

SNAPSHOTS

The authors suggest that mitigating greenhouse gas emissions is not only important for Earth's climate but also for preserving our access to and use of outer space.



Symptoms of Long COVID can last up to two years

A study has revealed that 23% of people infected with SARS-CoV-2 between 2021 and 2023 developed Long COVID, and in more than 50% the symptoms persisted for two years. The risk of developing Long COVID was lower in people who were infected after the Omicron variant became dominant. Based on the symptoms reported, the researchers identified three clinical subtypes of long-COVID – whether the symptoms were neurological and musculoskeletal, respiratory, or severe and involved multiple organs.

Environmental mapping reveals melioidosis peak during monsoon

A study has revealed that melioidosis disease in Odisha has clear seasonality, with infections peaking during and after the monsoon season. Disease occurrence is also linked to temperature, cloud cover and solar radiation



Older adults might be more resistant to bird flu infections

Prior exposures to specific types of seasonal influenza viruses promote cross-reactive immunity against the H5N1 avian influenza virus, according to a new study. Older adults who were exposed to seasonal flu viruses that circulated prior to 1968 were found to be more likely to have antibodies that bind to the H5N1 avian flu virus. The findings suggest that younger adults and children would benefit more from H5N1 vaccines, even those not tailored specifically to the current strain circulating in birds and cattle.



Mother's high-fat diet can cause liver stress in foetus

When mothers eat a diet high in fat and sugars, their unborn babies can develop liver stress. The study sheds light on changes to the fetus's bile acid, which affects how liver disease develops and progresses. Excessive bile acid levels can damage the liver. While the mother can detoxify the acids, the foetus lacks that ability. Bile acids may re-circulate to the mother for detoxification, but if they do not, they build up in the foetal liver, setting the stage for future problems.

Treating chikungunya using HIV/AIDS drug efavirenz

“Based on good pharmacokinetics properties, previous successful applications of efavirenz to treat HIV infection, and the demonstrated anti-chikungunya activity in this study, efavirenz shows high potential for repurposing against human chikungunya infections and further clinical human trials can be conducted in this direction,” Dr. Tomar says.



Question Corner

Ancient grasslands

shifts towards higher specialisation and successful pollination as grasslands get older. What drives this lag is not a lower diversity of pollinators in itself, it is the identity of the pollinators. The study therefore shows the importance of considering pollinator communities for efforts targeting the conservation of threatened grassland plants. First of all, this means that maintaining ancient grasslands as reserves for specialised pollinators should be a top priority for conservationists.

FAQ

What is the reach of an ICC warrant?

What are the implications of former Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte's arrest on the direction of the ICC?

Aaratrika Bhaumik

The story so far: Former Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte was flown to the Netherlands on March 12 to face charges of crimes against humanity before the International Criminal Court (ICC) for his role in the deadly “war on drugs” during his tenure.

What was Duterte’s ‘war on drugs’? In a statement, the court said its Pre-Trial chamber had reviewed evidence from the Office of the Prosecutor and found reasonable grounds to believe he is “individually responsible as an indirect co-perpetrator for the crime against humanity of murder, allegedly committed in the Philippines between November 1, 2011, and March 16, 2019.” The ICC’s investigation into extrajudicial drug-related killings under Mr. Duterte covers his tenure as Davao City mayor, starting in 2011, through his presidency, which ended in 2022. By the end of his term, human rights groups and the ICC prosecutor estimated that police and unidentified assailants had killed approximately 30,000 people.

Where do domestic politics stand? Despite its expansive mandate, the court lacks enforcement authority and relies on national governments to execute its warrants, rendering it vulnerable to domestic political considerations.

Rodrigo Duterte's indictment is a rare triumph for the ICC, unlike its largely symbolic arrest warrants for Vladimir Putin and Benjamin Netanyahu, which remain unenforced

humanity committed before the withdrawal. A formal investigation was launched in 2021. Initially, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. refused to cooperate, but his position shifted following the collapse of the Duterte-Marcos alliance. Mr. Marcos has maintained that the Philippine government was merely upholding its obligations to Interpol by facilitating the execution of the ICC warrant. Since taking office, he has made no effort to rejoin the court.

Does the ICC have jurisdiction? Mr. Duterte and his allies have long contested the ICC’s jurisdiction, citing the Philippines’ 2019 withdrawal from the Rome Statute. In January 2023, the ICC authorised its prosecutor to resume an investigation into the killings, reversing a 2021 suspension granted at the Philippines’ request. The Philippines government had argued that its institutions were capable of prosecuting the alleged crimes, invoking the principle of complementarity, which limits ICC intervention to cases where national courts are “unable or unwilling” to act. The Pre-Trial Chamber rejected this claim, ruling that the Philippines had not demonstrated sufficient efforts to warrant a deferral.

Under the Rome Statute, all 125 signatory states are required to arrest and surrender individuals facing ICC warrants if they enter their territory. However, compliance remains inconsistent. Non-compliance leads to a referral to the Assembly of States Parties, the court’s governing body, and ultimately to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). When the UNSC invokes the court’s jurisdiction, all relevant UN member-states are obligated to cooperate, regardless of their status under the Rome Statute.

What are the implications for the court? Mr. Duterte's indictment is a rare triumph for the ICC, unlike its largely symbolic arrest warrants for Russia's Vladimir Putin and Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu, which remain unenforced.

However, the arrest is not without risks for the court. The ICC is an embattled institution these days, with the Trump administration threatening to arrest its top officials over investigations of Israel, a close U.S. ally. China has also warned against politicising ICC cases. Though not a signatory to the Rome Statute, it is embroiled in a territorial dispute with the Philippines over the South China Sea. Beijing’s statement was a thinly veiled critique of how a case meant to ensure accountability for grave international crimes has instead become a battleground for domestic political rivalry.

What lies ahead for Duterte? During the proceedings before the Pre-Trial Chamber, Mr. Duterte’s lawyer argued that his arrest and extradition from Manila to the Netherlands constituted “pure and simple kidnapping.” The next step is a hearing to confirm the charges the prosecutor intends to pursue, during which Mr. Duterte may also apply for interim release. Only after this hearing will the court decide whether to proceed with a trial. A trial, if approved, is unlikely to begin anytime soon.

Why has India got another tiger reserve?

Where is Madhav National Park located? What is its tiger population? What are the factors under consideration before a national park can become a designated tiger reserve? What is the tiger population in the country according to the 2023 tiger census?

Jacob Koshy

The story so far: On March 9, Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav announced that the Centre had declared the Madhav National Park in Madhya Pradesh as the country’s 58th tiger reserve. This is the ninth tiger reserve in the State, the highest among the States. Maharashtra has six; Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka have five each.

What is the rationale behind setting up tiger reserves? While tigers were historically abundant in India, hunting, poaching and the colonial exploitation of forests for timber started a precipitous decline in their numbers in the early 20th century. It was estimated in 1964 that there would have been around 40,000 tigers in the country at the turn of the 20th century. By the 1960s, these numbers were down to between 2,000 and 4,000, attributed to wanton hunting aided by a proliferation of gun licences issued in the years following 1947, improved access to the forest, clearing of large tracts of forests for various purposes, mushrooming of the new businesses of “Shikar Companies” and fur trade. Following an alarm raised by naturalists, the Indian Board for Wild Life (IBWL) – the earlier avatar of the National Board for Wild Life – in a meeting in New Delhi in July, 1969 recommended a total ban on the export of all

The Madhav National Park is an important connecting corridor to Ranthambore tiger reserve in Rajasthan

wild cat skins, including tigers. The same year, the 10th Assembly of International Union for Conservation of Nature met in Delhi and included the tiger in its “Red Data Book” as an endangered species and adopted a resolution calling for a ban on the killing of tigers. When numbers further dwindled to nearly 1,863, then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi commissioned an 11-member Task Force to investigate the problem and prepare a project to preserve the tiger in the wild in India. In August 1972, the Task Force recommended eight tiger forests spread across India to be brought under the purview of ‘Project Tiger’, as this mission came to be called. On April 1, 1973, Project Tiger was inaugurated at Corbett tiger reserve with nine tiger reserves announced across India – Corbett (then in Uttar Pradesh, now in Uttarakhand), Palamau (then in Bihar, now in Jharkhand), Simlipal (Odisha), Sundarbans (West Bengal), Manas (Assam), Ranthambore (Rajasthan), Kanha (Madhya Pradesh), Melghat (Maharashtra) and Bandipur (Karnataka) - which were representative of the various tiger habitats in the country.

What does establishing a tiger reserve entail? The Project Tiger (replaced by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) since 2006) guidelines made it mandatory for every tiger reserve to be managed in accordance with a site-specific management plan. Project Tiger established a template for scientific management of protected areas in India. It laid down the concept of establishing a ‘core zone’ and a ‘buffer zone’, prescribed interventions for protection, habitat improvement, field data collection relating to change in the composition of flora and fauna on account of protection, animal estimation and other aspects. The guidelines also established Tiger Conservation Plans to ensure: i) Protection and site specific habitat managements for viable population of tigers, prey and co-predators, ii) ecologically compatible land uses in the tiger reserves and areas linking one protected area or tiger reserve to another for addressing the livelihood concerns of local people. The NTCA guidelines for preparing Tiger Conservation Plans, cognizant of constraints imposed by small reserves embedded in human land uses, aimed to create source populations within tiger reserves with corridor links between sources and to sink habitats. Sources are places where animal numbers are growing, and sinks are where they are dwindling, and must be supplemented by bringing in animals to boost numbers to sustainable numbers. To establish a reserve, the Centre gets a proposal from the State, the NTCA recommends the proposal to



What’s on the agenda of the Raisina Dialogue?

Who are the newsmakers attending the 10th edition this year? Will Ukraine war, tariffs threatened by U.S. President Donald Trump, relations with China dominate proceedings? Why are leaders from West Asia and South East Asia not well represented? What about Pakistan?

Suhasini Haidar

The story so far: A month after this year’s explosive Munich Security Conference, where U.S. Vice President J.D. Vance put Europe on notice, Delhi is set to host the annual Raisina Dialogue from March 17-19, where U.S. President Donald Trump’s seismic foreign policy shifts are expected to be the big conversation points again.

What are the issues expected to make the headlines? The 10th edition of the annual Raisina Dialogue will be inaugurated on Monday by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, where the chief guest, New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon will deliver the keynote address, with the theme “*Kalachakra*” (wheel of time). However, a big contingent from the U.S. is expected to take the centre stage, given the twists and turns in American policy under Mr. Trump – from the Ukraine war, the talks with Russia, the new tariff regime that threatens ties between the U.S. and countries around the world, including India, the U.S.’ fraying relations with its NATO and European allies, uncertainty around the U.S.’s Indo-Pacific policy, and new statements on China and Taiwan. Amidst the turmoil, U.S. Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard is leading a team to

Europe is well represented; no speakers listed from Bangladesh

Delhi for an intelligence chiefs’ conference at the weekend hosted by National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, and will speak at the Raisina Dialogue. Apart from Ms. Gabbard, the Special Assistant to U.S. President Trump and National Security Council official, Ricky Gill, and Senior Counsellor to Mr. Trump, James Carafano, who was a key figure behind the Republican campaign document “Project 2025”, are also listed as speakers and are expected to defend the U.S.’ moves. A Quad panel with senior Navy leadership from the four countries, India, Australia, Japan and the U.S., is expected as India gears up to host the Quad leader summit this year, which is expected to see some announcements on expanding maritime cooperation.

