, funding bankable projects through domestic and bilateral channels —and building state and city resilience — becomes more critical.Third, working alongside BASIC and Like-Minded Developing Countries, India kept equity, Common But Differentiated Responsibilities, and developed nations' Article 9.1 finance obligations central to draft texts, while also emphasising the near-term climate benefits of cutting anthropogenic methane alongside food security concerns.Fourth, procedural Article 6 carbon-market texts were approved without weakening integrity rules. However, unilateral trade measures like the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism remain a live pressure point, pushing Indian exporters in sectors like steel, aluminium, cement, and fertilisers — alongside facilities under India's Carbon Credit Trading Scheme — to maintain strong emissions tracking and carbon-pricing readiness.Fifth, unfinished debates on climate finance, adaptation baselines, and energy transition will carry forward to COP32 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

As a long-term resident of Dubai, it also made me think of what the outcomes would reflect on the future of the UAE. First, it leaves the UAE Consensus from COP28 intact as the global benchmark for fossil fuel transition language. It thus strengthens the UAE's COP28 legacy.

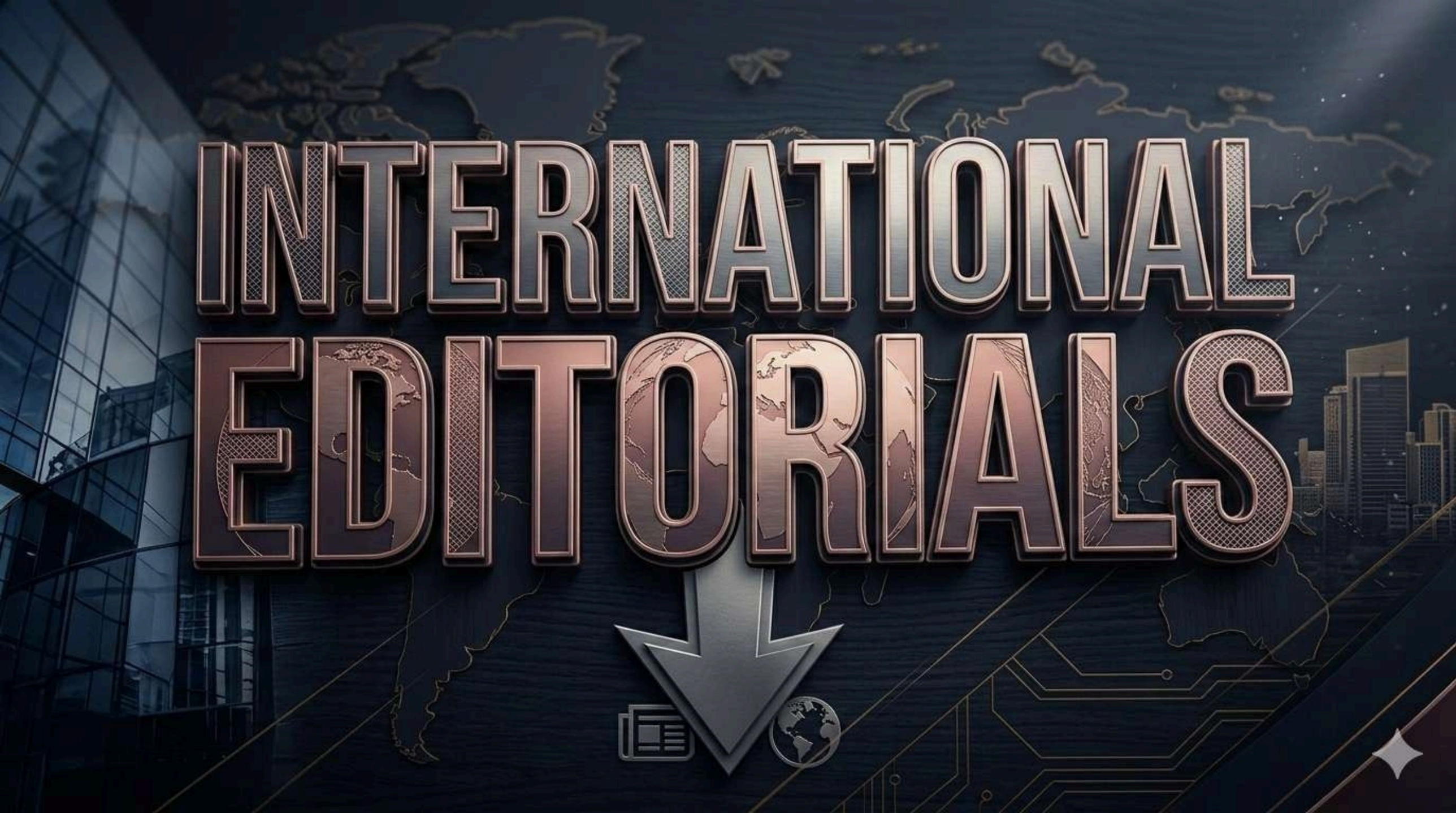
Second, the UAE's calm and progressive stance shone through as it reaffirmed its commitment to the full implementation of the UAE Consensus, in contrast to Saudi Arabia, which lobbied loudly and hard to omit mention in the agreement about transitioning away from fossil fuels, ironically despite the Saudi pavilion being one of the largest and most opulent pavilions showcasing its climate commitment.

Third, the collapse of a climate agreement has now placed greater weight on civil society across countries, including the UAE, for clean energy investments, outside any UN political pact. Fourth, a major highlight of COP31 was its push toward global electrification through renewables. We can expect the UAE to be investing more in clean electricity and supporting startups offering innovative technologies for it.

Finally, COP31 formally launched the second Global Stocktake to drive implementation of national climate plans. The UAE already monitors emissions through a federal MRV system led by the UAE Ministry of Climate Change and Environment. Now we can expect the further strengthening of emissions reporting data in the UAE at the companies' level. On the morning of my last day of COP31, I watched a 19-year-old student at the climate engineering college I had established, adjusting the lanyard around her neck as she entered. She was one of the young delegates attending COP31. At around midday, she took a seat at a roundtable discussion.

She spoke about her own struggles with heatwaves and water shortages. There, she made a friend. I smiled as she introduced me to the young Turkish girl pursuing an affiliated degree in carbon management in Istanbul, whom she had befriended. Perhaps the success of COP is then determined at two levels. First, it is defined by the level of success of country-level negotiations to collectively preserve the planet's ecosystem and the human species. But second, it is also defined by the cumulative value of the micro-progress achieved by friendships at COP. Friendships are built on empathy, understanding, and trust - which are the cornerstones to arriving at an agreement towards climate action amongst world leaders too.Antalya then failed on the first front, and salvaged the second. Things could have been far worse had climate activists and over 130 countries not joined hands to quash a disastrous draft agreement.

The writer is the CEO of Sustain Labs Paris, a Global Leadership Fellow of the World Economic Forum


INTERNATIONAL
EDITORIALS

Opinion

I worry the Spanish are nostalgic for Franco

The elections this weekend in Spain may usher in a new era of right wing governance.

Paco Cerdà



OSCAR DEL POZO/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

A campaign rally for the far-right party Vox in Madrid this month. Some predictions suggest Vox may double its current representation in Parliament after elections on Sunday.

VALENCIA, SPAIN I grew up in the 1990s in Spain, just 15 years after the country emerged from an extreme right-wing dictatorship. In those years, it would have been very surprising to see slogans praising Francisco Franco or symbols of the far right. Such things were frowned upon. Praise for fascism recalled a dark era of executions by firing squad, mass graves and a total lack of freedom.

That old reticence is gone. Vox, Spain's ultraright-wing party, is expected to radically alter the political landscape in the country's elections on Sunday.

The mantle of the so-called nationalist spirit has been picked up by these heirs to the rancid discourse many of us thought we'd left behind. On election posters across Spain, Vox promotes itself with the slogan "common sense." It claims to distance itself from politics. Its ideas, after all, are simply common sense. This is a false antipolitics; its members are as political as everyone else on the rest of the spectrum.

Some predictions suggest Vox may double its current representation in Parliament. Most polls say the bloc formed by the center-right People's Party together with Vox will pick up enough votes to form a coalition government. The P.P. and Vox have even aligned in some districts. There is no coordinated political effort to isolate the far right.

If those polls are correct, Spain's Council of Ministers could include several ministers and possibly even a vice president from Vox, a political party that typically avoids condemning the dictatorship of Francisco Franco. But Vox is not only a party of the past. It is also a party that denies climate change, even in the face of over 230 deaths in Valencia in floods two years ago and devastating fires last summer. It is a party that has opposed laws aimed at preventing gender-based violence, though more than 1,300 Spanish women have lost their lives to domestic violence since 2003. It is a party that fights migration under the banner "Not one more" and defends the idea of repatriation of migrants without documentation, the return of out-of-work foreign nationals to their home country and the deportation of those who (in the words of its political platform) "attempt to impose their foreign customs, habits or cultures."

The rise of Vox is particularly shocking when viewed against the policies of the administration of Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez. After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Spain became a bulwark of progressivism. It has been committed to the defense of Kyiv and was among the countries most vocally opposed to Israel's destructive war in Gaza and has called it genocide. The Spanish government denounced the U.S. war in Iran, despite President Trump's political and financial threats, and led Europe in policies on accepting and integrating immigrants, despite setbacks such as this past summer's crisis in Ceuta, where tens of thousands of migrants crossed the border and in many cases were treated terribly.

The Spanish elections on Sunday will be a test of Mr. Sánchez' government. His administration has been damaged by serious corruption allegations against his party and members of his personal circle. It is tarred, as well, by erratic management, two major train accidents in a span of nine months that killed 115 people and, most critically, an inability to guarantee the right to housing for millions of Spaniards in a market swollen from real estate speculation.

But the elections are also a test of Spanish democracy. In recent days, I've heard people speaking anxiously about how to vote. They are critical of the left's lack of unity and claim they cannot rally behind this government, as a former minister is in prison for corruption. At the same time, the prospect of the far right entering the government frightens them. So they talk about holding their noses as they go to the polls. I understand the sentiment. And yet it strikes me as a democratic failure. What has become of hope?

If one of the last antipopulist bastions in Europe falls, that shift could set off a far-right domino effect.

This continent's political transformation is alarming. In the mid-1980s, the political appeal of the extreme right was negligible in Europe. Now the far right is ascendant. Yet the most worrisome thing isn't simply the increase in votes. The radical right has already shifted the European cultural conversation toward one of fear. The utopian impulse is gone. A continent that was forced to learn hard lessons about hate and xenophobia from World War II is now capable of conceiving of such unenlightened projects as the creation of a deportation center in Rwanda for migrants whose asylum claims have been denied. This is a moral failure, the likes of which I never could have imagined.

Vox is not only a party of the past. It is also a party that denies climate change and fights migration under the banner "Not one more."

Spain's elections are a prelude to the elections this spring in France, where polls suggest the National Rally's Marine Le Pen is already dangerously close to the Élysée Palace. If Spain is governed in part by the far right and France elects a far-right president, joining a far-right prime minister in Italy and the rise of the Alternative for Germany in Germany, Europe as we know it will be shattered.

Which is why, these days, I am reminded — with the obvious historical differences in the scope and level of violence — of the Spanish Civil War, which was itself a prelude to and a testing ground for World War II. Our civil war was provoked by a military uprising that toppled a legitimate Spanish Republican government, dividing those in favor of fascism from those who defended democracy.

It is dangerous to speak of fascism in the context of our politicians today: It both trivializes our past and hinders our ability to understand the disturbing realities of our present. Spain is still a democratic nation, as are France, Italy and Germany. But what happens when a democracy is governed by leaders who refuse to condemn dictatorships and who disparage politics?

Today in Spain, nostalgia for the spirit of Francoism is no longer frowned upon. It is not merely that we have forgotten. There is an unrest that European democracies have not been able to handle. There is a discourse of fear that they don't know how to respond to. If our ballot boxes have become dumping grounds for fear and frustration, the only solution is for democracy and the European social model to once again become useful to every voter, not just morally superior.

The political heirs to those who led Europe out of an era of hatred and Spain out of dictatorship must find solutions to voters' very real problems — in housing, in education, in inequality, in employment, in advancing women's roles in society and in managing immigration. Being useful is the battle democrats now face. And *that* is real common sense.

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It's hard to look away when greedy people divorce

Why I loved the slick and dirty divorce drama "War," now airing on HBO and Sky Atlantic.

Robin Givhan

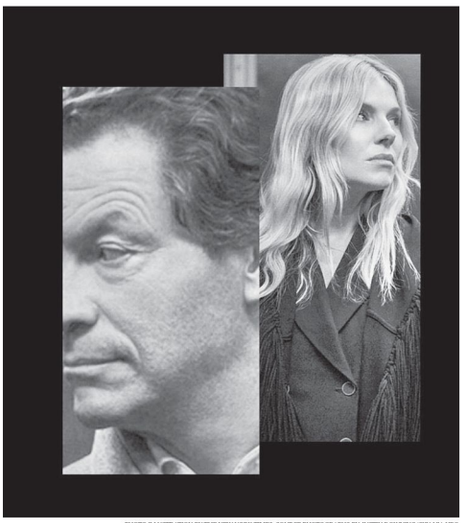

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY THE NEW YORK TIMES; SOURCE PHOTOGRAPHS BY JUSTIN DOWNING/SKY, VIA HBO

I've never been married, which of course means that I have never been divorced, which is perhaps why I could enjoy "War," the just-finished series on HBO Max (and Sky Atlantic in across Europe) that detailed the high-stakes split-up of an extravagantly wealthy couple in modern-day London, and not get queasy over the self-serving schemes of the protagonists and their high-end but unethical lawyers. I have no fragile, scabbed-over marital wounds in danger of bleeding out.

"War" is a form of glossy anthropology. The actor wife and the tech entrepreneur husband might be fictional, but their circumstances offer a guiltless and entertaining exploration of the obscenely privileged and deeply narcissistic. When the pile of money gets comically high, as it does in tech, where everyone seems to believe he is a world-saving genius, people are prone to fighting over the cash as if they're scrambling for the last crumbs in a famine — even if they'll never, ever go hungry.

This is the greedy world of "War," a satisfying study of a kind of wealth that doesn't just stir resentment; it sparks outrage, schadenfreude and free-floating existential fear that the capitalist apocalypse is upon us. Can you even imagine the spousal hair-pulling and legal skulduggery that will emerge from the inevitable divorces of the recently minted SpaceX millionaires and, now, Anthropic gazillionaires?

But by the end of the series, the heart of the show becomes something far less cynical. It's instead a confirmation of how greed — and winning at all costs — might not actually be worth it.

When you meet Carla Duval, the actor played by Sienna Miller, and her husband, Morgan Henderson, the mogul played by Dominic West, they are already at odds and hurtling toward divorce. I've only gotten the barest hint that they were once happy.

A decade earlier, money guy Morgan founded Zephyr, a social media site built to elevate kindness over clickbait, a civil town square rather than a fetid swamp of negativity. In the world of "War" his idealism paid off, and Zephyr is a huge hit and worth a mint. Carla's celeb pals love being on it because of its non-hater vibes.

But Morgan is also a rich guy, and rich guys like to be in control. He makes this point after he has been advised to temporarily place his Zephyr shares in the hands of one of his executives to shield them in the divorce. Morgan then calmly offers a subordinate in the room the million-dollar watch off his wrist if he'll strip down to his socks. Within seconds, the poor guy is ripping at his shirt. This, Morgan says, is validation of what he has learned. People will say and do nearly anything when tremendous amounts of money are at stake. In other words: Trust no one.

What Morgan misses is that he, too, is caught up in the same web of desire and flexible ethics, like so many in our billionaire class. Just before Anthropic went public, its co-founder Dario Amodei read a statement that warned, "We've always been honest that this technology has very real risks." He went on to list some of them: misuse by nations, economic disruption, loss of human control. Then he and his sister Daniela rang the Nasdaq bell, and they became worth more money than they could ever spend in multiple lifetimes.

Mr. West's Morgan is polished to a very English high gloss ("educated to within an inch of his life," as one of his estranged wife's lawyers describes him) but just shy of haughty. He lacks the nerdy flatness of Mark Zuckerberg or the callousness of Elon Musk. And with his bespoke suits and jaunty scarves, Morgan is a far more elegant dresser than Jensen Huang.