What can be expected in Ukraine? The Raisina Dialogue follows weeks of dramatic developments in the Russia-Ukraine war, including the showdown between Mr. Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Washington, followed by rounds of U.S.-Russia talks and then U.S.-Ukraine talks about a ceasefire, which will no doubt be a major point of discussion at the dialogue, and on its sidelines. Eleven of the 20 Foreign and other Ministers arriving for the dialogue are from Europe, including Ukraine Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha. In 2024, the numbers were even more skewed, with chief guest Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and 15 of 21 Foreign Ministers present from Europe, making a concerted pitch for India to shift its position on Ukraine. This year, all eyes will be on discussions and debate that pit European leaders against those from the U.S., particularly Ms. Gabbard, who has in the past batted for better U.S.-Russia ties. However, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, who used to be a regular speaker, will not attend. At the Raisina Dialogue in 2023, Mr. Lavrov faced a barrage of questions over the war in Ukraine during a session, that got extremely heated over the question of Russia joining talks for a ceasefire. Also on the list is International Atomic Energy Agency chief Rafael Grossi, who will be an

the State after due diligence, the State government notifies the area as a Tiger Reserve.

How are tiger reserves funded? Under Project Tiger guidelines, 60% of the funds for conservation are provided by the Centre, while the rest is borne by the concerned State. In the case of Northeastern and Himalayan States, the Centre covers 90% of the funds. These activities include anti-poaching initiatives, habitat improvement and water development, addressing human-animal conflicts, designating inviolate spaces, and relocating villages from critical tiger habitats within a timeframe by offering a better relocation package. It also supports States in settling the rights of displaced people, rehabilitating traditional hunting tribes living in and around tiger reserves, conducting independent monitoring, and evaluating tiger reserves.

Why is the Madhav National Park important? With an estimated area of 165.32 sq km, it was first notified as a National Park in Madhya Pradesh in 1956 under the MP National Parks Act, 1955. Now, the Madhav National Park and tiger reserve has a core area of 355 sq km, with a buffer zone of 4-6 sq km. It did not have a tiger population till 2023, when a male tiger and two females were relocated there. Today, the population has grown to seven. However, the Madhav reserve is an important connecting corridor to the Ranthambore Tiger Reserve in Rajasthan. It is also connected to Kuno National Park, which now has a captive cheetah population. Experts speculate that there could be competition among these predators for the prey base of deer, leading to its complex dynamics. Madhya Pradesh boasts several prominent tiger reserves, such as Kanha, Panna, and Bandhavgarh. Due to successful conservation strategies, the State has the highest number of tigers (785). However, the Kuno-Madhav forest division, in the northern part of the State, has historically been relatively neglected. With Kuno gaining prominence as an emerging cheetah reserve, a more centralised management strategy is expected to oversee both cheetah and tiger populations, contributing to the region’s long-term development as a wildlife spot. There are plans to introduce lions from Gir in Gujarat into Kuno National Park, after the Supreme Court green-lit the project. In March 2023, the government told the Supreme Court that relocating lions to Kuno may create tensions between the pride and the cheetahs imported from Namibia and South Africa, and sought time to re-examine the issue. But if lions were to be relocated to Kuno, it would also mean more funds –central and international – for conservation. As of the 2023 tiger census, India is estimated to have 3,682 tigers. About 30% of them are considered to be living outside tiger reserves.

important speaker on the war in Ukraine, and the possibility of reviving nuclear talks with Iran.

Who else is coming? The speakers’ list at the Raisina Dialogue serves as a good barometer of India’s relations with various countries, and which countries participate are often as important as those who miss the event. According to the list released by the Ministry of External Affairs, the Foreign Ministers of Bhutan, D. N. Dhungyel; Nepal, Arzu Rana Deuba; and the Maldives, Abdulla Khaleel, will attend the meet. Mauritius’ Foreign Minister, Dhananjay Ramful, will also be present. Given tense ties with India’s western neighbour, Raisina Dialogue does not invite Pakistani delegates. However, it is notable that no speakers from Bangladesh or representatives of the Yunus government are listed this year. The programme lists a speaker from China’s Fudan University, which reflects the thaw in bilateral ties after the meeting between Mr. Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping last October. Another country with which India may see a thaw this year is Canada, given the change in leadership. The Director of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, Daniel Rogers, who is in Delhi, could also attend the Dialogue. In addition, former Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper and former Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott, both regular attendees, will be present. Despite the Indian government’s attempts at improving ties with West Asia (GCC) and South East Asia (ASEAN), both regions aren’t well represented again, a trend visible for the last few years. The only exceptions are the Philippines’ Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Enrique Manalo, and Thailand’s Foreign Minister, Maris Sangiampongsa. Foreign Ministers from Ghana, Cuba, Peru, Antigua and Barbuda are the others attending from the Global South.

How did the Raisina Dialogue start? Launched in 2016 by the Ministry of External Affairs as a “flagship Indian international dialogue”, the Raisina Dialogue aims to bring together leaders and thinkers from around the world. Envisioned by the government as a potential rival to the Munich Security Conference and Singapore’s Shangri-La Dialogue, the Indian version is named after the Raisina Hills, where Rashtrapati Bhavan, key Ministries and Parliament are located in the capital.

PROFILES

The rebels who shook Pakistan

Baloch Liberation Army

The militant group, which has overshadowed the traditional nationalist movements of Pakistan's restive province, mobilised thousands of fighters and stepped up operations in recent months, says 'Free Balochistan is our only demand'

Kallol Bhattacharjee

October 18, 2018 came bearing bad news for the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA). On that day, across the Afghan-Pakistan border, Kandahar's police chief Gen. Abdul Raziq Achakzai was assassinated by the Taliban, who were still three years away from capturing Kabul. Raziq was known for his brutal tactics in dealing with the Taliban but his assassination in the house of the Kandahar Governor Zalmay Wesa, who was also critically wounded, left lingering questions about the fate of the BLA because among many things, Raziq also handled the movement of Baloch militants within the Af-Pak territory. The BLA suffered another setback when its top commander Aslam Baloch was killed in a blast three months later, in December 2018. Weeks earlier, the BLA had attacked the Chinese consulate in Karachi where two policemen and four cadre were killed. After the targeted assassinations of Raziq and Aslam, there were signs that the BLA's logistical network would be disturbed. The next big setback was the U.S. designation of the BLA as a terrorist outfit, on July 2, 2019. However, the BLA carried out some more daring attacks, including the May 2019 attack on the Pearl Continental Hotel in Gwadar, the newest port of Pakistan which is also vital for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. It was the last major attack by the group which came under pressure after the Taliban took over Kabul on August 15, 2021. But the calm did not last long. On March 11, 2025, the BLA carried out its biggest attack in its nearly 25 years of operation against the Pakistani state when its militants assaulted the Quetta-Peshawar Jaffar Express. The latest attack, executed through a series of actions spread across a vast area interspersed with mountain tunnels, has indicated that the BLA has bounced back from the setbacks of 2018-21, and highlighted the souring state of relationship between Pakistan and the Taliban. Months before the Jaffar Express attack, the BLA had been expanding



A special train to transport the people rescued from a passenger train attacked by the BLA arrives in Much, Balochistan, on Wednesday. AP

the footprint of its firepower. A survey of its claims of attacks shows that the Jaffar Express attack came after nearly two years of escalation during which it carried out an exhaustive series of operations across Balochistan. The BLA claimed to have carried out attacks almost every week in 2024.

Support base

On October 7, 2024, the BLA claimed responsibility for a blast that targeted Karachi's airport road, killing two Chinese nationals and injuring 10 Pakistani nationals. The blast revived fears about the BLA. The group rose out of the Baloch nationalist movement, which was traditionally dominated by the Baloch nawabs or sardars belonging to the Bizenjos, Bugtis and other clans. The BLA does not possess a formal structure like other armed nationalist groups in South Asia and West Asia. The total strength of the group is believed to be around 6,000 cadre, though the number of sympathisers to the Baloch cause is much higher. The new generation of young social media savvy Baloch university graduates is

the main support base of the group, and the Majeed Brigade, the wing of the BLA that carried out the attack on the train, has been consistently at the forefront of violent operations. The Baloch nationalist movement sprang from the dispute of sovereignty in the princely states in the region that were to join Pakistan. However, the armed struggle under the 21st century BLA is markedly different from the tradition of armed militants who were earlier indirectly supported by the Marri, Bugti, Mengal and other dominant clans or tribes. A dispute over sovereignty at the end of the British colonial rule, coupled with negation of the federal spirit in military-dominated Pakistan, has been the driving force for the Baloch national movement. A major element of the Baloch nationalist struggle, which was parallel to the linguistic nationalism of Bengali-speaking East Pakistan, was that it unfolded during the Cold War era. The Baloch movement was influenced by the Soviet Union and radical Marxist ideology in the past, and Moscow trained many radical

Baloch figures during the period of 1950s to 1970s. Long before the BLA, in 1964, the Baloch Liberation Front (BLF) was launched by Jumma Khan but that outfit is now completely overshadowed by the BLA. The BLA rebels claim that Pakistan has been exploiting the rich resources of the province without giving due share to the indigenous people and the tribes. In recent years, the BLA has emerged as a movement with a wide network in both urban and rural areas of Balochistan that has carved a space for itself away from the traditional hold of the sardars or tribal chieftains. BLA rebels claim that they are aiming for both freedom from Pakistan and internal reform of Baloch society. After the death of Aslam Baloch, the BLA suffered from lack of coordination and internal controversies. For example, the June 29, 2020 attack by the BLA on the Karachi Stock Exchange created an internal problem for the organisation, after Majeed Brigade claimed that it was carried out by Tasleem Baloch, Shehzad Baloch, Salman Hammal and Siraj Kungur. The claim immediately triggered a protest

from the BLA spokesperson Azad Baloch, who claimed that the four were already expelled from the group. His statement indicated that the attack was part of an Iranian effort to malign the group because it had not compromised with Iran. Baloch nationalist sentiment is prevalent both in Balochistan of Pakistan as well as Sistan-Balochistan, the easternmost province of Iran. Voice of the rebels Traditional Baloch sardars have been cautious and refused to acknowledge any link with the BLA, but the London-based pro-independence leader Hyrbair Marri is generally considered to be an overground voice of the group. Following the Jaffar Express attack, in which, according to the Pakistani military, 31 people, including five civilian passengers, were killed, Mr. Marri said: "We are Baloch and we reject Pakistan's flag. Remove it. We have our own. Free Balochistan is our only demand." By drawing in India, Pakistan has highlighted an old link between Baloch nationalist leaders and India. Non-violent Baloch nationalist leaders and human rights activists like Mama Qadeer and Naela Qadri visited India several times in the past. In the last decade, there were instances when BLA commanders visited India ostensibly to seek medical treatment. It is said, the slain Aslam Baloch had visited India under an assumed identity provided by the intelligence agency of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (before the 2021 Taliban takeover). After the train attack, Pakistan pointed fingers at India. However, India "strongly rejected the baseless allegations", and asked Pakistan "to look inwards". With the BLA gaining strength in Balochistan and the Pakistani Taliban stepping up attacks in the tribal region, Islamabad-Rawalpindi is once again facing multi-pronged security challenges, at a time when the country's economy is struggling to stabilise itself amid unresolved political tensions between the military backed government and the jailed former Prime Minister, Imran Khan.

THE GIST

The Baloch nationalist movement sprang from the dispute of sovereignty in the princely states in the region that were to join Pakistan Long before the BLA, in 1964, the Baloch Liberation Front (BLF) was launched by Jumma Khan but that outfit is now completely overshadowed by the BLA The BLA rebels claim that Pakistan has been exploiting the rich resources of the province without due share to the indigenous people and the tribes

Market watchdog

Tuhin Kanta Pandey

The new SEBI chief says his focus will be on optimum regulation, not on maximum regulation, as he seeks to ensure fair practices at India's security's markets

Lalatendu Mishra

Tuhin Kanta Pandey, the former Union Finance Secretary, took charge as the Chairman of Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) on March 1, Saturday. The next day, the news broke that a Mumbai Special Court Judge directed the city's Anti-Corruption Bureau to file FIRs on former SEBI chairperson Madhabji Puri Buch and three of the regulator's four Wholetime Members for their alleged complicity in listing of a now delisted company in 1994. Without wasting any time, Mr. Pandey, 59, moved into action. In a statement, SEBI said that even though these officials were not holding their respective positions at the relevant point of time, the court allowed the application [to register the FIR and a court monitored investigation] without issuing any notice or granting any opportunity to SEBI to place the facts on record. "The applicant [a media reporter who could get a court order on Saturday, the day after Ms. Buch exited office and the day Mr. Pandey took over] is known to be a frivolous and habitual litigant, with previous applications being dismissed by the Court, with imposition of costs in some cases," it said.



ILLUSTRATION: SREEJITH R. KUMAR

SEBI said it would initiate appropriate legal steps to challenge the order. On the day he took over, at the SEBI headquarters in Mumbai, Mr. Pandey faced a lot of questions from journalists, particularly about the style of functioning of his predecessor. In his response, he firmly put the organisation's integrity at the centre, without resorting to any blame game. Mr. Pandey, a 1987 IAS officer of the Odisha cadre, is the 11th Chairman of SEBI. All of SEBI's past heads, except G.N. Bajpai and Ms. Buch, were IAS officers. With Mr. Pandey at the helm, SEBI has returned into the fold of the "steel frame of India", as the Indian Administrative Service is often referred to. In the past three months the Centre has selected two Finance Ministry secretaries as regulators – Sanjay Malhotra, who was appointed as the RBI Governor in December last year, and now Mr. Pandey.

During his over three decades career as a bureaucrat, Mr. Pandey has held noteworthy positions in the Union Government and the State Government of Odisha, besides serving a stint in the Regional Office of the UN Industrial Development Organisation. Rich experience Before joining SEBI, Mr. Pandey served as the Union Finance Secretary, Revenue Secretary and Secretary, Department of Investment and Public Asset Management, Secretary, Department of Public Enterprises and Secretary, and Department of Personnel & Training. He was also with the Planning Commission (Now Niti Aayog), the Cabinet Secretariat and the Ministry of Commerce in the past. After Mr. Malhotra's posting at the RBI, Mr. Pandey had played a key role in the preparation of the last Union Budget. As the disinvestment se-

cretary for five years, he has handled the divestment of the government's stake in many Public Sector Enterprises, including Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC), Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Ltd and several companies from the Indian Railways stable. He had also handled the strategic sale of Air India to the Tata Group in 2021-22. His former colleagues describe him as someone who is thorough and methodical. He has a very good sense for numbers and most importantly as a person, he is uncompromising and unyielding, they say. Having a Masters degree in Economics from Panjab University, Chandigarh and an MBA from the University of Birmingham (U.K.), Mr. Pandey has a tough task ahead – he has to tame a rampaging bull as markets have been volatile in recent weeks due to "Trump tantrums", and fight manipulations in the derivatives market. Tough times call for tough measures. Mr. Pandey is no stranger to such measures. "Capital market is a dynamic space so change is imminent but we will certainly not be looking for maximum regulation but for optimum regulation," Mr. Pandey said on March 7, in his first public speech since assuming the chairmanship of the regulator.

Enter India

Starlink

Elon Musk's satellite Internet service Starlink is entering India again, this time flanked by Airtel and Jio; however, official authorisations are still pending and the roadmap remains unclear

Sahana Venugopal

On March 6, an account on the social media platform X claimed that Reliance Jio, Airtel, and VI wanted "fair competition" as the Indian government mulled over the possibility of granting Starlink a license. In response to the post, the U.S. President's advisor and SpaceX CEO Elon Musk commented, "Fair competition would be much appreciated." Netizens enjoyed the interaction, with many joking about Reliance Industries potentially finding its 'fair market' match in Tesla CEO Musk. Days later, however, Airtel announced that it had inked a deal to bring Starlink to India. Hot on its heels was Jio Platforms with the same announcement. India's two major telecom companies announced their Starlink partnerships after a White House meeting last month between U.S. President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The Prime Minister shared that he had met Mr. Musk and discussed a range of subjects with him, including space, mobility, technology, and innovation. Weeks later, Airtel and Jio hailed their partnerships with Starlink and its potential for India's consumers.



PHOTO: AFP

"This is the first agreement to be signed in India, which is subject to SpaceX receiving its own authorizations to sell Starlink in India," noted Airtel in a statement on March 11. The two would also explore offering Starlink products in Airtel's retail stores and Starlink service via Airtel to business customers. A day later, Jio Platforms released its own statement, with similar language. It hailed the partnership between the "world's largest mobile operator in terms of data traffic" and Starlink, but noted that the agreement was subject to Starlink obtaining authorisation. Airtel further acknowledged its existing alliance with Eutelsat OneWeb, which also provides satellite connectivity. Eutelsat OneWeb noted on its website that it had "more than 630 satellites along 12 carefully synchronised orbital planes 1,200 km above, in low Earth orbit (LEO)." Jio, during the India Mo-

bile Congress in 2023, introduced its own JioSpace-Fiber satellite Internet service. In a press release, Jio shared that it was "partnering with SES to access the world's latest in medium earth orbit satellite technology." SES has 70 satellites operating in two different orbits and broadcasts to over 1 billion TV viewers worldwide. Meanwhile, Starlink noted on its website that it is a constellation of "thousands of satellites" that orbit Earth at about 550 km. Keep in mind, however, that the winner is not necessarily the company with the largest number of satellites. The satellite's assigned location – in low, medium, or high Earth orbit – greatly affects its build, its orbital speed, the area it can cover by itself, and the kind of service it provides to users. For example, a Starlink satellite system in low Earth orbit that enables users to watch movies while camping will drastically differ from a sa-

telite or a satellite system that enables one country's military to monitor an enemy region. As of March 15, the Starlink availability map still marked service in India as "pending regulatory approval". India's only neighbour that currently enjoys official access to Starlink is Bhutan. Meanwhile, some Bangladeshi companies have entered into agreements with Starlink, and service-related discussions are taking place, reported local news outlets. Past controversies Starlink has been trying for years to enter the Indian market, but faced hurdles. In early 2022, Starlink emailed customers to promise refunds for pre-orders after the government said it was not licensed to operate in the country, reported TechCrunch. In December 2024, satellite Internet equipment with Starlink branding was seized from Manipur's Imphal East and linked to militant activity. Mr. Musk said this was false and that satellite beams were turned off over India. While the Indian government needs to formally bless Starlink's latest attempt to land in the country, the high-profile agreements signed with Airtel and Jio after Mr. Modi's U.S. visit signal a softening stance in Delhi.

{ THE BIG PICTURE }

India's uneven quest to master technology

Learnings from Delhi's past should help in shaping the future as the country bets big on new critical technologies

When I set out to write a book about India's international relations, I did not necessarily appreciate the centrality of the role of technology. But in setting out the basis of India's international relations — past, present, and future — in *Vishwa Shashtra: India and the World*, I could not escape considering the critical role that technology has played, and continues to play, in the country's international engagement.

Throughout history, technological developments have shaped competition and cooperation between countries. In India's case, it can be traced back to the spread of writing, agricultural, and metallurgical techniques in pre-historic and ancient times. At various points, India was a regional leader in certain technologies, including mathematics, stone masonry, and seafaring. The spread of technology around what we might now call the Indo-Pacific accelerated around the 10th century, with India's export of medicinal, astronomical, and agricultural knowledge, and its import of gunpowder and paper-making techniques. The circulation of technology also took some unexpected turns, such as the diffusion of certain gunsmithing techniques from West Asia to India and from there to Europe.

But, as a newly independent nation after 1947, mastering critical technologies assumed a new urgency. It explains India's efforts at reaching out to several partners in the

advanced industrial world in its early years. With the US, India sought assistance in dam building and water management, notably through the Damodar Valley Corporation. With the UK and the Commonwealth, India participated in the Colombo Plan, which contributed significantly to agricultural, medical, and urban development. With West Germany, India sought defence and aerospace design, resulting in — among other things — its first indigenous fighter jet, the HF-24 Marut. After 1953, India also received financial and technical assistance from the Soviet Union, resulting in the Bhilai Steel Plant in present-day Chhattisgarh, and later the licensed defence production of transport and fighter aircraft.

India's ability to work with a variety of partners contributed to some notable technological successes during the early years of the Cold War. The establishment of the first five Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), benefited considerably from assistance from the US, USSR, United Nations, the UK, and West Germany, including the provision of initial lab equipment. Just as dramatically, the Green Revolution benefited from public and private US and multilateral initiatives to introduce high-yield varieties of wheat, helping make India agriculturally self-sufficient. Another area of initial success was in nuclear sciences, which involved the private sector (specifically, the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research) and international partnerships for civilian technologies and raw materials. In fact, India boasted an undisputed leadership position in the developing world when it came to civilian nuclear technologies.

There were also some meaningful techno-

logical successes after economic liberalisation and the end of the Cold War in 1991. Many domestic initiatives benefited from international assistance to advance public health objectives, including drastic reductions in communicable diseases and the development of a pharmaceutical industry. The Indian telecommunications revolution, while mired in scandals and poor infrastructure in the initial years, took off after foreign vendors agreed to adapt their business models for the Indian market. The software and outsourcing boom of the late 1990s and early 2000s was the product of investments in human talent; policy changes that slashed duties, subsidised broadband, and created single-window clearances; and heightened global demand. Another clear manifestation was the Delhi Metro which, after 1995, benefited from financing, imports, systems, technical assistance, and training from Japan, South Korea, Germany, Canada, the US, the UK, and Hong Kong.

Yet India's quest for technology was not always sustained or consistent. The country continued to lag in many important areas, including electronic and automotive manufacturing, defence production, and nuclear energy. It is worth considering what factors held India back. Perhaps the most important was adverse politics, ideological hang-ups, and strong vested interests from public and private sector parties eager to preserve their power and monopoly. Second, in an era of sharper resource constraints, including foreign exchange reserves, India grew accustomed to cheap licence production — which included attractive financing and technical assistance but without the necessary technological trans-



Dhruva Jaishankar



Over the past two decades, successive governments have endeavoured to diversify India's partnerships with advanced economies. REUTERS

fers. One consequence was that India could rarely take advantage of its immense scale. Third, paradoxically, India lacked sufficient State control of production and labour that characterised economies such as the Soviet Union and allowed them to make decisive progress in critical sectors. Finally, India often had to reconcile foreign dependencies with strategic autonomy, particularly when it came to nuclear weapons, which contributed to an adverse export control regime and technological denials.

These limitations have slowly been overcome. Over the past two decades, successive governments have endeavoured to diversify India's partnerships with advanced economies, reduce export controls, offer more attractive terms for technological indigenisation, improve procurement processes, and increase financial outlays. Efforts are also underway to clarify specifications, alignments, and processes when it comes to procurements. In civilian sectors such as semiconductors, telecommunications, electronics, space, biotechnology, and other nascent technolo-

gies, India has begun to offer sizeable subsidies, workforce training programmes, and regulatory and customs changes to encourage indigenisation efforts. In addition, foreign partnerships that enable investment, market access, coordinated standards, and policy alignment remain important.

Today's technological priorities are apparent. They include computational hardware, digital technologies, infrastructure, cleaner and more efficient energy systems, transportation, health and biotechnology, and defence and aerospace. All have important strategic and economic implications, as well as the potential to generate growth, jobs, and exports. Defence efforts today focus on aircraft components and engines, missile systems, drones and counter-unmanned aerial systems (CUAS), armoured vehicles, surveillance and radars, and maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) facilities. Extra efforts will have to be made in shipbuilding, particularly large hulls, for both defence and commercial platforms. To these ends, India has outlined new regulations in defence, artificial intelligence, space,

drones, and geospatial data; created nodal agencies for semiconductors, quantum technologies, and green hydrogen; and entered into a variety of agreements and mechanisms with foreign partners for investment, standards, technology transfers, market access, training, and supply chain security.

While considerable progress has been made, it is worth reflecting on past experiences. Why did India succeed — sometimes overcoming great adversity — in areas such as space, agriculture, public transportation, public health, and telecommunications, but struggle in areas of defence, electronics assembly, semiconductors, and nuclear industries despite apparent head-starts? How can the mistakes of the past not be repeated when it comes to artificial intelligence or quantum technologies? These are worth considering as India makes another set of big bets on emerging technology in an increasingly competitive and contested world.