As I watched the show, I began

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INTERNATIONAL EDITION

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Constructing the future of global maternity care

Jessica Grose

The Paul E. Farmer Maternal Center of Excellence opened on Valentine's Day this year in the Kono District of Sierra Leone, in West Africa. The center is made up of four buildings with cheerful cobalt-blue roofs set around a gracious courtyard with plants that were donated by the community. It also contains the first neonatal intensive care unit in the area.

Mothers and infants from neighboring Liberia and Guinea have been among the thousands of patients served by the center so far this year. Because many of these women have to travel hours on muddy, often impassible dirt roads in rickety vehicles to get to the center, there is a dormitory for them to stay in while their babies receive long-term support. There's also a specific ward for "moms that might have lost their babies to recover more privately," Allison Adamson, an architect at Build Health International who worked on the center, told me.

Build Health International provides modern medical facilities in the poorest parts of the world.

Build Health creates and sustains hospitals and clinics in parts of the world where running water and electricity are not guaranteed, and it upgrades existing health care facilities so that they can function when utilities are interrupted. This work is more vital than ever since USAID funding was demolished last year, and international development was thrown into chaos.

Build Health's architects worked with midwives, doctors, nurses, community members and the Sierra Leone Ministry of Health to make sure the buildings met the needs of local families. Isata Dumbuya, a Kono-born midwife and obstetrics nurse who worked for the National Health Service in Britain for 25 years, has been an integral partner in building the center. She returned to Sierra Leone in 2018 to try to help lower maternal mortality rates, which were at truly horrifying heights in the early 2000s after a decade-long civil war.

The shoddy state of the physical infrastructure of health care in Sierra Leone contributes to levels of maternal and infant mortality that remain among the highest in the world. Although maternity care has been free in Sierra Leone since 2010, without functioning hospitals and supplies, the policy is toothless. According to commentary in The Lancet, "A 2018 national survey found that only 5 percent of facilities could provide basic emergency obstetric care."

The maternal care center doesn't just provide access to sterile operating rooms and oxygen supplies. It was also built with the emotional needs of new mothers in mind. This is a remarkable achievement in sub-Saharan Africa, where only half of hospitals have reliable electricity and 15 percent of health care facilities have none at all, according to the World Health Organization.

The center was constructed using natural ventilation with backup from generators to bypass an unstable local electrical grid. Similarly, at the Mirebalais University Hospital in Haiti, a country where just under half the population has no access to electricity, Build Health installed 2,400 solar panels that created a "self-sustained micro-grid" in a town that regularly has power failures.

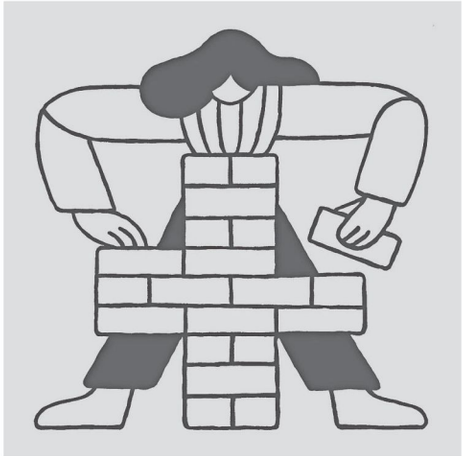
Build Health had its genesis in 2009 when its future founders were commissioned to design a hospital by the nonprofit Partners in Health, another worthy charity that expands access to health care in impoverished and hard-to-reach parts of the world. (Dr. Paul Farmer, after whom the Sierra Leone maternal care center is named, was a founder of Partners in Health.) Build Health was formally founded in 2014. Part of its work involves training locals in construction so they can contribute to future development in the region and support their families. Sixty percent of the construction workers on the Sierra Leone center were women, many of whom had never worked in the field previously. "It is for us, the women who will give birth here," one young worker, Hawa Baryoh, told The Guardian in 2023.

Now, Build Health is working to create "an exemplary state of the art" children's hospital in Cameroon where doctors from the United States and Europe would feel comfortable practicing, said Gerard Georges, the director of architecture.

You can give the gift of future hospital beds for sick children by donating at buildhealthinternational.org/donate.

This article is part of Times Opinion's 2026 Giving Guide. The author has no direct connection to the organizations mentioned. If you are interested in any organization mentioned in the guide, please go directly to its website. Neither the authors nor The Times will be able to address queries about the groups or facilitate donations.

JESSICA GROSE *is a writer in Opinion.*



LENNARD KOK

FROM READERS

A family's touch

"Are you a hugger? Your answer may be telling." (Well, Nov. 13) brought up poignant memories of my late mother's last hours. My then-college-age son and I were at her bedside, each of us holding a hand and gently stroking her head, as she took her final breaths in her assisted living residence.

I know that hearing is the last sense to go, according to science. Yet as my mother's vision diminished and her hearing did as well, I found it comforting that she responded to our touch.

That seemed a more powerful connection, for all of us, than our whispering in her ears that we loved her.

MERRI ROSENBERG,
ARDSLEY, N.Y.

New York is on track to be safer than Berlin, Barcelona and Madrid

David Wallace-Wells

On Nov. 16, Mayor Zohran Mamdani of New York announced that the city was disbanding the N.Y.P.D.'s Strategic Response Group, a high-profile specialized police unit that had been tasked with counterterrorism operations and monitoring protests, and which had become a particularly contentious flashpoint for the mayor's left-wing supporters when it raided Columbia's campus and violently dispersed pro-Palestine protests in the spring of 2024.

Disbanding the S.R.G. was a campaign promise the mayor sat on for almost a year as part of a détente on the role of the police that also included an ongoing partnership with the police commissioner, Jessica Tisch. The new policy is a sign of the changing political tides: In the wake of a big blue wave nationwide, one of the country's most popular politicians feels secure enough in his standing to tackle police reforms that just a year ago seemed radioactive. But it is also a sign that we are all living in a very different world when it comes to crime than we were just a few years ago, at the peak of the pandemic crime surge. Back then, you heard a lot about social chaos and urban doom loops, the bad old days of the 1970s and the possibility that flight to the suburbs could wreck American cities once again. Instead, what followed was historic drops in violent crime almost across the board. By some measures, American cities are actually safer now than their European counterparts, which many Americans have long envied as walkable, high-trust utopias.

Between 2021 and 2025, the number of murders in New York City fell by more than 36 percent. Though this is miraculous, it isn't exceptional: In those same years, the national murder rate fell by 40 percent. And it has continued to decline, according to estimates, by between 15 percent and 20 percent this year alone. Half of the number of people who would have been killed given crime rates in 2021 are now likely to survive given the rates of 2026.

WHEN MURDER DECLINED this much over the course of the 1990s, it was as if the clouds had opened and a new age of urban possibility dawned, with decades of white flight reversing and a future of information economy gentrification coming into view. We stopped talking about superpredators and the crack epidemic and started talking about police violence and eventually the new Jim Crow. We stopped worrying about child abduction and started worrying about excessive safetyism. We began hearing a lot less about burning neighborhoods and cities going bankrupt and a lot more about housing shortages and the unmanageable cost of rent.

That drop in crime was momentous, marking the end of the 20th century in American life and the beginning of the 21st, perhaps as decisively as the arrival of the internet or the end of the Cold War. In percentage terms, this drop already appears to be larger. It has also come faster.

Some large shares of these declines are returns to prepandemic trends, after a horrific Covid-era surge. Although the pattern may seem predictable and intuitive now, it was hardly conventional wisdom five years ago that all would quickly return to normal, or better than normal. Instead, spikes in violence and disorder looked to many less like temporary blips than a new semi-permanent reality. And yet the past five years haven't just brought the country back to prepandemic levels of crime; murder rates are now well below the prepandemic trough, achieved in 2014. Last year's murder rate was tied with 1955 and 1956 for the lowest on record, according to the F.B.I. This year's rate will be even lower — perhaps the safest the country has been at any point in its entire history.

What makes the decline doubly miraculous is that no one can explain exactly why it is happening. In September the Council on Criminal Justice convened a summit, bringing four dozen experts together to hash out the various hypotheses and come to some sort of consensus. They came up with almost 50 possible explanations, from the end of pandemic disorder to the targeted use of violence intervention programs, the aging of the population and the decline of drinking, expanded surveillance systems and the loneliness epidemic.

SOMETIMES YOU HEAR CONSERVATIVES talk about the effect of immigration enforcement or progressive retreat on bail reform. Liberals may talk about what is sometimes called community violence intervention — directly and proactively engaging with gang members and others at high risk of committing violent crime — or the benefits of social spending contained in President Joe Biden's American Rescue Plan. Maybe we're finally leaving the lead paint generation behind; maybe we're getting better at treating gunshot wounds; maybe the spike in murders in 2022 left fewer would-be killers alive in subsequent years; maybe calls to defund the police really did demoralize officers even though few politicians echoed them, fewer localities implemented them and, nationally, the level of police employment recovered from a brief drop in 2021.

This is the kind of exhaustive list you come up with in the absence of any obvious answer, giving everyone an excuse to ride a hobbyhorse while making each of those explanations seem partial at best. And in the end, those four dozen experts at the Council on Criminal Justice couldn't really agree on much. Only one factor was described as a major contributor by

Crime rates in American cities have never been lower. Why?

to 38 percent over that time, according to a running database maintained by Epic Research. In the world of education reform, there has been an awful lot of excitement about the so-called Mississippi Miracle, in which a new emphasis on phonics-based reading has generated some striking improvements in test scores in the South. But as even some of its most ardent proponents will acknowledge — and as classroom teachers might've predicted — not everyone implementing the new pedagogy has seen improvement. Few enduring social crises can be solved by silver-bullet policies, or even explained straightforwardly. Murder has been declining for decades now, and if anything, we know less about what has driven it now than we thought we did 10 or 20 years ago.



IBRAHIM RAYINTAKATH

One thing we can know, however, is where it has left us — with the country less murderous than it has ever been in our lifetimes. Maybe than it has ever been. This is amazing progress, but it is also pretty disorienting.

FOR A VERY LONG TIME, Americans have understood that theirs was a violent country, prone to killing, perhaps especially because of the widespread presence of guns. In many parts of the country, this pattern still holds: Murder rates are much higher in American cities than in European ones, even with the enormous recent declines, and perhaps all of the difference is attributable to guns.

But if the pace of New York's murder rate through October 2026 holds through the end of the year, the city will be safer than Berlin, Barcelona and Madrid, though still more deadly than many other European cities.

Perhaps even more striking: When looking past murder rates to lesser crimes, like assault and residential burglaries, it is no longer clear that U.S. cities should be regarded as more violent or crime-ridden than some of their counterparts in Europe. The best data we have shows that by several measures, U.S. cities are at least as safe, if not safer.

Comparisons like these are inherently tricky, which is one reason those studying crime prefer to focus on homicide rates: Dead bodies typically get reported to the police, and though there are some differences between what is counted as a murder in Lisbon versus Los Angeles, the differences are relatively small and the comparisons pretty easy to make.

But complicated is not the same thing as impossible, and for several years now the criminologist Matt Ashby at University College London has been working to standardize the relevant data to produce what he calls the "least worst comparison" between global cities — lining up jurisdictions and standardizing definitions and data to make it easier to compare the prevalence of car robberies in, say, Los Angeles and Rome. And the results are pretty eye-opening, especially for anyone who might assume that American cities are significantly more dangerous than those elsewhere in the rich world.

Comparing rates of assault with rates of injury, Ashby finds that Berlin is considerably more dangerous than New York, London is more dangerous than Chicago and Los Angeles is much safer than any of those cities. Rates of personal robbery are higher in Berlin and Paris than in New York and Los Angeles, he says. Rates in Chicago are almost twice as high as they are in New York — but rates in London are more than half the participants: the easing of social disruption from Covid, which isn't even the kind of policy change that might be easily implemented or built upon.

That we remain so unsure what is driving such a consequential shift seems, at first blush, pretty weird. But it shouldn't be, because crime isn't unique in this respect. Many of the forces most profoundly changing the shape of contemporary life remain pretty inscrutable when it comes to causes and stubborn when it comes to policy response.

Rates of rape — which are difficult to compare — are almost exactly the same in Paris and Chicago, and comparable between Barcelona, Los Angeles and Seoul. New York is far better. And London and Sydney are much worse.

It's uncomfortable to admit that we don't really know what lies behind a rise in suicide rates or school shootings, for instance, in part because we want to believe we have a solution we can lift off a shelf and implement right away, and in part because epistemological humility is psychologically uncomfortable and politically unpalatable. In an age of social media factionalism, we also tend to weaponize crises to score partisan points, even if doing so requires us to flatten what are pretty deep social pathologies into problems we insist can be solved easily — if only those on the other side of the argument would let us. More often than not, the opposite is true: We don't fully understand the challenge, or exactly what to do to address it, and the pathology persists in large part because it is complicated and hard to solve.

Positive surprises often remain mysterious, too, however eager you'd imagine leaders might be to claim higher still. Rates of rape — which are especially difficult to compare — are almost exactly the same in Paris and Chicago, and comparable between Barcelona, Los Angeles and Seoul. New York is far better. And London and Sydney are much worse.

This pattern is so contrary to conventional thinking about American crime that it can be hard to believe. And the difficulty of comparison means each data point should be taken with a grain of salt. But the country has also always been slow to acknowledge good news.

THE LAST FEW YEARS of crime rate trends have been especially vertiginous, but the story of America getting safer is a long one, stretching back four decades now. And yet for 33 of the past 36 years, a majority of Americans told pollsters that they believed crime was getting worse. In 2025, only 49 percent of the country said so — the lowest number since 2001, and a sign that the country's crime paranoia may be lessening if not disappearing entirely.

In some cases, there has been an even faster change in vibes. Forty-nine percent of voters in New York City reported crime as the most urgent issue facing the city in 2022. In 2026, only 9 percent of voters said crime was the most important issue in deciding who to vote for as governor. That is a spectacular drop in anxiety, which reflects pretty honestly the basic transformation of the risk landscape in the city. We don't yet know what changes of this scale might mean for policy and politics, especially if the pattern replicates nationally. But one possibility is experiments with public safety reform of the kind that looked, as recently as that last mayoralty, like political albatrosses and atavistic relics of so-called Woke 1.

DAVID WALLACE-WELLS, *a writer for Opinion and a columnist for The New York Times Magazine, is the author of "The Uninhabitable Earth."*

ACPM 19,344 **Printed in** Athens, Beijing, Beringen, Dubai, Frankfurt, Gallargues, Hong Kong, Islamabad, Karachi, Kathmandu, Kuala Lumpur, Lahore, London, Madrid, Milan, Nagoya, Osaka, Rome, Seoul, Taipei, Tel Aviv, Tokyo.
The New York Times Company 620 Eighth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10018-1405, NYTCo.com; The New York Times International Edition (ISSN: 2474-7149) is published six days per week. A.G. SULZBERGER, Publisher ©2026 The New York Times Company. All rights reserved. Commission Paritaire No. 0528 C83099.
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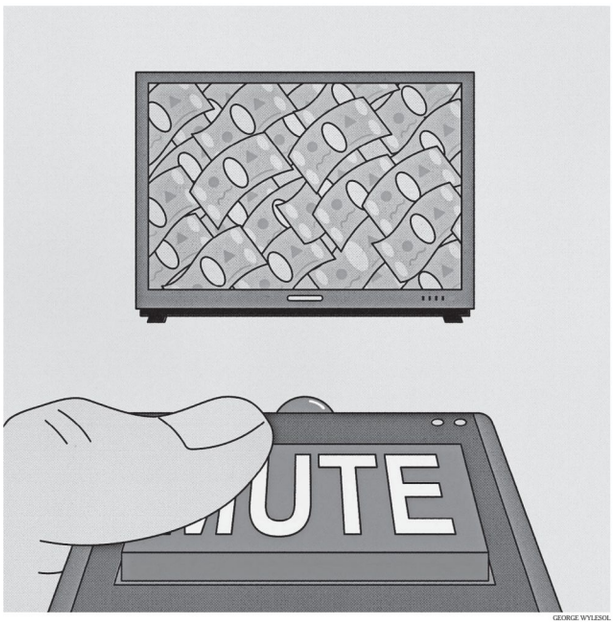
Regional Offices: U.K. 1 Bartholomew Close, 3rd Floor, London, EC1A 7BL; **Hong Kong** 1201 K.Wah Centre, 191 Java Road, North Point, Hong Kong; **France** 2, rue Favart, 75002 Paris, France. Printed in France by Midi Print ZAC du Pôle Actif. 18 Allée Piot 30660 Gallargues le Montueux.