Dhruva Jaishankar is executive director, ORF America. The views expressed are personal

{ SUNDAY SENTIMENTS }

Karan Thapar



The general at his desk, writing murder mysteries

It's not every day that an Army chief writes a novel. In fact, it's only happened once during the 77 years since Independence. This is what makes General Manoj Naravane's book almost unique and special. That's also why I'm writing about it today.

Called *The Cantonment Conspiracy*, it is, as its subtitle says, a military thriller. Though not a Le Carre, it is pacy and very readable. I finished it in a single sitting. The pages seemed to turn themselves.

The story centres around two young newly commissioned officers, Lieutenant Rohit Verma, a third-generation officer, and Lieutenant Renuka Khatri, the first woman to join an infantry regiment. Rohit is accused of molestation and assumed by most people to be guilty. Renuka, the more powerful personality of the two and the driving force behind the story, jumps to his defence. As the plot unravels, two murders take place, and the person who commits them is not the one

you first suspect. But I won't tell you more. That would reveal the tale.

The story is set in the future. It all happens sometime after June 2026. It unfolds at the regimental centre of the Sikh Rifles in Fatehpuri. Rohit and Renuka are there for what is called orientation training. Now, General Naravane's own regiment was the 7th Sikh Light Infantry. So, clearly, he's drawing upon his own experience and personal knowledge.

Thrillers, of course, are not easy to write. First, there is the plot. It needs to be intriguing and, more importantly, as you read you need to be pulled deeper and deeper into it. Then, there's the pacing of the story. It must gallop towards a climax if not also a furious end. Finally, there's the language. It needs to be terse and taut. Short snappy sentences rather than long philosophical disquisitions. Through all of this, you also need a clear sense of what sort of people the principal characters are. Their personality needs to be etched clearly and sharply. And you

need a deft sense of right and wrong. Thrillers tend to be moral books.

This book has all of that. Yet to be honest, it is not what you expect from army generals. The book's different shades of colour and its subtlety of description is, I would say, pleasantly surprising. I haven't met an Army chief who has these literary qualities and, believe me, I've met several.

Though his is only a peripheral role, I was particularly struck by the Regimental Centre's commandant's English. When he speaks, Brigadier Ashok Menon reminds me of an English Colonel Blimp. "What the deuce?" and "dam" pop out of his mouth. His speech is peppered with words like ruddy, blighter and buggler.

Clearly, General Naravane has done this deliberately. He's conveyed a particular image with his character's language. At times, it reminds me of Arthur Conan Doyle or even PG Wodehouse.

But is that what army brigadiers are truly like? Or is that what the author believes readers would expect? Either way, it works.

However, for all its meticulous attention to detail and description — and this thriller captures the spirit and character of Army life rather accurately — there's one strange lapse I find mystifying. There's a moment when Brigadier Menon is talking to Rohit and the author writes: "Pointing to the wall, he said 'Do you see that quote of Guru Nanak? The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.'" As far as I

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know, this quotation is usually attributed to the British Conservative politician Edmund Burke, although scholars of late have even begun to question that. Did Guru Nanak really say it? If he did, when and where?

That quibble apart, I can't wait for the general's next thriller. He tells me if this one is well-received, there could be a series of Lt Renuka Khatri murder mysteries. Who knows, she could become our own young Miss Marple. In that event, the general would be the new Agatha Christie!

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

{ ENGENDER }

Lalita Panicker



A women's front to boost green energy

India is expanding its renewable energy sector at a fairly rapid clip with new capacity expected to increase significantly enough by 2026 for it to outpace many major economies. But do we have enough skilled manpower to keep up this trajectory? We do not. One answer would be to get women to enter the green workforce in greater numbers which will not only empower them but also ensure that India achieves its green energy goals.

There are many sectors in which women can play a significant role, from waste management to climate adaptation. By 2030, experts estimate that India will need at least 3.5 million people working in the green energy sector; at present, it is about a third of that. This is an industry where skilled workers will be needed more and more and where we need much greater gender focus. Women, with their capacity for innovation and responsiveness to on-ground realities, could be a great asset in energy transition, ensuring greater inclusion in the workforce and reducing the gender gap in green energy jobs.

The Skill India programme could focus more on imparting women with the wherewithal to integrate with the green workforce. To address the dichotomy of hunger on the one hand and food waste on the other, Nidhi Pant, co-founder of Science for Society, who is a part of the Powering Livelihoods Programme run by Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) and Vilgro, has set up a food processing start-up powered by solar dryer technology. With this, she has democratised the technology for women farmers while addressing the issue of food losses. Disha Agarwal, senior programme lead, CEEW, says, "Women are engaging in several programmes and initiatives, advancing India's energy transition journey. For instance, *vidyut sakhis* in Uttar Pradesh are supporting electricity distribution companies in collecting electricity bills from consumers.

Important contributions are emerging from CEEW's powering livelihoods programme, where women-users of decentralised renewable energy technologies are sharing their experiences with other women across the country, providing learnings for creating new avenues of income generation. Women's participation will be essential in bringing energy transition closer to the communities."

But such success stories like Nidhi's have not moved the needle enough on women in green jobs. The International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) found that while women constitute 32% of the global clean energy workforce, the figure for India is only 11%. While the government has framed many schemes to include women in green industries, there is still far too little data on their involvement here. Reliable data could help address the challenges that women face, from lack of awareness and skills to the lack of gender sensitivity in green workplaces.

One of the areas which is expanding rapidly is solar energy. But installing and maintaining solar equipment requires a certain degree of education, which many women do not have. Many solar plants are in areas without proper and safe transportation and lack of facilities for women. So, to draw in more women, enabling conditions must be created both in training and the workplace.

Jobs in the solar power sector are often in remote locations which deter women. This will make achieving net zero by 2070 that much harder. Studies show women's leadership in climate adaptation and mitigation leads to more sustainable solutions and innovations. In India, women are already active at the grassroots in resource management and this could lead to a valuable cohort of green workers. Women can't be just politically correct additions to green energy efforts, they must be given their rightful place in it.

The views expressed are personal

A bookmark for your memory called cricket

Whenever I am happy or sad about a cricket result, I ask this existential question: How does a cricket result matter to me? It's a pure intangible. It doesn't improve my standard of living, help my status in society, or make me achieve any of my life goals. Why am I so invested in this?

Twenty-nine years ago, on March 13, a kid was standing before the gods in the *poola ghar*, wishing his team would chase down a score of 251. It was the World Cup semi-final. Venkatesh Prasad had just given us a once-in-a-generation-high, by showing a cocky Aamir Sohail the way to the pavilion after taking his off-stump for an evening walk in the quarter-final. The stage was set to bring the second World Cup home. The kid, who was still learning how to multiply two numbers, could calculate the gravity of this match. He hadn't seen a World Cup win in his living memory. Plenty of Hero Cups and Singer Cups. But never a World Cup. This was it. Only, Sri Lanka had four spinners, a combination that would be handy three decades later as well. But we had Sachin (Tendulkar), and he started well, playing his shots in the V, scoring his 50 in quick time. The score was 98/1. Suddenly the delivery turned when a Sanath Jayasuriya delivery didn't turn but flicked Sachin's pad and rolled to the wicket-keeper, Romesh Kaluwitharana, who dislodged the bails in a flash. And our black and white Weston TV was switched off. It



Abhishek Asthana

wasn't an impulsive decision, as it required you to walk up to the TV and turn it off. It was a rational move. The result of the match would then be conveyed to us next morning by the newspaper.

But this was the World Cup semi-final, so I secretly switched it on an hour later. "Why can't Sachin come back again wearing Mongia's jersey, they look the same with the helmet on." In my defence, I was a 10-year-old.

But, the only thing I saw was a desolate Vinod Kambli walking back to the dressing room, with tears in his eyes, and the stadium ablaze. The 1996 World Cup semi-final was a lesson in handling grief for many kids of my generation.

As we grow old, we learn the concept of emotional investment. It's like keeping it in a vault rather than investing it around small-cap stocks. Most of us being working professionals can't afford a mental downtime with all the commitments and responsibilities. Any such loss shouldn't rankle so much that you can't face a Monday. Evidently, as time passes even if the losses sting, the recovery is faster. Be it the 1999 Chennai Test when we lost to Pakistan, or that 81 all out in Barbados while chasing 120. Or as recent as November 19, 2023, the debacle at Ahmedabad. The losses hurt badly, but most of us older people got back on our feet. It's dual in nature, the victories are as sweet. I remember, just as Mahendra Singh Dhoni hit the winning six in 2011, I ran out to participate in a mob in BTM Layout Bangalore, hugging



The goal is to win so much that eventually there is emptiness in victories ANI

random strangers, waving a borrowed Tricolour, and celebrating till 3am. Will I be able to repeat any such thing? Not really. Once you have made yourself immune to a loss, you won't get drunk in a victory.

So, what's the tangible utility of these trophies in your life? It occurred to me when India won the Champions Trophy 2025 last Sunday. A memorable day for all Indian cricket fans. But you need more such days when you have spent 70% of your life watching cricket. As these days are memory book-marks, the days you will remember 20-30 years from now, clearly recalling where you were, watching it with whom. These memories will be stored in your brain as snapshots, like that old album you pull out from the parental almirah, to feel all mushy. Our lives are inconsequential and mundane. We have a shortage of memory bookmarks. In such a case, cricket acts as a great memory maker. Our job is to be there, when it throws

such days at us, to freeze them permanently. Indian fans from the 1990s have more sad memory bookmarks than happy ones. The onus is on the current Indian team to tilt the balance in favour of the happier ones. And this team seems quite capable.

The goal is to win so much that there comes a time when there is emptiness in victories. When all your ghosts are exorcised, all bastions (like Gabba) conquered, there is no frontier that hasn't been scaled. You get used to it. It ceases to be an event of note that gets burned into your brain. Like the Australian team of the 2000s. That's when you can afford to miss a few of such days, but till the time memories of days like the 1996 semi-finals are still fresh, keep collecting those bookmarks.

Abhishek Asthana is a tech and media entrepreneur and tweets as @gabbbarsingh. The views expressed are personal

{ SUNDAY LETTERS }

Tharoor & Congress

This is with reference to "Congress party and its Tharoor dilemma" by Karan Thapar (March 9). While Shashi Tharoor's eloquence and charisma continue to make him a beloved figure among Kerala's middle class, his relationship with the Congress party has been one of missed opportunities and occasional controversies.

Sanjay Chopra

Protecting Indian migrants

This is with reference to "Securing the lives of India expat workers" (March 9), by Rejimon Kuttappan. The government must support Indian migrants abroad. Not finding jobs here, they go to other countries in search of livelihoods and are often not aware of laws there.

Neeta Shere


America's dodgy DOGE

This is with reference to "Tremors in Washington and aftershocks in Delhi" (March 9), by Milan Vaishnav. DOGE and Elon Musk represent a tyranny of the unelected unleashed on the American population.

Shreya Pathak

Write to us at: letters@hindustantimes.com

Across THE AISLE



PCHIDAMBARAM

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Prepare to deal with dealmaker

THE FIRST Charter of Rights is believed to be the *Magna Carta* agreed by the King of England in 1215. The first *Parliament* in the world is believed to be the ‘Althing’ in Iceland established in 1262. The first *bicameral legislature* can be traced to 1341 in Britain. The first *written Constitution* of a country was of the Republic of San Marino in 1600. The doctrine of *separation of powers* is attributed to the ‘Spirit of Laws’ published in 1748 by Montesquieu, a French philosopher. The *judicial power* of a country was first vested in a Supreme Court in the United States on September 24, 1789.

THE GOOD UNDER THREAT

The great and good lessons of constitutional history were embodied in the U.S. Constitution, and it has been copied by many countries including by the makers of the Constitution of India. Free and democratic countries led by the United States promised to make a new world order that will end war, poverty and disease. They succeeded to a large extent. Though the new order could not end local wars, the world had never before witnessed eight decades of relative peace, unprecedented growth and widespread prosperity.

It has, therefore, come as a major shock that developments of the last three years — and, in particular, the developments since January 20, 2025 — threaten

to re-shape the world in a selfish and authoritarian mould.

The office of President of the United States is unique because of its vast specified and unspecified powers, aided by the fact that America is the richest country in the world. Exercising those powers, William McKinley expanded the territory of the United States and annexed Puerto Rico, Guam, the Philippines and Hawaii. Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D Roosevelt suppressed free speech and used executive orders to detain or deport foreigners and dissidents. Barack Obama started a war in Libya without the authorization of the U.S. Congress under the War Powers Act, 1973. Other presidents have tested the limits of the office and got away with apparently unconstitutional acts.

TEARING APART WORLD ORDER

None more so than the 47th President of the United States, Donald J Trump. For *eight decades*, despite aberrations and misadventures, America was considered the leader of the free, democratic countries and the underwriter of the world order. Numerous world institutions were created to advance the cause of peace, education, healthcare and human rights. However, in barely *eight weeks* under Mr Trump, the U.S. has quit the WHO and threatened to quit or halt funding to the United Nations Human Rights Council

(UNHRC) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). Mr Trump has shut USAID and brought to a halt dozens of programmes throughout the world. He may quit NATO and abandon the European allies.

Domestically, egged on by Mr Elon Musk, the world’s richest person, Mr Trump has begun to dismantle the structure of the U.S. government. He has fired thousands and is likely to shut down the Department of Education.

Under Mr Trump, friend has become foe (President Zelenskyy) and foe may become friend (President Putin). Mr Trump covets Canada to be the 51st state of the USA and has openly invited Greenland to join the U.S. adding ominously that “we will get it one way or the other”.

Mr Trump has made no distinction between foe (China) and friend (India), and is willing to make deals. “I have made deals all my life”, he boasted and, after inviting, humiliating and throwing out President Zelenskyy, he invited him back “when he is ready to sign an agreement” for presumably critical minerals — Mr Trump called it ‘payback’.

DARK CLOUD OVER WORLD

Where will the world go with a transactional president of the United States and a confessed deal maker? And what are the implications for India?

For the world, the authoritarian rulers

will form a club — Mr Trump, Mr Putin and Mr Xi. They will grab territory — America eyes the Panama Canal, Canada, Greenland and Gaza; Russia, having already annexed Crimea, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, wants Ukraine and perhaps Georgia; and China, after forcibly integrating Tibet and Hong Kong, has made no secret of its desire to annex Taiwan, significant parts of India and the South China Sea and its islands. The three countries will attempt to divide the world into ‘areas of influence’ and exploit the resources in the respective dominant area. India will be vulnerable to China and neither America nor Russia will help.


For India, the country will be forced to buy more military equipment from the U.S. India will also be obliged to import more goods from America at low tariffs. A detente between America and Russia will mean that Russian oil will no longer be available at cheap prices. India may be ‘persuaded’ to downplay BRICS. QUAD will not be seen as hostile to China. Pakistan and Bangladesh will forge closer ties under their common patron, the U.S. If Mr Trump starts a tariff war, it will up-end rule-based world trade and India’s economy will be ruined. Like Germany and France have realized, India must fend for itself.

Mr Modi may think that his *dosti* with Mr Trump will bail India out. Not a chance. Mr Trump is selfish and an ego-tist, and will not care even if he crashes the world’s economy. Hang on, world, for four years.

Fifth COLUMN

TAVLEEN SINGH

Twitter @tavleen_singh



Investment needed in people

AN ODD thing happened after my column appeared last Sunday. Soon after I posted it on X, it came under full attack from hyper-sensitive, hyper-nationalistic Indians who thought that I had portrayed China in a better light than India. The thrust of the attack was that I had failed to notice that China was not a democratic country with a free press, aggressive opposition parties and the freedoms we take for granted. When it became clear that there were many readers of the column who felt this way, I responded to a particularly belligerent critic by saying that instead of behaving like a chippy Indian with an inferiority complex, he would do well to notice what China had got right and what we in India have not. Suddenly I was inundated with an unexpected flood of support.

So let me begin by admitting that I was gratified to see that I had touched an empathetic nerve. There are clearly many Indians who agree that China invested in the things that go towards making a strong country and we did not. No country can be strong if its population is weak. I am personally not mad about the term ‘human resource development’ but use it here because it is in exactly this area that the leaders of India have failed to invest.

This is why I plan this week to expand on what I believe India needs to do urgently to make us more able to compete with China, a country that is without question our biggest and most powerful enemy. We also need young Indians to be given the tools to compete in an increasingly competitive world. It is my fervent hope that our political leaders will urgently discover that without proper schools, healthcare and nutrition, young Indians will remain unable to deal with the changing realities they face.

The average Indian child is forced to go to schools that are so bad that they are lucky if they leave school with basic literacy. Study after study has revealed that Indian children finish school without being able to read, write or count adequately. This is not just because educational standards in our ancient land are abysmal but because they are not healthy enough to concentrate on learning. Last week, Parliament was told by the Minister of Women and Child Development that 38% of Indian children under the age of six are stunted and another 17% are below the weight they should be. Of these, some are so below normal weight that they are considered ‘wasted’. In recent years midday meal schemes have helped but not sufficiently yet.

In this age when Artificial Intelligence is beginning to compete with human intelligence, most Indians leave college without the qualifications needed to become employable. Is it any wonder that young people from our richest states pay small fortunes to human traffickers who promise to take them to better countries? In the few weeks since Donald Trump has returned to the White House, some of these desperate young Indians have been sent back to India in chains and fetters. Others have been rescued from slavery in Chinese scam factories in Thailand where they are forced to commit digital crimes.

When are our political leaders going to admit that the prospects for young Indians are so grim that this should be considered a national emergency? The Prime Minister likes to tell us that he is working on securing our ‘virasat’ (heritage) while at the same time ensuring that as much attention is being paid to ‘vikas’ (development). Has he noticed that if weighed on a scale it would be ‘virasat’ that would weigh a great deal more than ‘vikas’? Almost not a day goes by when some BJP leader is not seen banging on about our culture and heritage. They rarely tell us what they plan to do about bringing us closer to become a fully developed country by 2047. This is a goal that the Prime Minister personally set.


In fairness to Narendra Modi, it must be said that since he became prime minister the speed at which roads, ports, airports and other vital infrastructure is being built has been truly remarkable. If there are failures, it is at the level of his chief ministers who have mostly performed dismally. It is because of their failures that we have not yet seen that improvement in schools, healthcare, nutrition and the other things that are needed for our vast population of young people to become competitive in the world.

This is the reason why foreign investors when choosing an alternative to China to build their factories usually choose countries in East Asia. They have invested heavily in the things that really matter. Some of the people who responded to last week’s column said we needed a dictatorship in India for us to get ahead. No, we do not. We need our political leaders to drastically change their priorities. We need policies that will help us take advantage of having the largest population of young people in the world. Instead of just boasting about this in international forums we need our leaders to start doing something on the domestic front that will make a real difference. There is no sign so far that this has begun to happen, but we must continue to hope that it will. India is beginning to run out of time.

I am trying to raise a son who won’t conform to stereotypes

How to RAISE A BOY

MALLIKA BHATIA



I REMEMBER the sinking feeling in my heart when the doctor said, “It’s a boy.”

No, no, no. This can’t be happening to me. I can’t have a boy. I have a four-year-old daughter at home. I know how to love a girl, how to raise her, or rather, how “not” to raise her. But a boy? What would I do with him?

The doctor, knowing, smiled. “Focus on the fact that your child is healthy, the rest will follow,” she said.

Of course. What choice did I have? I thought to myself. We had presumed we had it all figured out. The second child would inherit everything from the first: clothes, toys, even the unspoken roadmap of how we envisioned parenting. We had a girl’s name ready. We had already declared to our families that this child, unlike our firstborn, would take my surname instead of my husband’s.

But now, a new plan had unravelled, the one I knew not how to execute. On my way back from the clinic, I tried to think of boys that gave me comfort. Mentally sifted through the list of all the people I knew — their sons, their brothers. Only when I was about to reach home did I remember my friend Sonal’s boys. They were gentle and grounded — a consolation that raising good men was possible.

The rest of my time went into making mental notes about everything I wanted my son to do, all that I wanted him to learn and follow. Was I overthinking? Over-planning? Maybe. But I had seen enough examples of boys who found humour in yanking their classmate’s ponytail and grown men who couldn’t sew a button. Within my circle, I knew boys who were growing up believing that it was their sister’s duty to serve them. Men who needed the suitcases for their work trip to be packed by their wives. I didn’t allow myself to think of the kinds I read about in the newspapers.

No, I wasn’t overthinking. I was preparing. Preparing to raise a boy I could call my own. Proudly. I did have examples around me, the ones I could draw inspiration from, but they were far too few. I needed a tribe, yet all I found were the ones pretending to

be leaders. I needed team players, boys who could cry without fear of being judged and men who could use a pressure cooker as comfortably as pens and keyboards. I turned to my husband who echoed my sentiments. In him I had found my teammate, and together we decided to raise a boy who knew how to be gentle.

At six, I let my son deck me up. He picks out my earrings and closes the latch of my chain when I am heading out. It teaches him to be gentle. It helps him learn respect and practise patience. It cultivates the concept that love is not just admiration, it seeks involvement. He loves dressing up as Spiderman while he practises sewing on buttons. He has volunteered to mend everyone’s buttonless shirts, provided we let him choose the “goldenest” button possible. When on salad duty, he turns the red of carrots into flowers and the green from cucumbers into stems and leaves.

Both sewing and kitchen work teach him the essentials: survival and meditation. Both activities need concentration, precision, and the right plan. I would rather let him prick his fingers with the needle now, than poke someone else later. My hope is that he learns that his power lies not in dominance, but in execution with tenderness, a kindness so deep that it heals the souls of generations of women.

His sister often complains that he is loud when he is playing with his imaginary ghost friend, Bhooti, a teacher at the school of ghosts, specialising in teaching the other ghosts how to make the perfect spooky sounds. We let her voice her complaint. It teaches her to have an opinion.


His favourite colour, until last year, was lilac. Then it changed to red because his friends told him lilac was for girls. I wanted to tell him that liking lilac doesn’t make him inadequate in his gender, nor does changing his favourite colour weaken his stand. But I knew better than to compete with his peers. Instead, my husband and I exchanged an internal high-five when he chose a fuchsia pink bike for his birthday.

We are trying to raise a boy who respects himself deeply, knowing that his thoughts shape his actions. The kind who cries when he needs to and laughs out loud. The kind who understands partnership, values gentleness, and moves through the world with grace. The kind of boy I will always be proud to call my own.

The writer is a psychotherapist and mother to two children, a girl and a boy (How to Raise a Boy is a fortnightly column)

History HEADLINE

ZEESHAN SHAIKH



CALLS FOR the demolition of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb’s tomb in Khuldabad, Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar district, have gained traction of late, with Maharashtra CM Devendra Fadnavis leading the charge. Besides Satara MP Udayanraje Bhosale, the descendant of Maratha king Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, labelling Aurangzeb a “thief”, *Chhaava*, a recently released film that graphically depicts Maratha king Sambhaji Maharaj’s execution, has fuelled the demolition demand.


However, this demand stands in stark contrast to the approach adopted by the Maratha rulers of the past. During the Maratha Confederacy from 1674 to 1818, there existed a more nuanced relationship with Mughal monuments. The Marathas, while asserting their own political and cultural identity, also maintained a respectful engagement with these structures. Historical records mention Chhatrapati Shahu I, the fifth ruler of the Maratha Empire and Shivaji’s grandson, visiting Aurangzeb’s tomb to pay his respects.