OPINION

In movies and politics, money gets you only so far

Tom Rothman



GEORGE WYLESOL

In my youth in the movie business, a salty old distribution executive correctly predicted that a coming film of mine was about to fail miserably. "But we are spending so much money on marketing," I protested. "Listen, kid," he said, with a line Yogi Berra himself would envy, "if they ain't coming, you can't stop 'em."

I was put in mind of that wise malapropism in the wake of the recent midterms. For months, we'd heard how the overwhelming Republican money advantage was the greatest risk in an otherwise favorable environment for Democrats, with Republicans outspending Democrats on ads by late October by more than a quarter of a billion dollars in the Senate races alone.

In both endeavors, every once in a while a thrilling original will break through on the strength of a compelling narrative alone.

Democrats were fretting. After a lifetime of marketing movies, I was not.

Let me explain: Motion picture marketing is unusual among consumer-facing businesses because movie studios must sell a different product to the public every few weeks. So studios function, out of necessity, as extremely sophisticated marketing machines. But what we do resemble, to a remarkable degree, are political operations.

Both film marketing and political campaigns have an all-or-nothing imperative: Move a mass of people, all at once, on a single day. The goal of every studio is to "open," or succeed, on the first Friday of release, or there is no meaningful tomorrow. In politics, that day is Tuesday. Get out more votes than your opponent on that one day or look for another job. In movies and in politics, there are no makeup tests.

In the film business, big marketing spends can sometimes produce huge successes, and they give studios an advantage over streaming companies, which often spend relatively little on marketing. But even the heaviest advertising campaign is useless if the message isn't compelling. Of course, in film and in politics, nothing is more important than the product, be it a movie or a candidate. But in a world increasingly driven by social media, the narrative that takes hold around a film or a candidate can be equally significant.

I will toss the first stone at myself to illustrate. It is a painful one. I truly respect Aaron Sorkin's talent and believe him to be one of our greatest living screenwriters. I wanted us at Sony Pictures to make "The Social Reckoning" because I believed this intricate true story was a fascinating look at a vital societal concern. The Times's chief film critic, Manohla Dargis, wrote of the film, "Sorkin isn't just taking aim at social media, he is also sounding the alarm about American democracy."

I stand by the film. But try as we might, we could not get a mass audience to give a damn about it. Indeed, the more we told them about it, the less they seemed to want to see it. We tried dozens of different advertising formulations, but folks just didn't want to confront its subject matter, regardless of how or where we spent the money. They didn't come, and we couldn't stop them.

In the film business, this unfortunate circumstance happens to one company or another almost every month. Having invested in the product, we have to keep the faith and try to sell it. But spending money, even tens or hundreds of millions of dollars, without a message that spurs people to action is like lighting the cash on fire. As the recent efforts of the world's richest man, Elon Musk, just proved, there are some things no amount of money can buy. Even the most expensive advertising campaigns are useless if the narrative is not compelling and if the message is not placed properly.

Both parties aired TV ads this election cycle, but Republicans relied on a traditional heavy linear TV blitz in Texas and Ohio — an approach that went out with the answering machine. At Sony, we now have five marketing employees working in digital and social mediums around the world for every one working in legacy media. Anyone who watched either the Ohio State or University of Texas football games on the Saturday before the election was inundated with negative ads on Sherrod Brown and James Talarico. Both candidates, now senators-elect, easily covered the spread.

Democrats also employed multiple negative ads in those states and elsewhere because, sadly, such ads can work. But like all great advertising, they must be captivating. The Willie Horton ad in 1988 and the "Kamala is for they/them; President Trump is for you" 2024 ad stuck for a reason. But ask Vivek Ramaswamy, whose misbegotten attack ad against Amy Acton backfired badly, what happens if you get it wrong. Everything today is about the power of social media, and the blowback from the good people of Ohio, across the political spectrum, killed him.

There are many other commonalities between the movie business and politics. Both disciplines thrive on figures with big screen charisma: Julia Roberts, Brad Pitt, John F. Kennedy and Barack Obama are all movie stars. Both film and politics lean heavily on familiarity in the form of sequels, spinoffs and pre-existing brand recognition, whether it's "The Devil Wears Prada 2" or George W. Bush; "Minions" or Hillary Clinton; "Barbie" or . . . Donald Trump. And both rely on vital advance information; in political campaigns, it's polling, and at studios, we call it tracking. Every morning, the first thing I look at on my desk is that day's measure of the awareness and interest levels in our upcoming pictures versus those of our competitors — exactly as campaign managers and candidates do. We do this to ascertain, in both enterprises, the effectiveness or evolution of the messaging and the likelihood of success.

In both endeavors, those of us in the business of selling beat on, boats against the current, because for all the dominance of brands and all the negativity, every once in a while a thrilling original will break through on the strength of a compelling narrative alone. In film, think of the hit documentary "You Can See Everything," and in politics, think of Sam Forstag, the handsome young former smoke jumper (movie star!) who is now the first Democrat elected to the U.S. House from Montana in more than 30 years.

The midterms felt like a festival of feel-good Hollywood genres: Underdog, sports story-type triumphs were everywhere (Annie Andrews in South Carolina; Abdul El-Sayed in Michigan). Other races felt like dramas about the unmatched power of community, like Gina Hinojosa in Texas, or nail-biting thrillers, with Julia Letlow narrowly elected to become the first Republican woman to represent Louisiana in the Senate and Mary Peltola pulling out a victory in Alaska. (One of Peltola's campaign slogans was a locally resonant alliterative tagline any movie marketer would envy: "Fish, Family, Freedom.")

Please do not misunderstand. I think the "Citizens United" Supreme Court ruling is one of the worst things to ever befall politics in this country, because it legitimized and institutionalized the corrosive and corrupting process of using unlimited dollars to try to purchase influence. It's a plague on both our houses, Democratic and Republican. I am only saying that sometimes message can overcome money. And the converse — money can never overcome message.

Just consider Scott Colom, who pulled off one of the biggest upsets in Southern political history, becoming the first Black candidate elected to statewide office in Mississippi since Reconstruction. He and a group of committed Black activists worked in small communities to get out the vote, and Mr. Colom's clever "Pick Another Protein" ad went viral — and viral is the holy grail of modern marketing. It's also worth noting that Mr. Colom's closing ad was not about his opponent. It was about the legacy of Medgar Evers. Message!

Since I work at Sony, the home of Columbia Pictures, you might perhaps expect me to end a discussion of movies and politics with a reference to Frank Capra's "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington," a prized jewel in our film library. But more salient for me, actually, is Mr. Capra's "It's a Wonderful Life," distributed by RKO.

At the film's end, George Bailey is rescued by dozens of small-donor donations, coming from the many ordinary people he has helped in his community. (Please text $5 to G. Bailey, Bedford Falls, today!) Then his childhood friend Sam Wainwright comes in with the big PAC money, putting him over the top. As George beholds these generous gifts (for which I trust the proper disclosure forms were filed), he finds a book inscribed with a message from Clarence, his guardian angel, which could double as the real takeaway from the Nov. 3 elections: "Remember, no man is a failure who has friends."

TOM ROTHMAN *is the chief executive and chairman of Sony Pictures Motion Picture Group, a former chairman of 20th Century Fox and the founder of Fox Searchlight Pictures.*

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Here's why the Nvidia board folded

SARIN, FROM PAGE 1

not) are not comparable, but both instances show how little power today's boards have to constrain superstar executives. This is not an entirely new problem, but it's made much more urgent with the rise of A.I. Now the leaders who are too big to fire and too central to replace are the ones developing technology that could soon be too powerful to restrain.

In the past two years we have seen many threats to the foundations of the American economy: attacks on central bank independence, attempted politicization of our tax system, assaults on the rule of law. Corporate malfeasance, like the corruption of political elites, has come to feel ordinary. In such a climate, the idea that a corporation could effectively govern itself feels a little quaint.

The best case for the board's decision to reinstate Mr. Huang is also the simplest: Doing so caused Nvidia's stock to shoot up, which is good news for shareholders. But what's good for share price today isn't necessarily good for it tomorrow or in the long run. This is a story that will be with us for some time, as the national security consequences of Mr. Huang's actions come to light and a new Congress takes office and begins investigating. In any case, if the board feels reinstating Mr. Huang is the right choice, then how does it explain having so recently rejected that option?

Just last weekend Alexandr Wang, the chief A.I. officer of Meta, said it is "hard to imagine" humanity maintaining control over this new technology unless the industry meaningfully diverges from the path it's currently on. Forcing the industry to change course, and figuring out where a better future lies, may not be the job of a corporate board. But surely someone, somewhere, should be working on that?



PETER MARLOW/MAGNUM PHOTOS

NATASHA SARIN *is a professor at Yale Law School and the president of the Budget Lab at Yale. She served in the Treasury Department during the Biden administration.*

When greedy people divorce

GIVHAN, FROM PAGE 14

cheering for Carla and her zealous pursuit of all that Zephyr cash. I'd like to think that if I were ever in the throes of an awful divorce, I wouldn't obsess about getting more money than I could spend. But I love how her hunger unleashes the tactical skill and muscular intelligence of all the lady lawyers. As for Morgan, I feel sorry for the poor sap. He succumbed to an embarrassing, age-old cliché: the honey trap.

The honey trap is an ancient test of willpower, honor and lasciviousness that uses a comely young woman — or man — as bait to lure a hapless target into a compromising position. The success of the honey trap typically relies not so much on the tantalizing nature of the honey, but on the insecurity, entitlement or sheer stupidity of the entrapped. (The inadvertent echoes of the Huang mess are inescapable.)

Because Carla suspected Morgan of infidelity, she had a friend — an attractive young actress — throw Morgan a few admiring glances at a black-tie gala where he was being honored. Later, at his hotel, one thing led to another. With a selfie the honey-trapper took of them together in bed, the divorce drama was set in motion.

In the battle of the lawyers, it's mostly the men who flail about attempting to bully one another into submission and calling one another names. The women are the ones really in charge, and they've carved out their own beautifully landscaped low road paved with viciousness, honesty and analytics.

Carla has Serena Byrne (Phoebe Fox), a partner in a shiny new law firm that she founded with her husband. Serena is pregnant and balancing Zoom meetings with a prospective doula with devising ways to spin Carla's parenting lapses. Morgan has Beatrice Ubosi (Nina Sosanya), a lead partner in a white shoe firm who moves with such earned imperiousness that her colleagues defer to her as "Her Majesty." She does it all while enrobed in an eclectic assemblage of blacks and grays that calls to mind The Row, Yohji Yamamoto and Comme des Garçons.

"When are you due, by the way?" Beatrice asks Serena, who was once her protégé.

"Like you care," Serena responds with an amused smile.

And of course, Beatrice doesn't care. I do love these women.

The finale had a lot to make sense of: legal double-dealing, sexual entrapment and attempts at corporate espionage. I won't spoil it for you (much). What's notable is the tone of a parable. We are left with the image of Carla and Morgan on a Normandy beach, bundled up in lush woolens and tweeds, hair blowing in the nippy air. The money battle has ended and everyone is still standing.

Imagine. A tech mogul realizing there's enough to go around! In this winner-take-all era! It's an outcome that's even more welcome, more idealistic — and sadly implausible — than a social media platform that makes the world a kinder and safer place.

As for the show's devious lawyers, they were all able to declare victory. I'm happy to know that they will live on to squabble and scheme for Season 2. I hope only that their next clients will also have the will to survive them.

ROBIN GIVHAN *is a Pulitzer Prize-winning fashion critic and a former senior critic at large for The Washington Post.*

The FT View



FINANCIAL TIMES
'Without fear and without favour'

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Trump doubles down on his tariff agenda

New import levies on 14 trade partners defy voters and add to price pressures

Donald Trump's eve-of-Thanksgiving treat for American voters was new proposed tariffs on 14 US trading partners — barely three weeks after Democrats swept both houses of Congress in midterm elections in which the cost of living was a big factor. By doubling down on his signature policy the US president seems to signal a wilful disregard for voters' concerns; in midterm exit polling, two-thirds of voters said tariffs had hurt the US economy. Only a fifth thought they had helped.

The timing also seems especially unpropitious. On the same day, the Federal Reserve's preferred core PCE inflation measure for October — which strips out food and energy — came in higher than expected at 3.3 per cent, its highest for three years, while headline inflation accelerated to 3.8 per cent. The figures fuelled perceptions that price pressures in the US economy are firming.

The proposed tariffs on partners including the EU, Japan and South Korea as well as China and Vietnam were not unexpected. They are the Trump administration's latest effort to rebuild the tariff wall that was torn down when the US Supreme Court in February rejected the emergency legal basis for Trump's so-called liberation day levies last year — the same authority the White House used to enforce a string of bilateral trade deals into which it strong-armed partners.

The administration in July applied tariffs of 10 or 12.5 per cent to imports from 60 trading partners based on a claim that their import regimes were insufficiently tough on forced labour — but these are also facing legal challenges. The new proposed measures are said to punish countries that fuel excess capacity through unfair subsidies, giving the White House an alternative mechanism if the July tariffs are struck down too. Countries would face the higher of the two; rates are generally set at 15 to 20 per cent to align with those agreed in bilateral deals, with higher levies threatened for some countries — 25 per cent for India or 35 per cent for Vietnam — if they do not conclude a final deal. China could face an additional 40 per cent rate if the current trade truce with the US collapses.

But Yale University's Budget Lab estimates the new levies would lift the average US statutory tariff rate from 11.4 per cent in early 2027 to 13.9 per cent, close to the level before February's Supreme Court ruling — and enough to raise consumer prices by up to 0.3 per cent.

The proposed measures create more unpredictability for US companies, which must figure out how they are affected. Foreign businesses that are building US factories also face an irony: many decided to invest in the US to get behind Trump's tariff wall but the new levies are complex in terms of what capital goods are included.

> His proposed measures create more unpredictability for companies, which must now figure out how they are affected

Though they could yet be modified after consultations, the latest proposals seem to confirm Trump's dogged but misguided belief in the power of tariffs.

But there is an additional possible explanation for the White House's attachment to tariffs: given the yawning $2tn US deficit, it fears losing levies that brought in $264bn in net revenues last year. The Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget estimates that the new duties plus earlier tariff measures introduced this year would together recover about 80 per cent of the tariff income through to 2036 that would have been lost after February's court ruling.

If the next administration wants to unwind Trump's tariffs, it will have to work out how to replace those revenues. Just as the Biden administration retained most of the first Trump administration's China tariffs, the uncomfortable prospect for US trading partners is that his second-term tariffs could prove more sticky than expected.

Opinion US society

Bringing data to the Thanksgiving table

Ann Kiernan





Soumaya Keynes

As many Americans spend Thanksgiving stuffing themselves with pumpkin pie, a familiar fight rumbles on. Senior Democrats pointed to the rising cost of a 10-person turkey dinner as evidence of an affordability crisis. President Donald Trump was more upbeat, claiming at the White House turkey pardoning ceremony that prices were "coming down rapidly". The president was wrong; food prices have been rising. But I'm not sure the Democrats are totally right either.

The topic of food affordability is frustratingly fuzzy. One way of getting clarity is simply to ask people whether they have struggled to access food. This measure of food insecurity published by the UN shows a rising trend over the past few years, with over 10 per cent of Americans suffering in 2024. But that might say more about general financial precarity than specific stresses coming from high food prices.

> Food prices have been rising, but I'm not sure Democrats are right about an 'affordability crisis'

An alternative approach pins down affordability by analysing the price of the cheapest possible healthy diet. In 1945, the future Nobel laureate George Stigler won few friends calculating a "cost of subsistence" of $59.88 a year, based on a mix of wheat flour, cabbage, spinach, pancake flour and pork liver. He didn't recommend following the diet, but said that it beat "non-scientific" alternatives based on "palatability, variety and prestige".

Over the past few years, economists have revived this approach, updating it for modern-day nutrition (minus the pork liver). Perhaps surprisingly, the cost of a cheap healthy diet is similar around the world, at around $3-5 a day. It's particularly cheap in the US, at $2.86 per day. (A more sophisticated approach to nutrition and more detailed product prices, based on ingredients such as milk, frozen vegetables and wholegrain pasta, would slightly raise that figure.)

Those first prices combined with income data suggest that in 2025, about 4.5 per cent of Americans couldn't afford a healthy diet. That figure is outrageously high for one of the richest countries on the planet. It was also a higher share than in 2021, reflecting the surge in food prices after Russia invaded Ukraine. But it's lower than in 2017, somewhat at odds with the impression of a particularly acute crisis today.