Aurangzeb, the sixth Mughal emperor, passed away on March 3, 1707, at the age of 88 in Ahmednagar, present-day Maharashtra. His death marked the conclusion of his 49-year reign, with the last 25 years dominated by fierce battles against the Marathas, led by Shivaji. Despite the constant warfare, Aurangzeb developed a deep spiritual connection with a region called Rauza, located just 26 km from modern-day Aurangabad. Known for its large number of Sufi saints, it was in this area that Aurangzeb sought solace during his turbulent reign.

In his will, Aurangzeb explicitly expressed his desire to be buried near the shrine of Sufi Zaynuddin Shirazi. Though he passed away in Ahmednagar, his body was transported to Khuldabad, located 136 km away, and laid to rest in accordance with his wishes. While the place was originally called Rauza, it was later renamed Khuldabad, meaning “heavenly abode”, as a tribute to Aurangzeb, who was posthumously referred to as “Khuld Makaan” or “the one whose abode is heaven/eternity”.

Aurangzeb’s tomb remains modest. He himself is documented to have funded his final resting place with just Rs 14 and 12 annas — the amount he earned by knitting caps during his last years. The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) de-

When Shivaji’s grandson visited Aurangzeb’s tomb



Aurangzeb holds court.
Wikimedia Commons

scribes the tomb as follows, “The existing gateway and domed porch were added in 1760 AD. The floor is of marble, a neat railing of perforated marble is on three sides, and the wall of the dargah forms the fourth side. It was erected by the Nizam of Hyderabad. Only a patch of earth with a small sabza plant remains on top, and it is roofed only by the vault of the sky.”

Aurangzeb’s death in 1707 marked a turning point in Indian history, paving the way for the Marathas to emerge as the dominant political force in the subcontinent. Despite the long-standing animosity between the Marathas and the Mughals — especially with Aurangzeb executing Sambhaji Maharaj, the father of Shahu I — his tomb was largely left undisturbed.

Historical records suggest that Shahu I, upon his release following Aurangzeb’s death, visited the tomb of the Mughal emperor. Shahu, who was imprisoned by the Mughals at the age of seven and spent 18 years in their courts, had every reason to harbour resentment towards Aurangzeb, particularly after his father’s execution in 1689.

Shahu’s visit is mentioned in V G Khobrekar’s *Maratha Kalkhand*, a history of the Maratha state published by the Maharashtra government: “In just a few days, Shahu Raje became beloved by the people. Love and admiration from the public poured in from all sides. After the monsoon season ended, Shahu Raje reached Ahmednagar. He stayed there

until October, preparing for battle against Tarabai. Initially, he considered making Ahmednagar his capital. However, since the city was under Mughal control and Shahu was determined not to antagonise the Mughals, he abandoned the idea of taking it under his rule. From there, he visited the nearby city of Khuldabad and paid his respects at Aurangzeb’s tomb.”

The visit is discussed in Richard Eaton’s *A Social History of the Deccan*, which offers a broader context to his power struggle with Tarabai, Sambhaji’s widow. Eaton writes, “She pointed to his 18 years spent in the Mughal camp, his fluency in Persian, his refined courtly manner — all suggesting that culturally the Maratha prince had ‘gone Mughal’ and therefore was not to be trusted. She drew particular attention to Shahu’s contention, in her view treasonous, that his claims to kingship had been approved by the new Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah — as though the Mughals had the right to name the successors to Shivaji’s throne! In fact, that August, Shahu seemed to confirm Tarabai’s charges when he made a pilgrimage to Aurangzeb’s tomb by foot...”


While most Mughal monuments, including Aurangzeb’s tomb, were largely left undisturbed — even thrived — under the Maratha rule, there were occasional incidents of plunder during the Maratha rule. These incidents highlight that while the Marathas generally preserved many Mughal structures, they did not hesitate to plunder certain tombs and royal buildings during times of military conflict. The most well-known of this is the attack on the Red Fort in 1761, just before the Third Battle of Panipat. The Marathas, during one of their expeditions to Delhi, looted the Diwan-i-Khas, where Mughal emperors received courtiers and state guests.

A Maharashtra historian says, “Despite the long-standing animosity between the Marathas and the Mughals, many leaders of the Maratha Confederacy adopted a measured approach when it came to targeting religious sites. Numerous Mughal architectural sites and mosques within Maratha-controlled territories were well-preserved. The Maratha policy was pragmatic and balanced, a stark contrast to the approach of present-day rulers.”

The writer is an Associate Editor

She SAID

ANKITA DWIVEDI JOHRI



ALL THROUGH the 1990s, Chhaya would wake up at 5 am, mostly annoyed. Within 20 minutes, she had bathed and planted herself in front of the stove. Before we — her three unruly children — had even opened our eyes, she would push three tall glasses of milk in front of our faces. After a sharp morning lecture to get ready, she would rush back to the kitchen, where the mustard oil had begun smoking in the *kadhai*, its sharp scent permanently woven into our curtains and sofa covers.

Then, she would cook up a storm — lunch boxes packed with rice, dal and aloo chokha/bhujia. A separate salad for my father and parathas with pickle or jam for us. She would also roll up cheese parathas and

The Mrs who doesn’t cook dinner

shove them into our hands as we rushed to the bus stop. As we waved goodbye, she rarely smiled. It was less farewell, more relief. And she still seemed angry. Chhaya was always angry in the mornings.

So when I recently came across a post by the Save Indian Family Foundation about the film *Mrs.*, claiming, “What stress does a woman feel while chopping vegetables or cooking? Zero. Cooking is like meditation,” I was reminded of Chhaya’s mornings.

Unlike the film, the script played out differently in our house. We were a nuclear family, and my father’s job as a fighter pilot meant we lived on large bases in remote towns. While help was available, cooking remained the woman’s duty. Three C-sections had weakened Chhaya’s back, and the relentless cycle of housework and child-rearing only made it worse. She detested the expectation that she would do it all. And

yet, she did.

One evening, after my parents returned from their daily walk, Chhaya went straight to the bedroom instead of the kitchen. My father, Arvind, called the three of us — my brother, barely five, and I about 12 — and said, “From now on, Mummy will not make dinner. We will. She gets very tired by the end of the day.”

And just like that, without fuss, our kitchen duties began. At first, we struggled. My sister, grumbling, chopped onions. I kneaded the atta. My little brother carried milk to our mother’s room. But what surprised me most was my father’s skill: Arvind rolled chapatis, gave *tadkas* and even whipped up desserts.

The first few days were chaotic and we left the kitchen looking like a pirate raid. But we were not let off without cleaning up. Within a year, our dinner routine became

second nature. By 6 pm, we were in the kitchen — chopping, kneading, stirring and laughing. My mother, a glass of warm milk in hand, stretched out on the sofa.

When we asked my father where he had learned to cook, he shrugged. “I lived alone for years. I did everything myself.” No grand philosophy, just necessity. Chhaya never showered us with gratitude either. She simply said, “I don’t like eating dinner, so why should I cook?” Fair enough. We were hungry, so we cooked.

As we got older, my father extended this logic to weekends. No sattu parathas for breakfast, just cornflakes with milk or dahi-chura. No cooking. My mother loved those mornings. She made chai for herself, sat in the lawn and read the newspaper.

For the next 15 years, our kitchen was the heart of the home. Every major conversation — about careers, college, heartbreaks

and life — took place over the sizzle of mustard seeds in oil. My father never spoke about equality, but his actions taught us more than any lecture ever could. In my mid-20s, when he passed away, we grieved for days. Eventually, life resumed. And one evening, hunger struck. “I’m not hungry. I’m going to sleep,” my mother said.

The first food delivery apps had just launched. With jobs now in hand, we ordered takeout for the next six months. How the family found its way back to the kitchen is a story for another time. But to this day, Chhaya doesn’t cook dinner. If someone asks, she smiles and says, “*Hum dinner nahi khate toh nahi banate* (I don’t eat dinner, so I don’t cook it).”

A former Express journalist, the writer is a reporter based in Doha, Qatar National Editor Shalini Langer curates the fortnightly ‘She Said’ column

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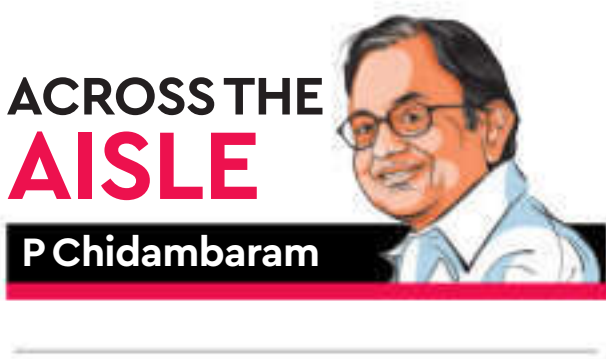
Opinion

SUNDAY, MARCH 16, 2025



When Collin Morikawa refused to speak with the press at the 2025 Arnold Palmer Invitational, he couldn't have picked a worse place and time to play truant

INSTAGRAM



Mr Trump has made no distinction between foe (China) and friend (India), and is willing to make deals. “I have made deals all my life”, he boasted and, after inviting, humiliating and throwing out President Zelensky, he invited him back “when he is ready to sign an agreement” for presumably critical minerals — Mr Trump called it ‘payback’

THE FIRST CHARTER of Rights is believed to be the *Magna Carta* agreed by the King of England in 1215. The first *Parliament* in the world is believed to be the ‘Althing’ in Iceland established in 1262. The first *bicameral legislature* can be traced to 1341 in Britain. The first *written Constitution* of a country was of the Republic of San Marino in 1600. The doctrine of *separation of powers* is attributed to the ‘Spirit of Laws’ published in 1748 by Montesquieu, a French philosopher. The *judicial power* of a country was first vested in a Supreme Court in the United States on September 24, 1789.

The good under threat

The great and good lessons of constitutional history were embodied in the U.S. Constitution, and it has been copied by many countries including by the makers of the Constitution of India. Free and democratic countries led by the United States promised to make a new world order that will end war, poverty and disease. They succeeded to a large extent. Though the new order could not end local wars, the world had never before witnessed eight decades of relative peace, unprecedented growth and widespread prosperity. It has, therefore, come as a major shock that developments of the last three years — and, in particular, the developments since January 20, 2025 — threaten to reshape the world in a selfish and authoritarian mould.



AN ODD THING happened after my column appeared last Sunday. Soon after I posted it on X, it came under full attack from hyper-sensitive, hyper-nationalistic Indians who thought that I had portrayed China in a better light than India. The thrust of the attack was that I had failed to notice that China was not a democratic country with a free press, aggressive opposition parties and the freedoms we take for granted. When it became clear that there were many readers of the column who felt this way, I responded to a particularly belligerent critic by saying that instead of behaving like a chippy Indian with an inferiority complex, he would do well to notice what China had got right and what we in India have not. Suddenly I was inundated with an unexpected flood of support. So let me begin by admitting that I was gratified to see that I had touched an empathetic nerve. There are clearly many Indians who agree that China invested in the things that go towards making a strong country and we did not. No country can be strong if its population is weak. I am personally not mad about the term ‘human resource development’ but use it here because it is in exactly this



If US President Donald Trump starts a tariff war, it will upend rule-based world trade and India's economy will be ruined. Like Germany and France have realised, India must fend for itself

FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

Prepare to deal with dealmaker

The office of President of the United States is unique because of its vast specified and unspecified powers, aided by the fact that America is the richest country in the world. Exercising those powers, William McKinley expanded the territory of the United States and annexed Puerto Rico, Guam, the Philippines and Hawaii. Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D Roosevelt suppressed free speech and used executive orders to detain or deport foreigners and dissidents. Barack Obama started a war in Libya without the authorisation of the US Congress under the War Powers Act, 1973. Other presidents have tested the limits of the office and got away with apparently unconstitutional acts.