I lived in the US long enough to understand that this calculation wouldn't pass muster with most Americans. A suggestion that Mississippians might "pick another protein" was toxic enough to feature in a political attack ad; I doubt "pick boiled pasta and veg" would fare better. Americans themselves judge "affordability" based on what they were recently able to buy — which makes food price trends a relevant metric.

Here the very recent figures don't point to an emergency either. Between 2006 and 2025, food-at-home prices rose by an average of around 2.6 per cent per year. This year, the US Department of Agriculture expects them to rise slightly more slowly, by 2.4 per cent. (Thanksgiving meals are unusual.) Prices of food away from home have been rising more quickly, though I'm not sure takeout is what is weighing most on Americans' minds.

It makes more sense that consumers have been strained by the high cumulative price changes over the past few years. Prices of food at home have risen by almost 33 per cent since the start of the pandemic, only just less than increases in average weekly earnings over that period. (And there will be many whose incomes didn't rise by as much.)

Although I appreciate that having your favourite staples or your kids' favourite foods drift out of reach will really hurt, there are limits to the idea that one can infer an affordability crisis from price changes alone. Americans' taste for beef has been strengthening just as its price has risen. To the third of the global population without enough money to afford even the cheapest possible healthy diet identified earlier, complaints about unaffordability might grate. There is also something a bit weird about blaming President Trump for cumulative increases in food prices, most of which happened when his predecessor was in office.

All that said, the Trump administration hasn't been helping. Its policies have contributed to a 14 per cent drop in the number of people receiving food benefits, to just below 36mn in August. (It is proposing to tighten eligibility further.) According to the Pricing Lab, led by Alberto Cavallo of Harvard Business School, Trump has imposed tariffs coinciding with food prices 3.9 per cent higher than their pre-tariff trend. Which leaves plenty for those with an appetite to keep the food affordability argument going.

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The economics of recruitment have changed — for the worse

The Burnham government's stated ambition to stimulate economic growth and increase employment sits uneasily alongside fiscal policies that have substantially increased the marginal cost of employing people, particularly those working relatively few hours ("Treasury resists Milburn plan to fight 'Neets' crisis with employer tax cuts", Report, November 20; and "My tax rises made Britain's economy stronger, says Rachel Reeves", Report, FT.com, November 2).

As managing director of Carroll Cleaning, a family business established 40 years ago and employing approximately 1,300 people across the north of England, I have witnessed the consequences first-hand. For labour-intensive businesses like ours, the combined effects of higher employer national insurance, rising wage rates and expanded statutory obligations are fundamentally changing the economics of recruitment.

In April 2025, the government increased employers' national insurance from 13.8 per cent to 15 per cent, while reducing the earnings threshold from £9,100 to £5,000.

For someone working 15 hours weekly at £12.21 per hour, the employer's NIC liability increased by more than 1,000 per cent. Our company's monthly NIC bill, previously around £20,000, subsequently rose to £55,000-£60,000 and has more recently reached approximately £75,000.

Then came the April 2026 statutory sick pay reforms, extending entitlement to lower-paid workers and abolishing the three unpaid waiting days. Our monthly SSP expenditure has recently reached almost £15,000, compared with £6,000-£8,000 previously. These costs come alongside successive minimum wage increases and growing employment law obligations.

I support fair wages and appropriate protection for employees. But there is a commercial reality that government appears unwilling to confront.

When employment becomes more expensive and financially unpredictable, businesses become more cautious about recruiting. Vacancies go unfilled, expansion plans are postponed and opportunities disappear.

The government says it wants growth, investment and more jobs, yet continues to increase the costs borne by the very businesses expected to deliver them. You cannot keep making employment more expensive and then express surprise when employers stop hiring.

Nicholas Carroll
Managing Director, Carroll Cleaning, Halifax, West Yorkshire, UK

De Gaulle's 'empty chair' crisis has lessons for Le Pen

Martin Wolf's column "The threat and opportunity of a French crisis" (Opinion, November 25) makes no mention of a previous occasion when a French president precipitated an existential crisis in what was then named the European Economic Community. In 1965, President Charles de Gaulle initiated an "empty chair" policy in Brussels. For six months there were no meetings of the then six member states; no councils, no meetings of the permanent representatives, no working groups, no commission proposals. Then de Gaulle was forced into a second round in the presidential election by an electorate deeply alarmed by his European policy. France settled for a pretty meaningless text on the use of majority voting and the institutions of the EEC resumed their work in a period of constructive development.

That precedent was quite some time ago. And the EU of today is very different to the EEC of 1965/66. But any adviser of a president Marine Le Pen who might be elected next year would surely do well to take account of it and to beware making similar mistakes. And Eurosceptics this side of the channel should also be wary of thinking that a Le Pen presidency would save us from needing to address the shortcomings of our present relationship with the EU in a serious and constructive manner.

David Hannay
House of Lords, London SW1, UK

Talking to Moscow

Simon Gass's op-ed "Europe needs to talk to Russia" (November 16) is timely. It is clearly important for Europe, including the UK, to establish a regular channel of communication with Russia and equally important to choose the right people to handle the discussions.

The team should include Russian specialists, especially if they speak Russian, as they will understand the real messages behind the language. In particular, they should have a deep knowledge of the history of Ukraine as well as Russia so that they can challenge Vladimir Putin's highly selective version of the countries' histories; Kievan Rus was a significant central European power in the ninth century, long before Russia existed as a country.

They should also base their discussions on the treaties signed by Russia, Ukraine and other countries following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The key ones are the 1991 Minsk agreement, which guaranteed the territorial integrity, individual rights and freedoms of each country, and the Budapest memorandum of 1994, which was signed by Russia, the US and the UK and prohibited them threatening or using military force against Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan, all of whom gave up their nuclear weapons (Ukraine had 1,700!). China and France also gave security guarantees. The team must make clear to Putin that no new agreement can be signed while Russia fails to comply with the above mentioned treaties.

CR Peer
Haywards Heath, West Sussex, UK



Young Americans pay twice for their pensions

In John Burn-Murdoch's Big Read "How pensions ate the state" (November 20) he largely overlooks the role of US public-sector pension funds.

These funds hold roughly $10tn, and they invest aggressively in companies like SpaceX and Anthropic, pre-IPO. Many are defined-benefit plans, meaning members are guaranteed a set payout regardless of investment performance. However, this means that when these returns fall short, governments have to cover the gap. And in the US, they do so by taking from public budgets, funded by taxpayers, that fund schools, infrastructure and childcare.

In short, we now have a system that gambles with public money while leaving taxpayers to pay the consequences. No wonder younger generations are struggling: they pay twice, first through asset prices, like housing, inflated by pension capital, and again when the public investment meant to support them is diverted to cover pension shortfalls. Any real solution to the generational squeeze needs to start there.

Masha Liberman
CEO of Humanism, Los Angeles, CA

Extending the franchise — Mrs Pankhurst would get it

Professor Philip Cowley questions young people's readiness to vote ("Why giving 16-year-olds the vote is misguided", Opinion, November 19). But surely many older voters also fall short of whatever standard of political knowledge or maturity he has in mind? Presumably he does not advocate disenfranchising them. What's more, if David Cameron, when prime minister, "sold the pass" by accepting that 16-year-olds would be allowed to vote in the Scottish independence referendum, research suggests it was a bargain well struck for democracy: young Scots first eligible to vote at 16 or 17 have continued to turn out in greater numbers than those who could only vote from the age of 18.

When Westminster last lowered the voting age — from 21 to 18 — the Labour MP Ivor Richard observed of the arguments against, that "Mrs Pankhurst would have understood [them] very well, because they are precisely the arguments which have been used against any proposal to extend the franchise ever since the Reform Act, 1870."

No one is now arguing for a return to a voting age of 21. How confident can today's opponents of extending the franchise be that their all too familiar objections will age better this time?

Tom Brake
Chief Executive of Unlock Democracy, London SE11, UK

Beware political canvassers with nefarious intent

In her Inside Politics piece "Giving 16-year-olds the vote is only half the job" (FT.com, November 6) Miranda Green makes some well considered points.

However, there are bigger concerns.

When we debated the people's representation bill in the Lords last week I pointed out that no thought has gone into protection for 16-year-olds who by definition are engaging with canvassers seeking to persuade them to support their party

The current draft legislation does not envisage a background check via the disclosure and barring service and in the debate the minister suggested this should be the responsibility of political parties.

But of course many canvassers are independent of a party.

Worse still, one can see that certain people will seek to identify 16-year-olds from the electoral register and then target them — on the pretext of canvassing them — for nefarious reasons. These children need considered protection.

Lord Leigh of Hurley
London SW1, UK

London keeps the HQ, the regions the vulnerable jobs

Jack Whitehouse's letter (November 14) rightly argues that the objective of "creating growth in every postcode" should not replicate the "carrot and stick" approach applied to address the UK's "regional problem" in the postwar period up to the late 1970s. This comprised planning controls such as industrial development certificates (subsequently extended to non-manufacturing activities with office development permits) to prevent companies from expanding in London and the South East and the west Midlands, which were economically overheating, and offering financial incentives (via regional development grants) to divert that growth to the "industrial heartland" regions (central Scotland, Merseyside, South Wales, North East England) that were suffering from high unemployment as a result of the decline of their industrial base.

The most detrimental outcome of this approach, as geographer Doreen Massey points out, is that it created a "spatial division of labour", that has had long-term detrimental effects on these regions. Companies relocated their low skill, routine activities to these regions while retaining their high-level corporate functions, research and development and high-level manufacturing in and around London. Moreover, the relocated functions were dominated by mature manufacturing products with limited economic spillover effects and were vulnerable to closure at the end of their lifecycle or relocation to low-cost countries once the financial incentives had ended. Creating growth in all postcodes requires a bottom-up approach that develops entrepreneurial ecosystems — the fertile soil that fosters entrepreneurial activity.

Colin Mason
Emeritus Professor of Entrepreneurship, Adam Smith Business School, University of Glasgow, Scotland, UK

Britain's wealth fund and where it spends its billions

Re the question Gill Plimmer and Sam Fleming pose — "Is Britain's state wealth fund putting its billions in the right places?" (Report, November 20) — UK policy on R&D support over the past 50 years has been to part-fund projects that can raise typically 50 per cent from private funds. If the project is good enough to raise 50 per cent, it can raise 100 per cent. Government funding should be reserved only for those projects that the private sector will NOT fund.

Chris Elliott
Cranleigh, Surrey, UK

Opinion

The invisible strength of the UK economy

BUSINESS



John Gapper

The UK has one of the most surprising economies in the world, judging by how politicians and policymakers have reacted to its recent growth. They are so used to focusing on its weaknesses, from a sluggish housing market to muted wage growth and pain on the high street, that they seem taken aback by its strength.

The economy grew at an estimated annual rate of 1.9 per cent in the third quarter of this year, and calculations of productivity growth since the global financial crisis have been upgraded. Chancellor John Healey praised its "standout resilience" and the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee described it as "much stronger than anticipated" at the start of the Iran war.

They ought not to be shocked. Much of the year's growth has been driven by business investment in technology and AI, with Britain's high-value services sector gaining momentum. Information, communication and professional services, including computer programming and consultancy, have been expanding faster than the UK economy as a whole, helped by AI adoption.

Such businesses were once known as British Invisibles, and for casual observers of the UK economy they remain invisible still. That is partly because many provide services to other companies, rather than directly to consumers and households. So they often slip by unnoticed except by those who work for them, which many people do.

While London is known for its banks, law firms and consultants, they are also integral to other UK cities. Prime Minister Andy Burnham wants to reindustrialise Britain, drawing on his time as Greater Manchester mayor. But more than half a million people now work in professional and business services in the north-west, five times as many as in advanced manufacturing.

Services make up more than 80 per cent of the UK's economic output and high-value sectors help to prop up its balance of payments. The country's £58bn trade deficit last year in cars and other consumer goods was slightly outweighed by its trade surplus in business services such as management consulting and legal, architectural and engineering services.

> High-value services is where investment naturally flows and productivity growth is emerging

The fact that the UK moved into services as it deindustrialised from the 1960s onwards is not a secret. But Brexit led to a renewed political focus on towns and regions that have declined as a result, while growth in white-collar sectors is less appreciated. The latter is "the defining feature of the post-Covid economy", writes Bruna Skarica, chief UK economist of Morgan Stanley.

Something interesting is now happening in these industries. While Britain is prone to slow adoption of technology in manufacturing, technology companies are investing heavily in AI, together with legal, accounting and consulting firms. Skarica expects robust growth in business services to continue, helped by the UK's trade links with the faster-growing US economy.

It can be hard to grasp how much of the UK economy runs on services. Rolls-Royce is a global exporter of aircraft engines, but it makes more money from servicing than selling them. Engineering consultancy is an obscure industry, but both Arup and Mott MacDonald have annual sales of more than £2bn and work on buildings and infrastructure in many countries.

Perhaps it helps that business-to-business services are not better known, given that many are doing fine outside the spotlight. Consumer-facing sectors such as retailing and homebuilding get greater political attention, only to be hit by increases in taxation and regulation. There is a benefit to being left alone.

But the fact that policymakers keep getting surprised by the vibrancy of the economy suggests they should get out more. When I visit British companies and cities, the reality in front of me often does not fit the conventional picture of UK malaise. High streets and old industrial districts have faded but offices and laboratories are rising.

James Farmer, founder of the B2B Nations Institute consultancy, argues that the UK is "attempting to run a 21st-century economy using a 20th-century mental model". While financial and business services are recognised in the government's industrial strategy, their significance is not: "People do not understand where our success lies."

Burnham should understand it, given the way Manchester grew by encouraging high-value services. They are where business investment naturally flows, where productivity growth is emerging, and where economic potential is greater than in the old economy. The country might feel more at ease with itself if the prime minister let others in on the secret.

john.gapper@ft.com

Britain's bonfire of the quangos doom loop

POLITICS



Stephen Bush

There's a new consensus forming in Westminster. You might call it "Sunaighism": a combination of the politicians who have given the two clearest explanations of it. Former prime minister Rishi Sunak this week urged his successor Andy Burnham to aim for "a radical transfer of power from unelected and unaccountable bodies to elected and accountable ministers", while Louise Haigh, Burnham's de facto deputy, used a speech to business leaders to decry the "hulking, complex behemoth of a regulatory state" that successive governments have built.

The theory runs like this: the UK now has far too many quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations — quangos, in the jargon — and these intersect poorly with various statutory duties and obligations, leading to a state that is slow and risk-averse. To make matters worse, the heads of quangos, unlike politicians, are essentially unaccountable to the public.

Sunaighism is not a new idea. Margaret Thatcher in 1979, Tony Blair in 1997 and David Cameron in 2010 all came into office decrying the growth of quangos. They left office having learnt to stop worrying and love them: indeed, most of these organisations, when you look at them, are either direct products of the administrative revolution that took place under Thatcher and John Major, or have a clear ancestor from that period.

But today's version is different. In 2024, Labour did not come into office pledging to scrap quangos, but rather vowed to create several new ones, quite a few of which had a nebulous purpose, such as Skills England. Over the past two years, though, they have changed their minds. The most significant act of Wes Streeting as health secretary was to scrap NHS England, the world's largest quango, which will breathe its last in 2027.

Seen one way, this about-turn is a sign of changing circumstances: that while quangos serve a necessary purpose, the Keir Starmer government's conversion to scrapping them — a cause taken up enthusiastically by Burnham's administration — is a sign the UK really does have too many of them.

Iain Mansfield of Policy Exchange (the centre-right think-tank that has done most of the intellectual heavy lifting on scrapping quangos) likens policymaking to software development: just as any piece of software requires tweaks and bug fixes once it enters the unpredictable world of users, so too does public policy. And like software, different parts of it can interact in unexpected ways.

This thesis is essentially that the British state is suffering from an excess of what programmers call "cruft" — outdated or poorly written code that slows the proper functioning of a system. The result is a mishmash of bodies and regulations. Some hail from James Callaghan's attempts to restrain the interventionist state of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. Others from Thatcher and Major's shift of power towards markets, with quangos as a necessary referee. Still more were uneasily bolted on during New Labour's expansion of judicial power as a constraint on the administrative state. This may have been a great way to run the UK during a financial services boom, but at a time when the country's pressing challenges involve building more infrastructure, it actively stops the country from delivering the basics, like building enough homes.