Tearing apart world order

None more so than the 47th President of the United States, Donald J Trump. For *eight decades*, despite aberrations and misadventures, America was considered the leader of the free, democratic countries and the underwriter of the world order. Numerous world institutions were created to advance the cause of peace, education, healthcare and human rights. However, in barely *eight weeks* under Mr Trump, the US has quit the WHO and threatened to quit or halt funding to the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). Mr Trump has shut USAID and brought to a halt dozens of programmes throughout the

world. He may quit NATO and abandon the European allies.

Domestically, egged on by Mr Elon Musk, the world's richest person, Mr Trump has begun to dismantle the structure of the US government. He has fired thousands and is likely to shut down the Department of Education.

Under Mr Trump, friend has become foe (President Zelensky) and foe may become friend (President Putin). Mr Trump covets Canada to be the 51st state of the USA and has openly invited Greenland to join the US adding ominously that “we will get it one way or the other”.

Mr Trump has made no distinction between foe (China) and friend (India), and is willing to make deals. “I have made deals all my life”, he boasted and, after inviting, humiliating and throwing out President Zelensky, he invited him back “when he is ready to sign an agreement” for presumably critical minerals — Mr Trump called it ‘payback’.

Dark cloud over world

Where will the world go with a transactional president of the United States and a confessed deal maker? And what are the implications for India?

For the world, the authoritarian rulers will form a club — Mr Trump, Mr Putin and Mr Xi. They will grab territory — America eyes the Panama Canal, Canada, Greenland and Gaza; Russia, having already annexed Crimea, Abkhazia and

South Ossetia, wants Ukraine and perhaps Georgia; and China, after forcibly integrating Tibet and Hong Kong, has made no secret of its desire to annexe Taiwan, significant parts of India and the South China Sea and its islands. The three countries will attempt to divide the world into ‘areas of influence’ and exploit the resources in the respective dominant area. India will be vulnerable to China and neither America nor Russia will help.

For India, the country will be forced to buy more military equipment from the US. India will also be obliged to import more goods from America at low tariffs. A detente between America and Russia will mean that Russian oil will no longer be available at cheap prices. India may be ‘persuaded’ to downplay BRICS. QUAD will not be seen as hostile to China. Pakistan and Bangladesh will forge closer ties under their common patron, the US. If Mr Trump starts a tariff war, it will upend rule-based world trade and India's economy will be ruined. Like Germany and France have realised, India must fend for itself.

Mr Modi may think that his *dosti* with Mr Trump will bail India out. Not a chance. Mr Trump is selfish and an egotist, and will not care even if he crashes the world's economy. Hang on, world, for four years.



Website: pchidambaram.in
X: @Pchidambaram_IN



“HOW STUPID, I am,” Roberto Di Vincenzo told the press after he signed an incorrect scorecard that cost him a chance to win the 1968 Masters Tournament. “This isn’t a funeral you know...It’s a great disappointment, and it tears at my gut...but it was not to be,” said 59-year-old Tom Watson to lighten the mood after he came up just short of winning the 2009 Open Championship. Phil Mickelson was clearly out of sorts after giving away a two-shot lead with three to play at the 2006 US Open: “I’m still in shock that I did that. I’m such an idiot,” he said wryly. Jean Van De Velde was even more introspective, squandering a three shot lead on the final hole of the 1999 Open Championship. “I wouldn’t say I wasn’t focussed...I think I wasn’t humble enough,” he said. And no one could accuse Rocco Mediate of not being humble after he summoned the courage to spend over an hour with the press, dissecting his 18-hole playoff loss at the 2008 US Open to Tiger Woods. Stuff like this is golflore: moments of courage and inner strength in the face of devastating loss; to be able to lay themselves bare at their most vulnerable moments without fear of undermining their confidence. Victories are the obvious yardstick, but often it’s how players deal with, and conduct themselves in the face of their biggest failures, that comes to define them.

With \$25 million in the kitty, the Players Championship still has the biggest purse of any event in golf played every year

It was appropriate that a discussion about pro golfers’ obligations to fans and the press should have come into circulation at the PGA Tour’s Arnold Palmer Invitational earlier this month. You see, Palmer’s graciousness with fans and the press remains pro golf’s model for public relations. He set the example and players like Jack Nicklaus and Tom Watson followed suit. The long-standing goodwill and popularity of the PGA Tour with fans and sponsors is often attributed to the brand these three players, and their cohorts, built in the Tour’s early years. So, when Collin Morikawa refused to speak with the press at the 2025 Arnold Palmer Invitational last week, he couldn’t have picked a worse place and time to play truant. Morikawa, understandably upset at not being able to convert a three-shot lead going into the final round lost by a stroke to Russel Henley. If that wasn’t enough, his blunt clarification at this week’s Players Championship, where he told the press, that “I don’t owe anyone anything, no offense to you guys,” has added fuel to the fire. Commentators across the board have

wasted no time in reminding Morikawa that most of the money he makes on the PGA Tour comes from media and broadcast rights. So he certainly has commitments to the Tour, the broadcasters and the sponsors. And as fans, the ultimate consumers who buttress this entire exercise, we do want to know how players feel about failures. Getting your teeth knocked out by golf is a story we can all relate to, and to see these players pick themselves up again, and again, is fascinating stuff. These human stories are at the heart of golf’s appeal. I mean just watch the latest season of Netflix’s *Full Swing*, and the stories that are showcased.

More than anything, as far as the PGA Tour is concerned, this is bad timing: in the wake of the power struggle with LIV Golf, the Tour has been attempting to build bridges with fans and sponsors, not burn them. And to have so much media distracted away from its flagship event—the ongoing Players’ Championship is hardly desirable. So let’s get back to the event at hand: with \$25 million in the kitty, the Players Championship still has (LIV events included) the biggest purse of any event in golf played at the same top-notch venue—TPC Sawgrass—every year. Until LIV came around, The Players also had the strongest field in the game. I’m not going to criticise the Tour for

not inviting the LIV players to augment the field: while there’s no question that doing so would have sent a clear message that it’s committed to resolving things with LIV, it’s likely to have further incensed players who’ve stayed in the PGA Tour’s fold.

That notwithstanding, it’s still a top-notch field. More than anything else, to win the players, you need self-belief. Hal Sutton, the 1983 champion was feeling pretty good about his game when he teed it up at TPC Sawgrass in 2000. Tiger fever was in full swing and Colin Montgomerie famously remarked that “we’re all playing for second.” As it turned out Sutton led from the start that year. And every post-round presser was dominated by questions on how he was planning to keep Tiger at bay. “Let me tell you, when I get down on my knees to pray, I don’t pray to Tiger,” remarked an exasperated Sutton. He later clarified that he didn’t want to build up Tiger in his mind so much that it crippled him.

If I was to conjure up a story for the next season of *Full Swing*, it would be Morikawa’s loss at the Arnold Palmer Invitational, the ensuing outrage over his comments, and then a comeback win at the Players Championship. What sort of triumph would it be if it didn’t have its share of travails? By the time you read this, it’s probably clear who’s in the hunt and who’s out. If Scheffler’s in the lead, then players need to internalise what Sutton said in 2000. May the best player win.

Meraj Shah is a seasoned golf writer and video producer

THE TRUMP OF UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

ACRONYMS have a knack of coming back to bite. US President Donald J Trump rode to power promising to punish China, censure Europe and Make America Great Again. In less than two months, the US economy has migrated from what was defined as “US exceptionalism”, with a roaring GDP and booming stock markets, to one where the definition is stranded between fears of recession and stagnation.

Trump, who said a few days back there may be “some pain”, has stepped up to brush off fears of an imminent recession. This week he said, “I don’t see it at all,” adding, “Remember, Trump is always right.” That said, the fears of inflation spiralled as Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent waffled around the term “transitory”. Yo-yoing between rising prices and slowing growth, many people now worry that the Trump playbook to Make America Great Again could be morphing into Make America Grieve Again! Meanwhile, top EU diplomat Kaja Kallas said that China, the original target, was “laughing at the US trade wars”.

The US president has apportioned himself the image of a strongman. He targeted Mexico and Canada in his opening gambit. He imposed tariffs on Europe, pummelled the European Union and mocked the leaders of the US’s oldest allies that are the large economies of France and Britain. The issue is not just what he says, but when he says what he says—from the insistent “I think Greenland will happen” in the presence of NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte, to “The only thing that makes sense for Canada is to become the 51st state” while discussing tariffs.

Every leader who stands up to Trump finds his or her approval rating rising. In Mexico, Claudia Sheinbaum is enjoying the support of 85 percent of her country, the highest for any Mexican president in three decades. In Canada, the Liberal Party took a lead over the Conservatives for the first time since 2021, overturning a 26-point deficit it was suffering from just six weeks ago. The Conservatives are facing anti-Trump headwinds and the Liberals an anticipation bump-up from the induction of Mark Carney as their new leader.

In France, Emmanuel Macron, who has had a disastrous year as president, was given his highest approval rating since June 2023. In Britain, Prime Minister Keir Starmer, who has had a torturous entry into 10 Downing Street and an uninspiring 180 days, found fortune smiling on him. An IPSOS poll last week bestowed him with a 7-point bump-up in approval from a low of 23 percent. Incredibly, The Economist, perhaps for the travelling talkies on support for Ukraine, even coined the new moniker ‘Winston Starmer’ and put him on the cover in a Churchillian avatar.

Meanwhile, Trump’s ratings are sliding. A Gallup-CNN poll says 54 percent Americans disapprove his handling of the presidency, 15 points higher than the historic average for presidents in the first 100 days. A Quinnipiac survey states 76 percent are worried about the state of the economy, a YouGov-Economist poll says he is not popular among 51 percent of the people, and Nate Silver’s Silver Bulletin places his ratings “underwater” with 49 percent negative.

Trump projects himself as a man who can move markets. A good way to test this is to measure performance of exchange-traded funds. Turns out the US markets are moving, but in the wrong direction. On Thursday, the benchmark index S&P500 slid over 10 percent. The billionaires who attended Trump’s inauguration have collectively lost over \$200 billion of their worth since then. Worse, on a year-to-date basis, returns on a Chinese large-cap ETF is at 19.3 percent and on Europe ETF at 12.5 percent, while that on the S&P500 ETF is at -5.6 percent. This week, Citigroup put a pause on American exceptionalism and upgraded China.

Trump has a point when he says Europe must pay for its security umbrella. But it’s also true that the bul of defence dollars forked out by Europe go to the US. This could change if the EU walks the talk. The threat-and-stick approach has catalysed 150 billion euros in loans to member states for defence investment and a long-term plan of spending 800 billion euros to re-arm Europe to counter the possible US disengagement from NATO and EU. Obviously, the allocations will favour EU entities and erode US firms’ footprint. Thanks to the emerging opportunity, EU defence stocks are soaring. It isn’t surprising that Germany’s Rheinmetall is up 124 percent, overtaking Volkswagen in market cap.

Trump believes that levelling the field for trade will enable the US economy to expand its global footprint, acquire resources and balance the two sides of the balance sheet. But history informs—from the days of the Fordney-McCumber Tariff Act of 1922 and the Smoot-Hawley law of 1930—that protectionism breeds trade compression and depression, and results in recession.

Trump’s strategy is often indistinguishable from his rant—in the unteem u-turns and whimsical announcements in the tariff wars, nobody can quite trace a storyline. Uncertainty haunts investment, halts hiring and hinders growth. While there is a large constituency that believes in the Trumpian pitch, those with skin in the game worry that the system America benefited from is unravelling. What’s in play is the trump of unintended consequences.

AILING AIR INDIA NEEDS INVASIVE SURGERY



POWER & POLITICS

PRABHU CHAWLA

prabhuchawla@newindianexpress.com

Follow him on X @PrabhuChawla

IN the new firmament of Indian independence, a new maharaja conquered the sky. Designed by Bobby Kuka, Air India’s immortal mascot with a twirling moustache and decorated turban was the country’s symbol for a welcome in the sky. Over the years, this glorious image became tarnished thanks to public-sector nepotism and indifference, accumulating total losses of ₹70,000 crore, more than a king’s ransom. Then, Prime Minister Narendra Modi did what others before him had promised: unshackle the overweight maharaja from incompetence and loss.