Ewan White



> One problem is that most are orphans, created by ministers who have long since moved on

There is some merit in this view. One problem is that most quangos are orphans — they were created by ministers who thought in great detail about who they wanted to chair them and what they wanted them to do. Now, though, all these people have long since moved on. The orphans go from being effective delivery bodies to sclerotic, forgotten organisations that clog up the state's arteries. The right way to understand the tide of new governments that come in, pledge to scrap quangos and then recreate them isn't as naive politicians discovering things are more complicated than they thought, but as a necessary process of administrative renewal. Labour's embrace of Sunaighism is, in that way, a belated act that it should have begun in opposition.

But it is also a way that UK politicians self-soothe about why the state is risk-averse and unable to deliver at pace. In recent years, under both Conservative and Labour governments, MPs have passed, on a cross-party basis, measures to force all institutions with 200 people or more on site to produce lengthy anti-terror plans and placed a "duty of candour" on all public servants. You can agree with these measures, but it is hardly a surprise that arms-length bodies have become risk-averse when every signal from elected politicians is that risk tolerance and moving at speed should come a distant second to safety, security and scrutiny.

The useful wisdom of Westminster's new consensus is that Whitehall's quangos require active management, both in terms of intermittent pruning and attention to who leads them. But the dangerous part is that all this distracts politicians from the ugly truth, which is that when it comes to the state's slow and risk-averse approach, the problem is not really one of unresponsive organisations, but an all-too-responsive class of legislators and ministers.

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Nvidia's 'great man theory' is flawed

TECHNOLOGY



John Thornhill

For a tech industry so hell-bent on automating away humans, it seems perverse to celebrate the cult of the individual in the way it does. But that's been the case with Jensen Huang, the disgraced boss of Nvidia, who came bouncing back after 11 days in exile, boosting his company's stock market value by almost $1tn on Monday.

No other industry is as dependent as semiconductors on the intricate interplay between thousands of anonymous designers, engineers and manufacturers across the planet. Yet to many in Silicon Valley, the stock market and the White House, Huang is the chip industry. "We have to protect our geniuses, and he's certainly a genius," President Donald Trump told CNBC, boasting of how he had persuaded Nvidia's board to reinstate Huang.

Investors have good reason to buy into the "great man theory" of business, echoing the historian Thomas Carlyle, who argued that the "history of the world is but the biography of great men." One of the most over-publicised yet under-analysed phenomena of our times has been the ability of inspirational founders to build remarkable companies that have defined new industries.

Three of the top 10 most valuable US public companies are still run by their founders (Nvidia, SpaceX and Meta). That would be four if you include Tesla, driven since its early days by Elon Musk. Three more (Microsoft, Alphabet and Amazon) remain heavily influenced by their creators, even if now run by non-founder chief executives.

A punchy case for "founder mode" was made by the tech investor Paul Graham in one of his famous essays. Founders often had the vision, passion, knowledge and grit needed to run businesses that professional managers lacked. But, according to Graham, almost no management books or business schools had paid as much attention to founder mode as it deserved.

It was sometimes a disaster for tech start-ups to switch from founder mode to manager mode and bring in outside executives, Graham wrote. All too often those "professional fakers" drove promising companies into the ground.

Unsurprisingly, that narrative went down well among Silicon Valley entrepreneurs, raised on easy money, founder controls and Ayn Rand novels extolling the genius of creators and the flaws of "second-handers."

> All companies will eventually outgrow their founders and have to revert to manager mode

But the great man theory of business, and history, has obvious limits. No doubt history would have been different had Napoleon been killed during the siege of Toulon in 1793. But it is also true that Napoleon would never have risen to power had the French Revolution not erupted four years earlier. Similarly, Huang would not have built Nvidia into a corporate colossus without the deep learning revolution in AI. Times shape people as much as people shape times.

Moreover, all companies will eventually outgrow their founders and have to revert to manager mode at some point. Some Big Tech companies have made a striking success of it. Apple, Microsoft and Alphabet may have lost the innovative spark they once had. But they have all added enormous stock market value since their founders handed over the management reins.

On returning to office, Huang has doubled down on founder mode, dismissing the need to change his management style or plan his succession. Indeed, one person close to the Nvidia boss told the FT that Huang should be asking: "How can I get some of those super voting shares so I can tell everybody to fuck off next time."

That would be a huge mistake. Whatever his talents, Huang has made some terrible errors of judgment that will continue to dog Nvidia. The newly empowered Democrats will hold hearings to examine whether Nvidia knowingly evaded chip export restrictions to China. The Securities and Exchange Commission is reportedly investigating the company's accounting practices amid suggestions by Scott Bessent, Treasury secretary, that it may have pressed "seemingly illicit sales" to China to "goose" its revenues. And investors will still question whether it makes sense for Nvidia to keep acting as the central bank of AI as the market is cracking.

Nvidia's weathervane board is clearly incapable of enforcing governance. The S&P credit rating agency this week warned it may soon downgrade Nvidia over this lack of board independence and key man risk. And Nvidia's share price has been sliding again. For the sake of his company, Huang should himself work out the best way to switch to manager mode and hand over power. Founder mode does not cut it any more at Nvidia, and survivor mode would be even worse.

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Do voters want vision or concision from politicians?

Michael Skapinker

Andy Burnham's reset with the EU has launched a debate on how far he intends to go — customs union, single market, full re-entry.

But reading the UK prime minister's reset speech at London's Guildhall on November 16, I was struck by the brevity of his sentences. "I do try to say things as I see them. And to be frank, we have lost more than we have gained in the last 10 years. The hard Brexit we were given is not good enough for Britain."

Compare his talk with one at the same venue by Harold Wilson in the 1960s. Wilson paid tribute to the UK's friendship with the US but said: "There is no future for Europe or for Britain if we allow American business and American industry so to dominate the strategic growth industries of our individual countries that they and not we are able to determine the pace and direction of Europe's industrial advance."

The same trend towards concision is apparent in the US. Take these two presidents employing the same metaphor. John F Kennedy at his inauguration in 1961: "Let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans — born in this century, tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace, proud of our ancient heritage — and unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this nation has always been committed, and to which we are committed today at home and around the world."

> There has been not only a reduction in sentence length but a fall in the number of big words used

And Barack Obama, speaking at the 2024 Democratic Party national convention that nominated Kamala Harris as its candidate to succeed Joe Biden: "Now the torch has been passed. Now it's up to all of us to fight for the America we believe in. And make no mistake: it will be a fight."

Academic research has confirmed that politicians are using shorter sentences. In a study of US presidents' inaugural addresses and speeches by UK party leaders, Russian academics Natalia Tsizhmovska and Leonid Martyushev found that between 1900 and 2000, the average number of words per sentence decreased from 30 to 16.

To assess whether this might be a phenomenon restricted to pre-written speeches, Jacques Savoy of the University of Neuchâtel studied US presidential campaign debates. Televised debates from Kennedy-Nixon in 1960 to Biden-Trump in 2020 and 2024 and Trump-Harris in 2024 showed not only a reduction in sentence length but a fall in the number of "big words" — those of six letters or more.

While about a quarter of Nixon, Kennedy and Gerald Ford's words were big, and 28 per cent of Jimmy Carter's, this fell to 15 to 17 per cent for Trump and Biden.

Why has this happened? While the desire to have short pithy phrases that can be turned into clips is one obvious reason, politicians in the pre-digital age were equally adept at creating what today would be regarded as excellent social-media snippets: Wilson's "white heat" of technology, Kennedy's "ask not what your country can do for you — ask what you can do for your country" or Franklin Roosevelt's "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself".

It might be because today's politicians have to compete with news overload and more platforms: once there were newspapers, radio and later television. Today there are also X, Instagram and TikTok.

Or possibly it has more to do with us, the listeners and viewers. As Savoy writes in his study: "While substantiated reasoning or a detailed explanation were the norm in the past, they are no longer required or even desired by the audience."

Perhaps we no longer have the patience or attention span to listen to a multi-clause sentence and don't feel able to vote for those who won't reduce their speeches to digestible bites.

The writer is an FT contributing editor

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EDITORIALS

NIMBYs didn't kill the South Loop stadium dreams of White Sox, Ishbia

It's back to the drawing board for Justin Ishbia and the Chicago White Sox.

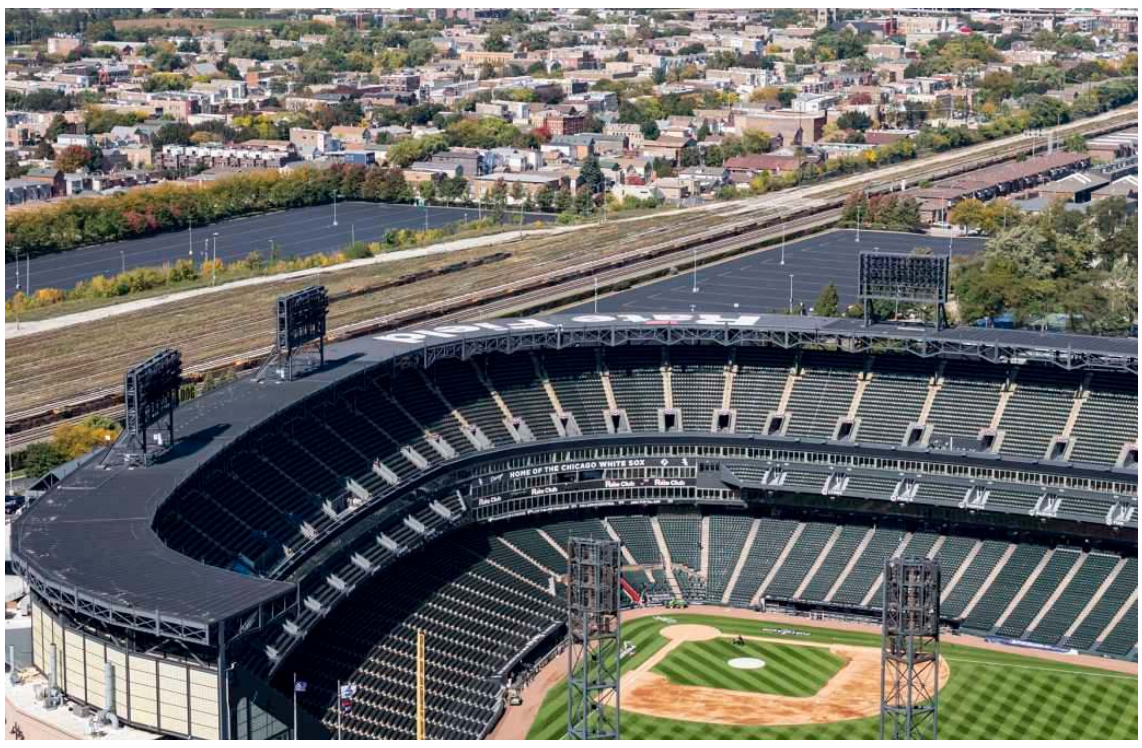
And that's not the worst thing in the world.

After proposing to build a new maintenance rail yard on Canal Street in Bridgeport on Chicago's South Side, the Federal Railroad Administration and Amtrak thought better of the plan and opted to update Amtrak's current operation on 14th Street in the South Loop. In so doing, the national passenger railway operator dashed the dreams of billionaire private-equity boss and future majority White Sox owner Ishbia of exiting Rate Field in Bridgeport for a newly constructed stadium on the South Loop property now occupied by Amtrak.

There was great consternation in Bridgeport when Ishbia and Amtrak's initial plans became public, due both to NIMBY opposition to a new quasi-industrial use in the neighborhood, albeit in an existing rail yard, and unhappiness over the prospect of losing the Sox, which have played their games in Bridgeport for more than a century.

Mayoral candidates Susana Mendoza and John Kelly both took victory laps after the news of Amtrak's change in plans surfaced, as if their opposition had anything to do with what happened.

Likewise, 13 miles to the northwest in suburban River Forest, Village President Cathy Adduci "congratulated" 13th Ward Ald. Nicole Lee and Cook County Commissioner John Daley for their "strong advocacy against the Amtrak proposal." Adduci said the developers of the O'Hare Flyer, the proposed (and badly needed) privately financed express train from downtown to the airport that would run through River Forest, ought to bow to her public pressure just as Amtrak supposedly did to Lee and Daley's.



The Amtrak maintenance facility plan near Rate Field included railroad tracks around West 35th Street between White Sox parking lots and the surrounding Bridgeport community. **BRIAN CASSELLA/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

Except, of course, that's not what happened.

The feds had no legal need to respond to parochial concerns and clearly neither the complaints of Amtrak's potential future neighbors nor various politicians attempting to curry favor with them drove this decision.

Instead, more mundane reasoning prevailed.

With $572 million in taxpayer money set to support the project, it simply was going to be far more costly to build the maintenance facility at the Canal Street location than to update the current 14th Street facility.

The needed refurbishment of 17 aged viaducts and bridges at the Bridgeport site added hundreds of millions over the coming decades to the price tag, not to mention a host of uncertainties that made the work far more complicated than necessary, the FRA said.

That the website Trains.com broke this important local news tells you a lot about the decision-making process at work here. This change was about, well, trains rather than the dreams of a billionaire professional sports franchise owner or the audacious plans of a city in need of more such visions. Or the objections of aggrieved residents.

That's not to say Ishbia was wrong to pursue his desire to facilitate Amtrak's move (with plenty of his own money) from the South Loop in order to move the team to a more exciting location. A White Sox stadium alongside the Chicago Fire's planned South Loop soccer stadium would have anchored a new destination neighborhood and transformed property that's been vacant for far too long in what by all rights should be a hot part of the city. The vision made a lot of sense.

We've seen other such plans come and go in this town before, sometimes because we shot ourselves in the foot. (See the Lucas Museum of Narrative Art, planned initially for Chicago's lakefront and open now in Los Angeles.)

No need to kick ourselves in this case. This idea died for a perfectly understandable reason. It clashed with the nation's passenger rail needs, and Chicago long has been the railroad crossroads of America. That priority had to come first.

For Ishbia no doubt this outcome hurts, but we would urge him not to be discouraged and to continue to think big in terms of a new home for the Sox. The team's lease at publicly owned Rate Field — which offers a perfectly fine viewing experience but is hardly anyone's idea of a baseball temple — expires after the 2029 season with an option to play one more year in 2030. The Sox and the authority that owns the stadium might anticipate now needing to extend that lease at least a few more years after that.

For all the public discussion of a new stadium for the Bears, a topic that may well be addressed next week in Springfield, a baseball stadium is a far more effective stimulator of a neighborhood's economy. (See Wrigley Field, Lakeview, the Cubs and the Ricketts family.) Baseball teams play 82 home games a year; football teams play a fraction of that total.

We look forward to whatever Ishbia has in mind next.

Black Friday, now going the way of Blu-rays and console TVs

And Cyber Monday? Try Cyber Everyday.

Today is Black Friday. Who still cares?

When you woke up, did you even remember? And did your kids know what you were talking about?

There was a time — it really wasn't that long ago — when the cultural centrality of the traditional kickoff of the holiday shopping season was unavoidable, whether or not you were much of a shopper.

The media would dutifully cover the long lines of people gathering in the ink-black early morning to race into the local big-box store as the doors opened to snatch the deals, which most of those folks could be assured wouldn't get any better in the run-up to the holidays. Their lost sleep absolutely was a worthy sacrifice, measured by the inch of a flat TV screen.

Business reporters, seeking insight into the health of an economy that overwhelmingly depended (and depends) on consumer spending, would call retail executives and analysts for minute-by-minute reporting on how the day went.

These days? While you're sure to see a few of those stories, it's just not the same. Black Friday seems on its way to becoming yet another shopping day on the path to making holiday dreams come true.

It's not that the Black Friday phenomenon has disappeared entirely, of course. Retailers still advertise Black Friday deals, and intrepid shoppers still march out to Michigan Avenue, Old Orchard or other landmark shopping destinations while still digesting the previous day's feast, perhaps as much to scratch their nostalgia itch as to find that perfect gift. Hey, it's a great way to get your steps in! No judgment here.

As in previous years, Small Business Saturday will follow and then will come Cyber Monday and finally Giving Tuesday. Do we hear any takers for Subscription Wednesday? You've heard about the precarious state of the journalism industry, right?



Shoppers rush in for deals at the Toys R Us store at 3330 N. Western Ave. in Chicago after it opened at midnight for Black Friday sales Nov. 27, 2009. **SCOTT STRAZZANTE/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

All of the businesses and organizations who rely on the interest ginned up by these various days — and stuff your inboxes while doing so — are doing exactly what they should be doing. This is the United States of America, after all. At last check, we still rely on a capitalist economy.

But even as many of us would love to travel back to a time when shoppers rubbed shoulders and strangers exchanged cheerful holiday greetings in the fresh chill of early winter, most of us are going to be snagging the vast bulk of our gifts with the click of a mouse. Cyber Monday is Cyber Everyday now.

And, unlike in past eras, sales likely are to be as generous (or maybe more so) than they are today the longer you wait. The bigger concern, really, is whether overwhelmed package-delivery firms will get your presents to your doorstep in time for the big day. We've certainly had to inform family members their gift was "coming soon" in recent years past. No one was too disappointed in our experience, although we'll allow this laissez-faire approach doesn't work well for those under the age of, say, 9.

So if you are making the pilgrimage to Woodfield Mall or the retail mecca of your choice, we salute your hearty upholding of the tradition. Each to their own and happy Black Friday.

ON THIS DAY 41 YEARS AGO
A SUPERIOR SITE FOR A STADIUM

Mayor Washington picked the best of the lot when he singled out the riverbank south of Roosevelt Road for a new sports stadium. It's the only one of the six potential sites that is vacant. It's big enough for two stadiums plus parking lots, close enough to McCormick Place for joint events and just a few blocks from expressway access and rapid transit stations.

All the other sites have selling points, but none matches the riverfront for its combination of accessibility and available space.

That location has an additional advantage. It's within walking distance of the reviving South Loop restaurant and hotel district. The same day the mayor picked the site, plans were announced for yet another South Loop plum: the conversion of the empty YMCA hotel into an apartment building with stores, restaurants and six movie theaters.

Beyond the selection of a good site, however, the stadium plans are tenuous. Jerry Reinsdorf, chairman of the White Sox, has valid criticisms of the configuration of a joint baseball-football stadium. But are twin stadiums financially feasible? And can the Bears be freed from their Soldier Field lease without handing over a new stadium to the mismanagement of Park District Supt. Edmund Kelly?

The team that wants to develop the riverfront site has impressive financial resources and heavy clout with both of Chicago's warring political factions, so perhaps it can pull it off. It will, of course, have to change the state law banning night games in any Chicago stadium that did not have them prior to 1982.

And it will have to build and run the complex without mortgaging tax dollars. The mayor's offer of tax-free revenue bonds to secure low-cost financing involves no public liability, and steering clear of liability should be an inflexible ingredient of any stadium plan.

Tribune editorial board, Nov. 27, 1985

EDITORIAL CARTOON



DREW SHENEMAN

OPINION

How Rikidōzan spread American-style professional wrestling in post-Word War II Japan

By Irvin Muchnick



Student wrestlers fight in the ring during the Student Pro-Wrestling Summit in 2015 in Tokyo. Members of college pro wrestling clubs from across Japan gathered to compete in their final graduation fight night. **CHRIS MCGRATH/GETTY**

Japanese American relations never lack for resonance, intensity and bitter irony. Current issues include tariffs and Japan's newly unapologetic military buildup, as well as the heated case of the U.S. Marine accused of murder on Okinawa.

But the period of occupation following World War II enjoyed a significant marker given short shrift in history: The birth of American-style professional wrestling in Japan, called puroresu.

As populist entertainment, pro wrestling has always had a particular place in the pop culture firmament. In the age of Donald Trump, the carnival-rooted wrestling term "kayfabe," defining how its practitioners juggle reality and fiction, has come to get bandied about by the punditocracy, with a mix of smarts and gullibility.

Rikidōzan was the alpha of puroresu early in its history. Except for the emperor's, no celebrity face was more recognizable in 1950s Japan than Rikidōzan's. In 1954, the first arena shows of Rikidōzan's Japan Wrestling Association were fed via closed-circuit television to 200 outdoor locations across the country. Spontaneous and frenzied fans climbed lamp posts and hillsides for views of the screens, and blocked car traffic. Out of a national population at the time of 90 million, as estimated 24 million watched on fledgling home TV and closed circuit.

Like American variety show host Milton Berle and sitcom mogul Desi Arnaz, husband of Lucille Ball, Rikidōzan is credited for the skyrocketing early sales of television sets. What the Japanese public didn't know was that, like the Cuban Arnaz, Rikidōzan was "gaijin" — a foreigner. But unlike Arnaz, who was unafraid to flaunt his Spanish accent and Latin-inflected demeanor in the U.S., Rikidōzan kept his origin a secret in fiercely homogenous Japan. He was born Kim Sin-rak in a tiny village during colonial occupation, in what would become the Democratic People's Republic of Korea — or North Korea. Like more than a million other Koreans, some forcibly, he moved to Japan, in his case to forge a career in the traditional martial sport of sumo.

As novelist Min Jin Lee and others have documented, the Korean diaspora is one of the signature phenomena of contemporary global culture. Much like the Irish and diaspora Jews, Koreans came to punch above their weight in world entertainment and literature. But for many Korean-Japanese, called Zainichi, the process played out in stealth. A fellow Zainichi, baseball star Isao Harimoto, who had survived the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, urged Rikidōzan to come out of the ethnic closet. He refused. The Japanese had treated Koreans "like insects," Rikidōzan told Harimoto. "How many Japanese believe that Japanese and Koreans are equal? I became a star because people think that I am Japanese."

The history of pro wrestling is dotted with parallel incoherence. Most of the Japanese bad guys, or "heels," who performed in the U.S. after the war were Japanese-Hawaiian. Some were Polynesians — same difference as far as the booing spectators were concerned. Others were second-generation Japanese Americans, or "nisei," who had served in the 442nd Infantry Regiment, a unit decorated with more Purple Hearts per capita than any in American military history.

Rikidōzan was a good enough athlete but not really elite. Before turning to pro wrestling, he washed out in sumo without making it to the top rank of yokozuna. Once he caught the puroresu bug, he got seasoned in Hawaii by a cohort of rising stars, including Harold Sakata, who would go on to portray James Bond's nemesis Oddjob in the 1964 movie "Goldfinger."

What Rikidōzan had over pretenders to the throne was excellent business acumen. In the match to determine the country's nominal champion, he double-crossed Masahiko Kimura, one of the greatest judo fighters of all time, by going off-script in what had been choreographed to be a draw to boost rematch sales.

Inside the ring, Rikidōzan's coup de grace was the most stereotypical of moves, a dreaded karate chop, which was telegraphed from Nagano to Nagoya, and felled his American antagonists like axed oak trees. He compensated his gaijin foils handsomely in service of lifting the spirits of his Japanese fans. The Americans got paid off the books in cash greenbacks, not weak Japanese yen.

For about 20 years starting in 1959, an aggressive recruitment campaign by Kim Il Sung, the founding premier of North Korea, resulted in the extraordinary repatriation there of around 93,000 people whose families had come from both the North and the South. They carried back stories of the prowess of the great wrestler Rikidōzan. In 1961, he made a secret trip back home himself and was reunited with family members.

According to later North Korean propaganda, Rikidōzan also planned to repatriate, before Japanese and American conspirators murdered him. The truth was that Rikidōzan, an out-of-control Tokyo nightlife bully, got knifed to death in a tawdry nightclub brawl in December 1963.

In 1995, Kim Il Sung's son and successor, Kim Jong Il, worked with Antonio Inoki, one of Rikidōzan's disciples, to stage a wrestling super-spectacular, the International Sports and Culture Festival for Peace, at a stadium in Pyongyang. This was 18 years before Dennis Rodman, the retired NBA star, befriended Kim Jong Il's son and successor, Kim Jong Un, and produced a fawning documentary about North Korean life. It was 23 years before strongman manqué Trump sat down with Kim Jong Un for a snap summit in Singapore, a prelude to Trump's direction of his United Nations ambassador to cast the occasional vote on a controversial resolution on the same side as North Korea.

Attendance at Inoki's event totaled more than 200,000 — one of the largest live crowds in pro wrestling history.

When writer Adam Johnson did field research in North Korea for his Pulitzer Prize-winning 2012 novel "The Orphan Master's Son," he found that rice wine branded with Rikidōzan's name and likeness was still being sold there.

A bronze bust memorializes Rikidōzan at the Ikegami Honmon-ji temple in Tokyo's Ōta Ward. Honmon-ji is also the final resting place of Rikidōzan cronies, ultranationalist anticommunist politicians and reputed CIA assets Yoshio Kodama and Banboku Ōno — the puroresu kingpin's tag-team partners in the project of restoring Japan's postwar pride in the 1950s.

Irvin Muchnick is author of "Pachinko Man: The Life and Meaning of Pro Wrestling Legend Rikidōzan," which will be published Jan. 26.

Winter blahs? Here are new books for the architecture enthusiast



Edward Keegan



The interior of the multilevel main dome in the Sam and Ruth Van Sickle Ford House, designed by architect Bruce Goff and built in 1949-50 in Aurora, as shown on Oct. 9, 2025. **E. JASON WAMBSGANS/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

With the holidays upon us, cold weather and impending snow can make it less desirable to get out and explore architecture. And while nothing can fully substitute for the physical experience of a building or urban space, books can deepen our understanding and whet our appetites for explorations in the months to come. Here are some new titles that can make any architecture enthusiast's season a bit brighter.

Cities are complicated. And every city is a mix of planning, architecture and chance. Paul Goldberger, longtime critic for The New York Times, The New Yorker and, more recently, Vanity Fair, considers these varied ingredients in his newest book "The Imperfect City: Design, Serendipity, and the Real Life of Cities" ($40, Knopf). The book looks closely at New York, Paris, Chicago, Amsterdam, Rome, Singapore and Los Angeles, while touching on many others throughout Goldberger's engaging text. It's a deeply personal book that reflects a lifetime of experience and contemplation about these enduring places.

"It's the result of my own visceral discomfort with formulas and dogma and ideology," Goldberger recently told me. "There really is no one-size-fits-all; there's no formula; there's no right way to make a city." Goldberger will join former Tribune architecture critic Blair Kamin at the Chicago Architecture Center on Dec. 7 to discuss the book.

Chicagoans are well aware of the stunning and highly personal ornament developed by Louis Sullivan for his buildings. In the last years of his life, the architect drew an elaborate set of delicate pencil drawings that became an oversize tome titled "A System of Architectural Ornament: According With a Philosophy of Man's Powers" ($95, Art Institute of Chicago; University of Chicago Press). This new edition was made possible by the Art Institute of Chicago, which commissioned and still holds the original renderings. It's accompanied by a reader's guide that features an essay by Art Institute curator Alison Fisher. This is the third edition of the book and is the first full-scale facsimile since its initial publication a century ago.

Some of Chicago's most memorable places exist in two dimensions on the walls of our museums. We all know Grant Wood's "American Gothic," but art historian Wanda M. Corn unravels the layers of meanings that have accrued to the work and its progeny since its creation in "The Couple With the Pitchfork" ($49.95, Princeton University Press). While it's just a painting, the simple wood building in the background of Wood's iconic "American Gothic" at the Art Institute remains part of this varied afterlife and is better known than many of our "real" buildings.

A somewhat unexpected take on famed artist Georgia O'Keeffe is on view at the Detroit Institute of Arts through Jan. 3. "Georgia O'Keeffe Architecture" ($35, Detroit Institute of Arts; Yale University Press) features a focused view of the artist's take on the built environment. O'Keefe's paintings of buildings are hardly unknown, but seeing them gathered in the accompanying exhibition catalog will provide an aesthetic delight for years to come.

Much recent attention has turned to the ghastly new proposed North Portico Welcome Hall to the Griffin Museum of Science and Industry that turns its broad front lawn into a ginormous putt-putt course. The project was designed by RAMSA, the late Robert A.M. Stern's New York-based firm. While not apparent at the museum, a new book dedicated to the firm's large-scale residential work, "Urban Elegance: Classic Contemporary Living" ($79.95, Monacelli), shows that the firm knows how to properly handle classical and traditional architecture, including One Bennett Park in Streeterville. That building evokes a certain period of New York architecture rendered in cardboard-thin stone walls punctuated with a touch of postmodern agitation — which describes a lot of the work throughout the volume.

Chicago architect Iker Gil's MAS Context never fails to impress with its continuing series of lectures and publications. It has launched a new book series with the "Sam and Ruth Van Sickle Ford House" ($35, MAS Context) — a look at Bruce Goff's memorable domestic design in Aurora. And the catalog for last year's Art Institute of Chicago exhibition "Bruce Goff: Material Worlds" ($50, Art Institute of Chicago; Yale University Press) remains a great look at the architect's ever-fascinating work.

"Chicago's Art Deco Skyscrapers" ($50, University of Chicago Press) by Joseph Gustaitis is a jazzy look at a series of buildings well-known to most of us. Deco originated in Paris and is often associated with New York City, but this new book reminds us that Chicago is hardly lacking in this most memorable style of the late 1920s and early 1930s.

Jens Jensen was one of the most important Midwest-based landscape designers of the early 20th century, leaving his mark on many of Chicago's West Side parks. The recently published biography "Jens Jensen: Nature's Artist" ($24.95, 3 Fields Books) by William H. Tishler ably examines the entire breadth of his career.

Finally, as a holiday antidote to the myriad design horrors now under construction in Washington, D.C., "Inside Our White House: A Cutaway 3D Tour of America's Most Famous Home" ($24.99, Bushel & Peck Books) by graphic designer Kurt Wahlner looks at the executive mansion through memorable original drawings that cut through parts of the house to reveal seldom recognized architectural relationships. In ostensibly a children's book, Wahlner depicts a delightful world where the Rose Garden is still a garden, the South Lawn is not a heliport, and the East Wing still stands.

And one more thing. Not a book, but a broadsheet periodical, the New York Review of Architecture is usually a cheeky yet serious look at contemporary architectural culture with a distinct New York bent. The most recent issue, now available online and at select bookstores, is dubbed the Chicago Review of Architecture and takes a broad look at new (and old) work under the editorial direction of Chicagoans Zach Mortice, Anjulie Rao and Kate Wagner. It's worth a read.

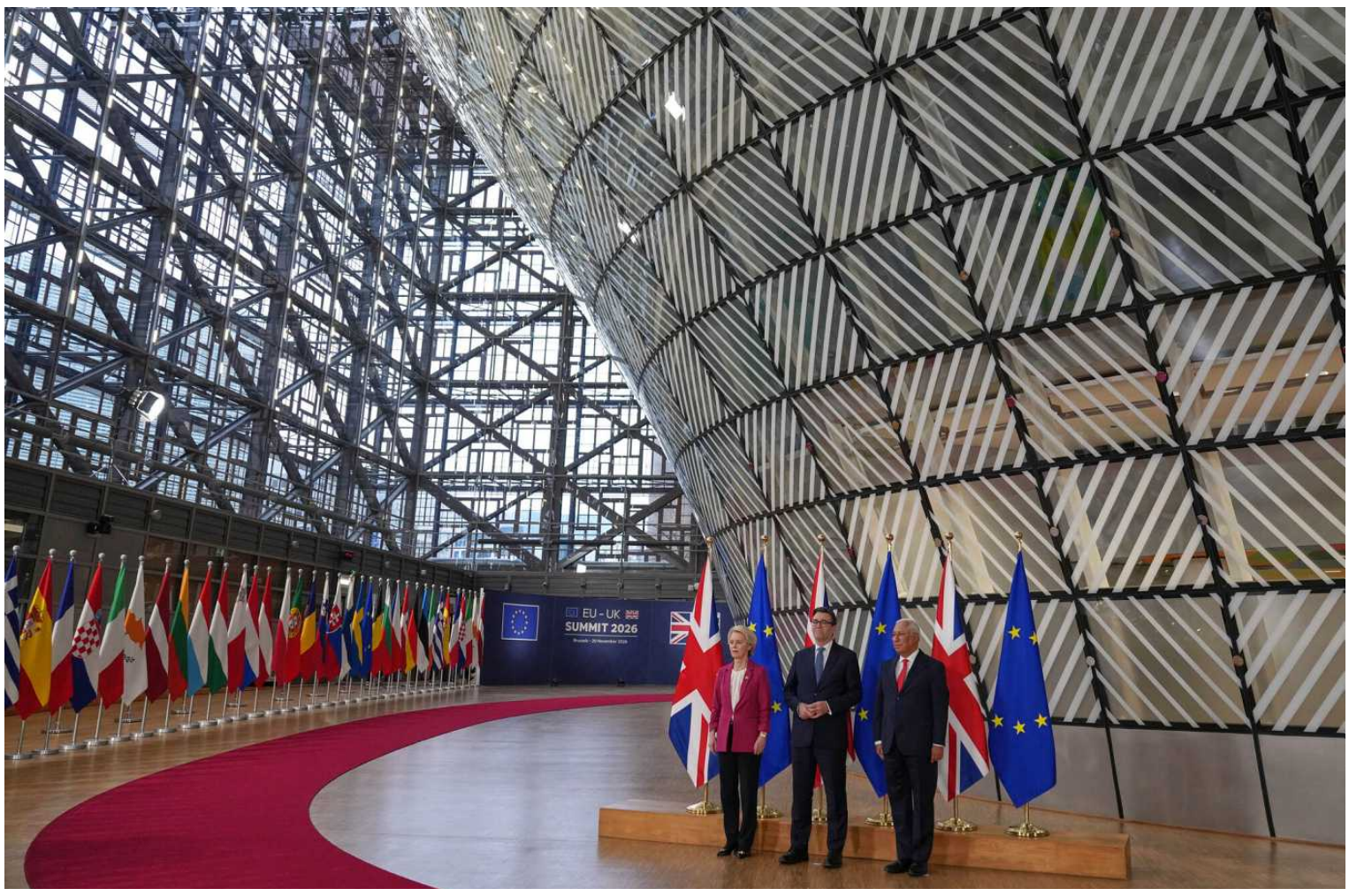
Edward Keegan writes, broadcasts and teaches on architectural subjects. Keegan's biweekly architecture column is supported by a grant from former Tribune critic Blair Kamin, as administered by the not-for-profit Journalism Funding Partners. The Tribune maintains editorial control over assignments and content.