The USP of royals is cachet. Air India, with over 17,000 employees, was taken over by one of Indian industry’s oldest maharajas—the Tatas. Everyone expected the king of the skies to get a shining new look and feel. Unfortunately, the reverse has happened. AI’s monarch became even more shabby, and as efficient and friendly as the purveyor of a roadside eatery. There is hardly a day when AI doesn’t face passengers’ wrath for mismanagement. From inadequate and horrendous in-flight services to technical faults, flight delays and arrogant staff, India’s premier airline is plagued with multiple malaises.

In his message to shareholders a year after taking charge company Chairman N Chandrasekaran wrote: “The team at Air India has been working hard to transform this ‘national institution’ into a ‘national inspiration’. So on behalf of the board, I would like to acknowledge their effort and that of fellow directors. Much has been achieved, but there is much more yet to be done.

Expectations for the new AI are high, but the resolve, enthusiasm and focus on delivering burns bright.” But three years after the takeover, AI isn’t an inspiration but a source of melancholy.

As the new owners with a phalanx of crackerjack officials track the fault-lines, many more surface with menacing celerity. Early this month, Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan was horrified to find that he had been allocated a broken seat. Chouhan isn’t known for angry outbursts; but he was so incensed that he even questioned the idea of handing over AI to the Tatas. He posted: “I had the impression that AI’s service would have improved once Tata took over its management, but it turned out to be my misconception. I don’t care about my discomfort while sitting, but it is unethical to charge the full amount from passengers and then make them sit on bad and uncomfortable seats. Isn’t this cheating the passengers?”

Chouhan was reflecting the exasperation of a large section of AI’s over-45-million fliers. The nation’s flag carrier has long been considered a symbol of pride with a maharaja as its mascot. However, its reputation has been marred by persistent operational and service-related goof-ups since the Tata takeover. The numerous challenges include recurring flight delays and cancellations due to fleet deficiencies that undermine its ambitious plan for growth and global competitiveness.

The airline’s inexplicable deficiency in in-flight service has drawn consistent passenger ire. Frequent reports of outdated cabin interiors, malfunctioning amenities and poor service paint a picture of an airline owned by the Tatas struggling to modernise. For in-

stance, on March 5, AI flight 126 from Chicago to Delhi was forced to return to O’Hare International Airport due to malfunctioning lavatories. The stinking incident pointed towards inadequate oversight by crew and underscored a broader problem: ageing aircraft with substandard maintenance and insufficient upgrades to passenger-facing systems.

Another pestilential experience occurred in late 2024 when passengers on long-haul flights to the US complained of broken in-flight entertainment systems and worn-out seats on legacy Boeing 777s. It exposed AI’s promise of a “heavy refreshment” plan to install new seat covers, cushions and carpets by mid-2025. The slow pace of retrofit-

ing has left many travellers having to tolerate the inferior flying experience. It is perhaps to do with Tata’s inability to correct the decades of underinvestment in passenger facilities during the airline’s state-owned era.

AI suffers from technical flaws as well, raising concerns about safety and operational reliability. On January 5, flight 2820 from Bengaluru to Delhi made an emergency landing back in Bengaluru after one of its engines shut down mid-air. The incident added to a growing list of mechanical failures. In 2024, an AI Boeing 777 flying from Delhi to San Francisco was diverted due to a hydraulic failure, and multiple flights faced delays from minor glitches, forcing the Directorate General of Civil Aviation to fine the airline.

AI admirers claim that these are isolated incidents that are being addressed. These issues just can’t be attributed to the pains of an airline which is in transitional transformation. AI’s fleet shortage is one of the primary reasons for its woes. The airline operates



SOURAV ROY



THE THIRD EYE

SHANKKAR AIYAR

Author of *The Gated Republic*, *Aadhaar: A Biometric History of India’s 12 Digit Revolution*, and *Accidental India* (shankkar.aiyar@gmail.com)

LEAPFROGGING LAGGARDS ON TECH CYCLES



OPINION

ANURADHA GOYAL

Author and founder of *IndiTalks*
Follow her on X @anuradhagoyal

WE are living in an era of abundant technology, when everything we do has a tech element in it. Next to divine forces, it’s technology that is all-pervasive. I wonder if it is a new-age manifestation of the divine or the latest *mayajal*, a web of illusions to keep us trapped in this universe.

Like living beings, technology keeps evolving, re-inventing itself and coming back in new avatars that it is not easy to keep pace with. You keep up at one end and can lag at another. Technology adoption cycles are interesting, as they can allow a laggard to leapfrog, leaving the earlier leaders wondering what went wrong.

For example, unified payments interface or UPI for small payments may have the record for fastest and largest adoption in the history of technology. It converged on the mobile phone our debit and credit cards, ATM, cheque books, demand drafts and hard cash. E-commerce in India, which was struggling due to low

penetration of credit cards and an even lower trust in e-transactions, are now flourishing with UPI. Developed countries with well-established networks of credit card use were way ahead of India at one point. But UPI made us jump ahead of them in a matter of just a few years. It will take those countries to move to UPI or the next wave of payment technology a lot more as it demands a change in systems and user habits.

Adoption of technology is heavily dependent on numbers. It’s not always the best product that leads, but the most adopted one. Take the case of WhatsApp. Most of us are on the app because everyone else in the family, friends and business circles is on it. Even if we get frustrated with the insane forwards, we know it is the best place to share family news, get neighbourhood updates or interact with clients and colleagues. Remember a couple of years back major doubts about WhatsApp’s security were making the headlines? Many of us downloaded alternatives like Telegram and Signal. But where are we now? Back to dear WhatsApp. The reason is simple—everyone is else is also there.

Technologies can trap us in a time warp. If something worked for us at some point in time, we start treating it as a best practice and assume it would continue to deliver forever. In the 2014 general elections, the winning party made very smart use of social media. Probably for the first time, digital media played a significant role in the national elections. The opposition was left wondering about it. But a decade later,

it was the opposition that made use of artificial intelligence and influencer marketing, while the ruling party stayed with Twitter trends and WhatsApp forwards. It’s an example of technology trap, which has a knack of favouring underdogs like the character of Barbarik in Mahabharat.

The early adopters of Facebook are the only ones left on that platform now, simply out of habit. Personally, I am myself trying to get out of the blogging



Those who missed out on a technology can get ahead of others when a new one comes along. While richer nations gained from the wide adoption of payment cards, their use in India remained low. But with UPI, India is a leader in digital payments

trap that I have been stuck in for 20+ years, while it’s evident that not many people are reading anymore.

If you notice, there is a cyclicality involved with the technology adoption or its smart use. If you lose out on a technology cycle, you can always ride the next one that will help you leapfrog—as long as you are open to being an early adopter. Yes, early adoption comes with its risks, but they are far lower than the risk of not adopting at all. Having said that, it is the scamsters and criminals

who are the fastest users of technology. They not only experiment with the latest technology, but often become its first pro users so that they can trap the naïve who comes on board with a bit of nervousness. That is how they can hack ways to obtain OTPs for your transactions, trap you into transferring money to them, or to give them access to your passwords.

Have you seen them using deepfake audios or videos for money extortion? Before we can find the use cases for artificial intelligence to make the world a better place, they have found a way to use it to make quick money. By the time the authorities train their people and systems to catch the culprits, they would have innovated for the next leap. I wonder if this energy was directed at positive uses of technology, would we be experiencing heaven.

Technology also loses its usefulness when it tries to deliver too much. Banking portals used to be simple, allowing users to conduct basic transactions. Then some marketing genius suggested inserting all kinds of clickbait promotions for their own as well as partners’ products, making its use dicey for not-too-tech-savvy people. The result is that they stay away or depend on their children to do online banking for them. A simple barcode reading often fails at the various checkpoints, necessitating both manual processes. Most technocrats need to learn the elegance of simplicity, where technology meets art.

The cycle of technology adoption has its own rhythm that those embracing it can dance along to.

QUOTE CORNER

One of the oft-cited constraints to adequate flow of climate-related finance has been the lack of bankable projects... Thus, creation of a common pool of such projects will have multi-fold benefits... Over the short-term, our goal is to be able to make a realistic estimation of the impact of climate-related risks not just on individual institutions, but on the financial system as a whole.

Sanjay Malhotra, RBI governor, at a central bank seminar

We have nothing to discuss with [Ebrahim Rasool] and so he is considered *persona non grata*.

Marco Rubio, US secretary of state, on X about South Africa’s ambassador

Even if they don’t surrender, we will go till the end, inch by inch.

Peter Thang, vice president of Chin National Defence Force, an armed rebel group fighting the Myanmar military close to the Indian border



MAILBAG WRITE TO

letters@newindianexpress.com

Love’s honour

Ref: *Work in unison to root out killing in the name of honour* (Mar 15). The recent verdict in the Pranay-Amrutha case is a welcome step towards justice. However, it’s a stark reminder of the deep-rooted malaise of caste-based violence. ‘Honour killing’ is a misnomer. It’s time for governments, civil society, and individuals to join hands in sensitising people to the fact that all are born equal. As the editorial said, we must recognise that “there’s honour in love, not in violence”.

Sridevi Tejaswani K, Kakinada

Helpful governor

Ref: *Guv in Team Kerala bodes well for state* (Mar 15). The new governor is trying to act as an envoy of the state when it’s facing a difficult financial situation. Rajendra Arlekar’s timely intervention is appreciated. Hope the relationship will remain cordial through the rest of the government and governor’s

tenures. The state is still burdened with high public debt, which is not a good financial position.

Asokakumar, Thrirkunnapuzha

Progressive budget

The general perception that the Tamil Nadu budget would be aimed at the assembly elections next year has been belied. It laid special emphasis on education and infrastructure development in rural and urban areas. Though the state’s overall debt burden will rise, it is laudable that the debt-to-state GDP ratio will be within prescribed limits. One hopes that all the assumptions and projections made by the government, particularly on revenue receipts, are realised and expenditure estimates are not overshoot.

Tharcus S Fernando, Chennai

Tax fraud

Ref: *Daily wage gets Rs 23 lakh GST notice* (Mar 15). It’s shocking that a daily wage earner in Bhadradi Kothagudem district got such a large payment notice from the Vijayawada GST office. There seems to

be some fraud perpetrated by a firm using his PAN card. At the same time, it also reflects the functioning of the tax department, which seems unable to draw conclusions from the personal details it has. The authorities should thoroughly probe this issue and punish the guilty.

Katuru Durga Prasad Rao, Hyderabad

Disciplining students

Ref: *Let teachers carry cane in educational institutions: HC* (Mar 15). It’s official now—the Kerala High Court said teachers can take corporeal action on students for their misdeeds. In our student days in the 1960s, not only the headmaster but also any teacher of the institution could act against students for misconduct on or outside the campus. Thus the lesson of discipline was inculcated from the school. The court decision is welcome.

P P Sahadevan, Nileshtar

Fuelling fear

Hindus and Muslims have coexisted peacefully for centuries in Uttar Pradesh. However, recent events

suggest a disturbing shift towards institutionalised communal distrust. During the Holi celebrations, authorities took the unprecedented step of covering mosques in multiple towns with tarpaulins, calling it a ‘precautionary measure’ to prevent communal clashes. This action sparked widespread concern as never has Holi been associated with communal violence there. Traditionally, both Hindus and Muslims have celebrated together. Yet the state’s approach this year fuelled an atmosphere of fear and division, rather than harmony.

K J Haroon Basha, Vaniyambadi

Overblown reaction

The Tushar Gandhi-RSS row has been blown out of proportion. Even Tushar felt his words might have hurt the RSS and conceded that they had a right to protest. The RSS workers did just that. Tushar explained there was no physical assault, and they only stopped his vehicle and raised slogans. That should have ended the controversy. Tushar can’t expect the kind of support the Father of the Nation enjoyed.

Vijayachandran Neerazhikkettu, email