OPINION

Could the UK undo Brexit?



Elizabeth Shackelford



Britain's Prime Minister Andy Burnham is welcomed by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, left, and European Council President Antonio Costa to the EU-UK Summit at the European Council building in Brussels on Nov. 20. **VIRGINIA MAYO/AP**

A decade ago, the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union. Brexit was the result of a referendum vote in which 52% of the country opted for divorce from its largest trading partner. Brexit's champions promised prosperity and strength through greater independence, but the benefits never materialized. Instead, the country's economy shrank, productivity and investment stalled, and the standard of living fell.

The sense of regret is real: Most Britons today would prefer to rejoin the EU. But could Brexit actually be undone? For the first time since the divorce, a return to the EU may be on the table, but it has a hard road ahead. In foreign affairs, as in life, it's much harder to rebuild ties and relationships than it is to rip them apart.

Time has shown definitively that the U.K. is better off in the EU than outside it. The U.K. doesn't have the geography, economy, technology or resources to be a wealthy country on its own. The EU is still the U.K.'s biggest trading partner by far, but since Brexit, the obstacles to trade in the form of customs paperwork, visa restrictions and border certification are dramatic and costly. Experts assert that the British economy is 4% to 8% smaller than it would have been had it stayed in the EU. British citizens who once took for granted that they could live and work at will across the union's 27 countries now must secure work visas and residency permits to do so. The reverse is also true, which means sectors that once relied heavily on less-skilled labor coming in from other EU countries, such as elder care, transit and agriculture, have experienced shortages.

If the negative impact of Brexit is so clear, then why is it so hard to pursue undoing it, and why has no one attempted to before? The obstacles are real. Now that the U.K. is on the outside, rejoining will require real concessions. The EU has the upper hand in any negotiations, and that could prove a hard pill for British politicians to swallow. The EU also has incentives to make the U.K. pay a price for that return, so that other EU states know that taking a break from the union comes at a cost.

The Labour Party, which currently leads the British government, doesn't bear the blame for Brexit, which was the Conservative Party's doing in 2016, but it will carry the political cost of any course corrections that it negotiates. Labour leaders may feel confident that rejoining the EU is the right move in the long run, but that doesn't make it any less politically risky in the short run. Such are the perverse incentives of any democracy where the government faces a public referendum every few years.

This is perhaps the reason that Prime Minister Andy Burnham is the first British politician since Brexit to even seriously raise the question of returning to the EU. His own Labour Party, which staunchly opposed Brexit from the start, explicitly committed in 2024 that it would honor the split, keep the U.K. out of the European single market and be "confident in our status outside of the EU." The debate around Brexit was so politically divisive that many politicians seem to believe that the only thing worse than Brexit itself would be revisiting it.

Labour's commitment to keep Brexit intact, though, was an attempt to win back voters who had supported the Brexit campaign in 2016, but the conciliatory approach seems less expedient today given Brexit's increasing unpopularity. The public does not seem set on maintaining the status quo. What it wants is change to improve Britain's economic situation, and that public desire presents a political opportunity.

Burnham seems poised to take advantage of that and is pursuing a closer relationship with the EU than any British government has in the last 10 years. Last week, he agreed to a package of deals on travel and trade and laid out a range of other areas for further collaboration. This is a far cry from returning to the union, but it is the first crack in the door to entering those discussions. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen hailed it as a "turning point" in U.K.-EU relations.

It is notable that this breakthrough is happening only weeks after Donald Trump's Republican Party saw major electoral defeats on the other side of the Atlantic. The far-right populist movement that brought Brexit to the U.K. had much in common with Trump's campaign to "Make America Great Again," which also hit the political scene in 2016. At the time, far-right populist platforms, which blamed national troubles on outsiders and called for a turn inward, were gaining popularity around the globe. MAGA and Brexit both expressed disdain for collective action and multilateral cooperation, and both accused erstwhile partners of ripping them off.

Ten years later, though, that approach has left its supporters in both countries disappointed. And now, both countries face a similar challenge: Will their political leaders pursue bold course corrections that could be risky? Or will they take the political path of least resistance and muddle along, offering their people marginal improvements at best?

Elizabeth Shackelford is a foreign affairs columnist for the Chicago Tribune and a lecturer with the Dickey Center at Dartmouth College. She was previously a U.S. diplomat and is the author of "The Dissent Channel: American Diplomacy in a Dishonest Age."

Voice of the People



A person rides a bike in a protected bike lane near a construction worker flagger along South Archer Avenue in Brighton Park on May 6. **JOSH BOLAND/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

Traffic fatalities unacceptable

"Everything was beautiful and nothing hurt."

That's the epitaph my grandmother chose for her son Joseph Moran Galvez, after he was killed in a car crash while riding his bicycle near the lakefront on a warm August night in 1975.

My uncle's family and friends called him Jey. He was 16 years old.

More than 50 years later, Chicago families are still suffering the sudden loss of their loved ones in thousands of crashes all across our city involving vehicles. Efforts to address this public safety crisis have inspired vigorous public debate, especially on the Southwest Side, where a wholesale reimagining of Archer and Kedzie avenues in Brighton Park kicked off a year ago this month.

While some Southwest Side residents have expressed legitimate concerns about the impact of concrete protected bike lanes, there are also neighbors like me who want to give the project a chance to succeed — because we are all too aware of the life and death stakes.

My uncle Jey's story came to me in fragments over the years: the traumatized look in my great aunt's eyes when she recalled the 2 a.m. phone call from the police, the prominent place on her hutch that my grandmother chose for her Mothers Against Drunk Driving bumper sticker and the awestruck tone in my grandfather's voice when he confided to a friend that our family "almost didn't come out of it."

We did come out of it — intact but fundamentally changed. Sadly, ours is an ache that's been felt by many families since.

On Easter weekend, 18-year-old Damian Gomez was killed while biking to deliver food for DoorDash in Chicago Lawn. In June, Chicago Department of Transportation planner Riley O'Neil was "doored" into traffic while riding through his home neighborhood of Bridgeport. In late September, Juan Martín Márquez was killed on an unprotected stretch of Archer in Garfield Ridge while riding to his job as a warehouse supervisor.

Over the last decade, 39 cyclists have been killed in crashes on Chicago's streets, but make no mistake: We are hardly the only ones at risk. During this same time period, 327 pedestrians and 814 drivers or passengers have also been killed in vehicle crashes.

Each one of these people — nearly 1,200 dead over the last decade — has a story that reverberates through families and through generations.

We owe it to them to do what we can to reduce crashes and save lives.

— Dixon Galvez-Searle, transit advocacy steward, The Southwest Collective, Chicago

Make affordability a policy

I keep hearing from our governor about affordability. Under his watch, according to the Illinois Policy Institute, there have been 63 tax increases or new taxes added in Illinois since 2019. That doesn't include annual gas tax or toll increases, as currently written into law.

I would like to see affordability as a government policy as opposed to the policy of squeezing as much cash out of the taxpayer as possible.

— Rob Scharf, Mundelein

Pritzker needs to be polite

It's high time the arrogant, self-centered Gov JB Pritzker do something for the residents of Illinois. He must understand his personal vendetta against President Donald Trump hurts the citizens of Illinois.

Pritzker could employ some version of "pretty please." Give something to get something. Make a peace offering and get the disaster relief from Trump. It would not be a sign of weakness but a sign of compromise. Pritzker could become a hero.

The common denominator is that we are all Americans and should do good for one another!

— Joseph A. Murzanski, Orland Park

Nominating petitions needed

I disagree with the editorial about nominating petitions ("The ballot signature trap is out of hand," Nov. 22). Collecting signatures is part of "the game."

Second, any candidate who doesn't have enough signatures should not be on ballot. I'll assert that if Mayor Brandon Johnson is short on signatures, oh well. (And this assertion would stand if Richard M. Daley or Jane Byrne had run short on signatures.)

— Lee Berenbaum, Chicago

Emanuel's chances in race

Regarding Richard Sciortino's letter ("Chicago needs Rahm Emanuel," Nov. 23), Rahm Emanuel could be abusive, abrasive and a bully.

Chicago needs him badly. Emanuel is exceedingly experienced, smart and decisive, and he knows how to get things done. Yet, his withholding of the video depicting Chicago police Officer Jason Van Dyke shooting 17-year-old Laquan McDonald 16 times would be hard to overcome in another mayoral race.

— Terry Takash, Western Springs

Suggestion for NYPD division

The Tribune Editorial Board gives a thumbs-up to New York City's move to establish a police team specially trained to manage crowds of legitimate protesters ("Mamdani's savvy New York police reforms make sense to us," Nov. 20).

The name of the team's division, however — "Community Dialogue and De-escalation Division" — strikes the editorial board as sounding "like some Orwellian-named socialist fantasy."

I agree. Let's call it the "Chill Out-fit."

— Joseph S. Harrington, Morton Grove

Pope Leo deserves honor

Regarding the editorial "A Pope Leo XIV Highway? We like the sound of that" (Nov. 22): All of us in Chicagoland should be grateful for the sponsorship in Springfield of Senate Joint Resolution 44, which would name the busily traveled stretch of Interstate 80 between I-55 and Illinois Route 394 after Pope Leo XIV, the first-ever American pope and a prominent Chicago son.

This brilliant idea should be immediately and enthusiastically approved by our state lawmakers, no matter the political party. Truth be told: I am a registered Democrat.

I cannot think of another native Chicagoan, or native-born American for that matter, who truly qualifies at this moment in time to be a genuine 21st century world leader who can positively impact people and communities globally. Leo's personal ethics and integrity and his commitment to the well-being of all members of society should make us all proud. He is a concrete, kind and eloquent example of the fact that, as the editorial notes, "Illinois can still produce greatness."

The I-80 corridor between Route 394 and I-55 runs through several demographically diverse suburbs, including New Lenox (where Leo is registered to vote!).

Those of us who live in the southern and southwestern parts of Chicagoland often use I-80 to go shopping, go to work, and to dine and play. A Pope Leo XIV Highway would help nurture and bridge multiple communities with a special Chicagoland pride.

It would be an enormous mistake not to approve Senate Joint Resolution 44. Without a doubt, a Pope Leo XIV Highway would be a long-lasting present for Chicagolanders and other travelers of I-80 to come. It would definitely remind them, after many of us are gone, that Pope Leo XIV — the first American pope in the history of the world — was born in the global city of Chicago and fully raised in our beloved Chicagoland.

— Alejandro Lugo, Park Forest

Not a persuasive sentence

In response to Rob Hirsh's letter on Nov. 18 ("Appointment is a reminder") stating in the very first sentence that Stephen Miller is a monstrous racist, who exactly was he trying to persuade to read further?

— Mark Behrendt, Chesterton, Indiana

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SHORT*TAKES*



France's President Emmanuel Macron shakes hands with Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni ahead of a Special European Council meeting to discuss the EU's long-term budget for 2028-2034, in Brussels, on Thursday. **— AFP**

MELONI TALKS TOUGH ON EU BUDGET, WARNS UKRAINE ON MEDITERRANEAN STRIKE

ROME: *EU leaders are far from reaching a deal on the bloc's nearly €1.6 trillion ($1.75 trillion) budget proposal for 2028 to 2034, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni said on Thursday.*

"We're light-years away from a solution," Meloni told reporters before an extraordinary EU summit in Brussels. "We are not willing to sign off on a budget under which we would have to give more to receive less," she added.

While the budget only starts in 2028, leaders want to have a deal by year-end because, as well as in France, there are elections next year in Italy, Poland, Greece, Estonia, Finland and Slovakia that could complicate negotiations.

The seven-year budget requires unanimous approval from all 27 member states.

Meloni also reiterated Italy's concerns about signs that the Russia-Ukraine war could spread to the Mediterranean, after Ukraine sank a Russian military vessel in Libyan waters on Sunday.

"I believe that the war must not widen to the Mediterranean. We have to be clear with our Ukrainian friends and with our partners," Meloni said. **— Reuters**

SNOWSTORM LASHES AUSTRIA



Snow covers the Johann Strauss memorial at the Wiener Stadtpark in Vienna, Austria, on Thursday. Austria is experiencing the first major snowfall of the season. — AFP

TRUMP URGES PUTIN TO 'PULL BACK ALL MILITARY AGGRESSION' AGAINST EUROPE

WEST PALM BEACH: *US President Donald Trump said on Thursday he had asked Russian leader Vladimir Putin to scale back "military aggression" in Europe to facilitate an end to Moscow's war in Ukraine.*

Trump said on his Truth Social network that during meetings in China last week "I spent a lot of time talking about the fact that I would like to see President Putin pull back all Military aggression against territories throughout Europe."

Trump on Thursday demanded an immediate probe into what he alleged was a deliberate decision to release "fake" growth numbers before this month's midterm elections.

The US Commerce Department's Bureau of Economic Analysis on Wednesday revised third-quarter annualised growth up to 4.3% from the advance estimate of 3.4% it announced on October 29. Trump's Republican Party suffered heavy losses in the November 3 election.

"It was just revealed that the REAL Numbers on the Economy, published before the Election, were FAKE," Trump said in a Truth Social post, without providing evidence. "Why wasn't the correct number issued before the Election? I am asking for an immediate investigation of this situation. This is not a small error; this is a massive, and purposeful, error," he said.

The BEA has previously said that its estimates can differ from the final numbers because advance estimates for quarterly growth lack complete source data on inventories, trade, and consumer spending on services. **— Agencies**

SpaceX to launch up to 1 m data-centre satellites

THE TRUMP administration authorised Elon Musk's SpaceX on Wednesday to launch up to one million satellites as part of its plan to build data centres in space, raising concerns from some experts.

The US Federal Communications Commission (FCC) said SpaceX's Starmind constellation would "process massive amounts of data to be used back here on Earth."

The company's authorisation runs until 2040, according to a document published on the FCC's website.

"America is leading the world into the era of super intelligence," FCC Chairman Brendan Carr said in a statement, using Trump's moniker for artificial intelligence. He added that data centres would be "essential to sustaining America's leadership in SI."

Projects for orbiting data centres have multiplied over the past year.

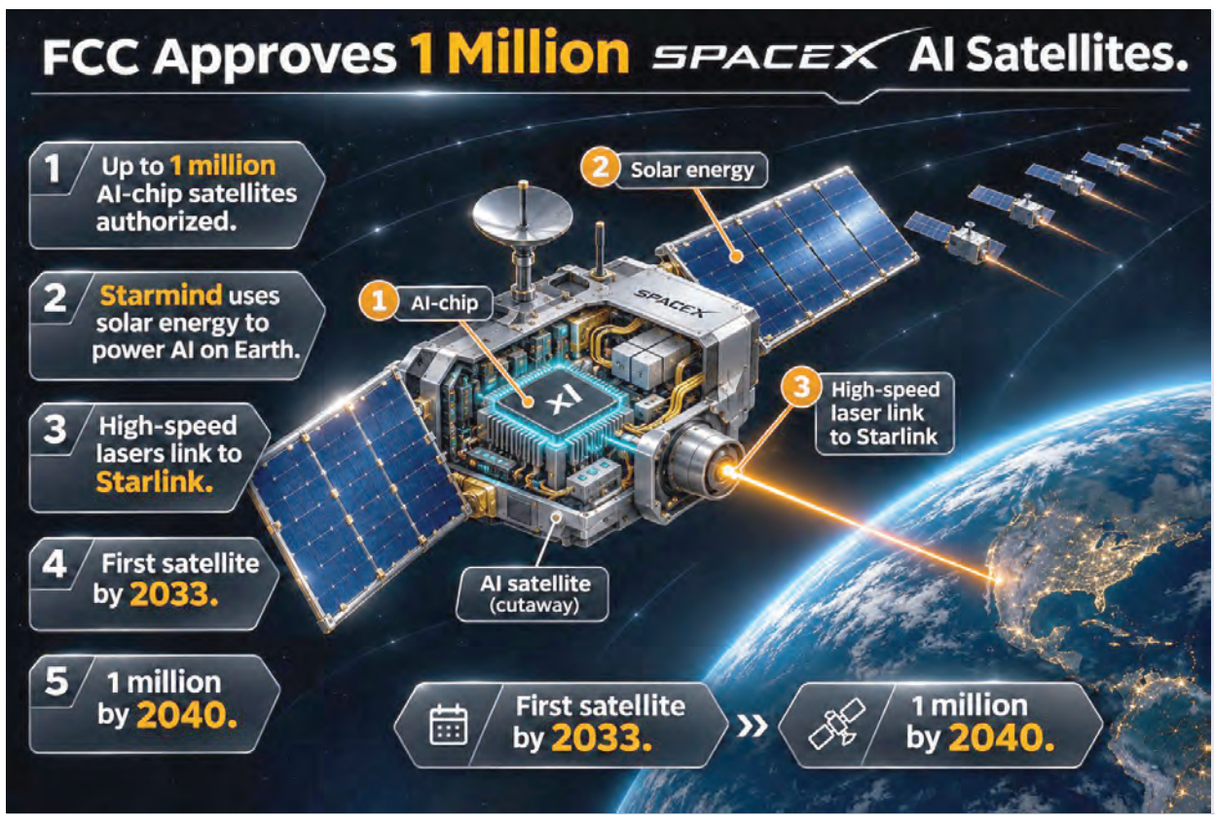
Alongside SpaceX and its Starmind constellation, Google is pursuing its own initiative under the codename "Suncatcher," while Jeff Bezos's Blue Origin has submitted an application to the FCC for its "Project Sunrise."

Several startups are also in the race, including Starcloud, which successfully operated an advanced processor known as a GPU aboard a satellite in late 2025. Google also reached that milestone in October.

SpaceX has the advantage of having its own rockets that have already completed hundreds of missions. In August, Musk promised a first SpaceX satellite launch into orbit in the fourth quarter of 2027 and a ramp-up in 2028.

The company has struck a deal with Nvidia, which will supply its latest-generation Vera Rubin processors, specially designed to operate in space.

Most space-based data centre projects have a similar architecture: a constellation of satellites in low Earth orbit (LEO), positioned close together to ensure reliable connections between them. Starmind's satellites will communicate with those already in orbit as part of SpaceX's Starlink satellite Internet network, which will then relay the data to Earth.



AI generated graphics

SpaceX has the advantage of having its own rockets that have already completed hundreds of missions.

Other competing networks plan to receive data directly from Earth and send it back using lasers.

But experts have warned of technical obstacles, as well as environmental concerns.

Unresolved technical challenges include processors' ability to withstand the high levels of radiation in space. Observers also point to the difficulty of withstanding extreme temperatures or avoiding damage from space debris and micrometeorites.

The American Astronomical Society (AAS) said it was "disheartened and dismayed" by Wednesday's decision.

"The proposed constellation would significantly undermine decades of federal investment in astronomical facilities and the ability of astronomers and the public to enjoy and study the night sky," the AAS said in a statement.

It noted that the constellation "involves larger (and therefore brighter) and more numerous objects," meaning the satellites would "be visible as extremely bright objects for longer periods in the night sky." "Drastically expanding satellites in space has a direct impact on people's everyday lives as well as the future of our planet," Jan Hasselman, a senior attorney at the nonprofit group Earthjustice, said in a statement. **— AFP**

Spain races to stop oil spill after ship capsizes off Ibiza; 1 dies

MADRID: Spanish authorities raced to contain any damage to ecologically valuable Mediterranean waters on Thursday after a tanker carrying up to 7,000 tonnes of diesel capsized off Ibiza, leaving one dead.

The Maltese-flagged Med Emre, a chemical products tanker which was travelling from the southern port of Algeciras to Barcelona, suffered the accident in the early hours of Thursday north of the popular holiday island, the Balearic Islands emergency services said.

The ship's 17 crew were rescued, but one was later confirmed dead in hospital in Ibiza, while six suffered "minor injuries", notably hypothermia, the rescuers said.

According to maritime data tracking firm Kpler, the vessel was transporting around 66,000 barrels of refined products.

Spanish government sources said the ship was "lying keel up, which indicates that it is not currently sunk", modifying an earlier statement that reported a sinking.

Images shared by Spanish media showed the grey underbelly of a ship visible above the waves.

It was unclear what caused the accident.

A government mechanism designed for marine pollution events had been activated, "but this does not presuppose that pollution has been detected on the coast", the government sources said.

A boat and a plane belonging to the Spanish maritime rescue service Salvamento Maritimo had been sent to assess the possible environmental damage, the Balearic emergency services added.



A rescue vessel moves next to the capsized oil tanker Med Emre off Ibiza on Thursday. **— Reuters**

The Civil Protection authority had requested the activation of the European Union's Earth monitoring system Copernicus to obtain images of the area, said the government sources. Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said the government was "closely following" the situation.

Any pollution entering the water could have an impact on tourism, fishing and Mediterranean seagrasses that absorb substantial quantities of climate-heating carbon dioxide.

The area includes spaces protected by the European Union's Natura 2000 network and hosts the critically endangered Balearic Shearwater, said SEOBirdLife. "Contact with the fuel may alter the impermeability and the thermal insulation of the birds' plumage, causing heat loss and hypothermia," the NGO warned.

Marine conservation group Oceana noted that the time of year was "key" for migratory species, including turtles, sharks, red tuna, pilot whales and the striped dolphin. But Emilio Rodriguez Diaz, a maritime security expert at the University of Cadiz, told Cadena SER radio the incident was not comparable to the 2002 Prestige oil disaster, Spain's worst environmental accident.

That vessel broke into two, spilling more than 60,000 tonnes of fuel and blackening thousands of kilometres of Atlantic coastline, affecting Spain, Portugal and France.

The Med Emre was a modern ship, built in Türkiye in 2019, with a double hull that acted as "a kind of buffer that prevents the cargo... from being released into the environment", Diaz said.

The waters surrounding Ibiza are a habitat for sea turtles, dolphins and the Balearic shearwater, one of Europe's most threatened seabirds. The area is also home to extensive meadows of Posidonia oceanica seagrass, which plays a vital role in supporting marine biodiversity. **— Agencies**

Celebrating progress and embracing the future



OMAN AL YAHYAI

The writer is a media professional based in Paris. She specialises in human rights and immigration.

EVERY YEAR, Oman National Day brings together generations of Omanis in a celebration of pride, unity and belonging. This year, as the Sultanate of Oman marked its National Day on November 20, the occasion offered more than an opportunity to celebrate national achievements. It was a moment to reflect on the country's remarkable transformation, honour its history and consider the responsibilities that come with shaping its future.

For Omanis, National Day is not simply a public holiday decorated with flags and fireworks. It represents a shared identity, a connection to centuries of history and an appreciation of the progress that has transformed the country.

For decades, Oman celebrated National Day on November 18, coinciding with the birthday of the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said, whose accession to power in 1970 marked the beginning of the country's modern renaissance.

Under his leadership, Oman underwent an extraordinary transformation. Schools, hospitals, roads and modern infrastructure expanded across a country that had previously faced significant developmental challenges. Education became more accessible, healthcare improved and Oman strengthened its international relationships.

In January 2025, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik announced that National Day would henceforth be celebrated on November 20, commemorating the establishment of the Al Busaid State in 1744 under Imam Ahmed bin Said al Busaidi. The change connected the celebration to a broader historical legacy, recognising the foundations of Omani unity, sovereignty and national identity.

Oman's development has continued under His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, guided by Oman Vision 2040, an ambitious strategy aimed at diversifying the economy, improving public services and creating opportunities for future generations.

According to the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, 74 per cent of the strategy's performance indicators demonstrated measurable progress in its 2024-2025 report. Education and healthcare have remained central priorities. Between 2021 and 2025, 188 schools were constructed or renovated, while new healthcare facilities and digital services expanded access to essential services. Economic diversification has also gained momentum. Investments in tourism, logistics, manufacturing, renewable energy and technology aim to reduce dependence on oil revenues. Projects in Duqm, Suhar and Salalah demonstrate Oman's ambition to strengthen its position as a regional centre for trade and investment.

The country's commitment to environmental sustainability, including renewable energy initiatives and conservation programmes, reflects an understanding that development must also protect natural resources.

Beyond statistics and infrastructure, National Day carries a deeply personal significance. It is a celebration of the values that connect Omanis across generations: hospitality, tolerance, cultural heritage and a strong sense of community.

The greatest tribute to the generations that built modern Oman is not simply remembering their accomplishments, but continuing their work with determination and responsibility.

From Muscat's busy streets to the mountains of Al Dakhiliyah and the landscapes of Dhofar, Omanis share a national identity shaped by history, tradition and collective experience. Oman's reputation for diplomatic dialogue and peaceful engagement also remains an important source of national pride, particularly amid growing regional instability.

Yet celebrating progress should not prevent us from acknowledging the challenges ahead. Youth employment, economic diversification, environmental protection and the rising cost of living remain important concerns. Ensuring that development benefits every governorate and every generation will be essential to sustaining national progress.

National Day should therefore be both a celebration and a moment of reflection.

Oman's achievements deserve recognition, but the country's future will depend on how effectively it invests in its people, supports innovation and creates opportunities for young Omanis. The greatest tribute to the generations that built modern Oman is not simply remembering their accomplishments, but continuing their work with determination and responsibility. As the Omani flag flies across the country, it symbolises more than pride in the past. They represent a collective commitment to the future. For Omanis, November 20 is ultimately a reminder that a nation's greatest strength lies not only in its history or achievements, but in the unity, aspirations and resilience of its people.

IN LEBANON, THE OPENING OF A SECOND AIRPORT REFLECTS POLITICAL SHIFTS

LAILA BASSAM AND NAZIH OSSEIRAN

LEBANON plans to open a second international airport next month to bring economic growth to the poorer north, in a project that underlines the diminished political sway of the Hezbollah group, which had long opposed it.

Kleiat Airport, located on the Mediterranean coast, about 20 km (12 miles) from the border crossing to Syria, will offer another gateway to Lebanon alongside Beirut International Airport, where travel has been disrupted by wars between Israel and Hezbollah in recent years.

The opening comes as Lebanon continues to grapple with occupation by Israel in the south, political dysfunction and deep financial turmoil. It is "a national economic need", Fayez Rasamny, the minister of public works and transport, said. The private sector will invest $5 million to $6 million in the airport and the government will improve the region's roads, Rasamny added.

Also named Rene Mouawad Airport after a president assassinated in 1989, it will initially offer flights to Türkiye, Egypt, and Jordan, Rasamny said.

Politicians from the north had long pressed for the disused airbase at Kleiat to be turned into a civilian airport, arguing it would boost prosperity in the Akkar region, adjoining the Syrian border. More than 300,000 people live in Akkar and the region is seen as Lebanon's poorest.

But the idea faced opposition from Hezbollah, a politician and a political activist from the area said.

Hadi Hobeich, a former lawmaker from Akkar, said he and a group of MPs from the region had tried to advance the project in 2022, winning the approval of all parties apart from Hezbollah.

Hobeich, a long-standing critic of Hezbollah, said the group had raised concerns over who would be responsible for security at the airport and had shown "intense hostility" towards the idea at the time.

"When the country's political conditions changed, we were able to open this airport," he said. ***— AFP***

Wasta and white privilege

"THE BIGGEST BUSINESS comeback in recent history! Yani [I mean], that is what they called it," said the woman sitting beside me. Her suntan and Jolie-inspired lips caught my eye as she glanced at herself in the mirror, while her dark-haired hairdresser stood behind her.

The Lebanese duo were discussing Jensen Huang's comeback as CEO of the AI company he had once left. Both were attractive and impeccably dressed, in that polished sort of way that makes someone like me feel like a slob.

"Just call it Wasta, habibti," mumbled her confidant, lifting a section of dyed hair between two jewellery-adorned fingers before snipping away with his fancy scissors.

Wasta, sometimes called Vitamin W, is the Arabic term for having connections, particularly in the workplace. Essentially, it means "it's who you know", or cronyism.

In Oman, Wasta can be used as an insult (He or she only got that position because they had Wasta), but it can also be an advantage: a foot in the door and an opportunity to prove yourself.

In this conversation, I gathered that the handsome hairdresser meant that influential people can sometimes get away with unethical behaviour.

His clients and I were both sitting in shiny, oversized chairs at a popular salon in Al Seeb, an area of Muscat that somehow manages to feel both shabby and chic, sometimes on the very same street. Christmas songs played loudly in the background, courtesy of the Filipino nail technicians.

It was Oman's National Day holiday, and while my loved ones were outdoors, I was eavesdropping on strangers. Not entirely my fault: the cosy salon felt somewhere between Gossip Girl and group therapy.



BREGJE VAN BAAREN

The writer is a freelance contributor

I guess that these contemplations are what make sitting in a hair salon so fascinating. Conversations flow like a river, moving from Wasta to cultural differences, colonial history and privilege.

My neighbours' conversation moved on to Love Is Blind, Habibi.

The client asked: "Why was she [one of the contestants who broke off the engagement] saying cultural differences prevented them from being together?"

"Akeed [of course], habibti! He is Syrian and you are Lebanese. Yani, no difference!" replied her hairdresser and confidant.

Meanwhile, my own hairdresser, a bubbly Indigenous South African woman, was trying to revive my curls by twirling them one by one. She and I often speak Afrikaans together because its similarities to Dutch have made it our secret gossip language.

This got me thinking about one of the biggest Dutch blind spots: our colonial past. At school, the first Dutch settlers in South Africa were presented largely as farmers, rather than colonisers and slaveholders.

Scrolling through my phone, I came across a video about Sinterklaas, St Nicholas (a sort of cousin of Santa Claus), the festive tradition I grew up with in the Netherlands, and showed it to my hairdresser.

I explained from my chair: "He arrives by boat, accompanied by Zwarte Piet, or Black Pete. As children, we were told their faces were black because they climbed down chimneys. I never questioned their curly Afro wigs or oversized golden hoop earrings. I was simply too excited about Sinterklaas arriving with presents."

I continued: "The Dutch like to consider themselves tolerant, but perhaps we have more blind spots than we care to admit, particularly those of us who are not Dutch people of colour. I mean, I used to be so proud that I had grown up without routinely categorising people as 'white' or 'black', as though that somehow meant I was free from racial bias."

My hairdresser nodded, still twirling my curls, and I felt she was like Bella Freud while I lay on the sofa instead of the salon chair.

"Today, I cannot deny that white privilege exists in ways I had not previously considered. At high school, a teacher once suggested that I could not possibly have produced an assignment myself because it was simply too good for a blonde girl sitting at the back of the class. She emphasised blonde. I was offended but looking back, I am sure she would not have dared to say something similar in my face if I had been a girl of colour."

"A beautiful blonde girl, I am sure!" exclaimed my hairdresser, a woman of colour herself, perhaps trying to lighten the mood. "I am serious. And this is not just about the Netherlands. I remembered how former Omani colleagues used to call me Muzungu, a Swahili word often used to describe a foreigner or white person. I never took offence. Perhaps they knew I would not. Perhaps that, too, was a form of white privilege."

I guess that these contemplations are what make sitting in a hair salon so fascinating. Conversations flow like a river, moving from Wasta to cultural differences, colonial history and privilege.

We arrive at the salon wanting our hair fixed, but sometimes leave having questioned a few things about ourselves and the world around us. And perhaps that is a rather good kind of makeover (or a sign that we all need a psychologist).

OMAN DAILY **Observer**

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Fax: 24649379
PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY:
Ministry of Information

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