

Selvam Jesiah

Entrance exams have been used mostly to assess how successful prospective students are likely to be in the institutions of higher learning. These tests are used mainly by higher educational institutions or national testing agencies with at least some degree of selectivity in terms of admission, particularly to identify students who are good in language, Maths, Science, logical reasoning, general knowledge, current trends, and study skills. The combination of certain components and the weightage differs from one admission test to another depending on the course requirements. Writing an entrance exam helps one gauge their knowledge, aptitude, confidence and suitability to pursue an education in that particular field. It may also help students discover their strengths and weaknesses.

Problem areas

In India, entrance exams are perceived as a test of knowledge to determine the student's fate rather than as an opportunity to understand one's condition and position in knowledge. With decisions being made due to crowd referrals and advice from parents and "career gurus" rather than on individual interest, this leads to increased stress levels. While an entrance exam looks at how much a student studies in that particular subject, it lacks an assessment of a student's efficiency and effectiveness in what they do and in accomplishing what they

Breaking the cycle

How to reduce the burden of entrance exams on students



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want. This tends to discourage many students from getting into areas of their interest and choice.

Entrance exams have also paved the way for coaching and "shadow education". This may destroy students' creativity, as they are bombarded with assignments, practice problems, previous years' question papers and daily tests. Studies indicate that this kind of cramming may increase dependence on

passive learning and reduce time for true learning. Further, there is huge pressure from parents and others to perform kills children from within. and makes them vulnerable to depression and mental illness. According to data from the National Crime Records Bureau, 1.2 % of 1,70,924 suicides in 2022 were attributed to failure in exams.

Mitigation strategies

The quality of education and teaching has to be improved tremendously to ensure that students are both confident and competent in seeking a higher course of their choice and interest. Teaching plans should be designed and implemented in strict accordance with curriculum standards rather than focusing on coaching. Repetitive or puni-

tive school work should be restricted or controlled to help students learn and offer adequate time to plan and learn for higher learning.

A well-tailored orientation to prepare students for higher education – from institutions or teachers – should start during the early stages of senior secondary level to help them identify courses that suit their level of knowledge, interest, capability,

and career perspective and, above all, the purpose of preparing themselves for an entrance examination. Compelled aspiration toward a single course during early or middle school must be avoided because it may prevent children from exploring plenty of other courses.

Full-time career counselors should be appointed to advise students on being realistic in choosing career options. The administration must facilitate mandatory interactions between the students, parents and counselors at least four times a year to ensure they are aware of the educational environment, curriculum, intensity of teaching and learning, study-life integration, controlling minimum sleep hours, good nutrition, personal and public hygiene, congenial environment at home and career options. The matter of positive parenting should also be addressed.

Achieving equal study opportunities for all can be a reality provided policymakers, schools, students, and parents work together for student well-being. Students should not be deprived of their right to choose a higher educational institution and the course of their dreams. Above all, it is time educators, governments and policymakers adopted a more human-oriented entrance exam and different admission procedures to match the diversity of society.

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SCHOLARSHIPS

Foundation for Excellence Scholarship for Technical Courses

An initiative from the non-profit Foundation for Excellence (FFE)
Eligibility: Open to students in the first year of a B.E. or B.Tech., five-year Integrated M.Tech, MBBS, or five-year Law programme during the 2023-2024 academic year who scored at least 70% in Class 12 boards and secured admission via a merit-based entrance exam or state counselling. Annual family income should not be more than ₹3,00,000.
Rewards: ₹50,000 per annum
Deadline: December 31
Application: Online
www.b4s.in/edge/FFES1

Amazon Future Engineer Scholarship

An Amazon initiative to help gifted and financially disadvantaged students
Eligibility: Open to female students who are Indian nationals and are in the first-year of a B.E. or B.Tech. in Computer Science or a closely related field. Admission should have been through a state or national entrance exam. Annual family income must be less than ₹3,00,000.
Rewards: ₹50,000 per annum and other benefits
Deadline: December 31
Application: Online
www.b4s.in/edge/AFES2

Western Digital Scholarship Programme

A CSR initiative by Western Digital
Eligibility: PwD and transgender students across India pursuing UG, PG and PhD programmes in STEM-related fields and have minimum 50% in Class 12 or previous semester or preceding class. Open to students across India.
Rewards: Up to ₹75,000
Deadline: November 27
Application: Online
www.b4s.in/edge/WDSP1

Courtesy: buddy4study.com

Look for opportunities

Uncertain about your career options? Low on self-confidence? This column may help



OFF THE EDGE
Nandini Raman

I finished Bachelor's in Civil Engineering in 2023 and have been preparing for the UPSC. I can't showcase any skills or capabilities but am interested in governance, international relations and public administration. How can I hone my skills in these areas?
Jayasivakumar

Dear Jayasivakumar,
Look for certifications and courses on governance and public administration, international relations, diplomacy, global affairs, and related subjects from reputed institutions on platforms such as Coursera, edX, and FutureLearn. Blog on these issues, as this will help refine your understanding and showcase your expertise. Look out for opportunities to take up small research projects or collaborate with professors and think tanks to publish your work. Join online forums, debates, and Model United Nations (MUN) clubs to develop critical thinking and public speaking. Look out for internships to gain experience across government bodies, think tanks, or NGOs. Institutes like Observer Research Foundation (ORF), Brookings India, or Centre for Policy Research (CPR) offer internships. Local NGOs could offer relevant opportunities on community development. Job opportunities would include being a policy research analyst across think tanks and research institutes, a

public affairs consultant. You can also consider a role in journalism or content writing in Public Affairs.

I finished Class 10 this year and am taking coaching for CLAT. While I have a strong hold on academics, sports and co-curricular activities, I haven't dedicated myself to one thing. Is it possible to do a Master's degree and get a scholarship at an Ivy League college? Hiya

Dear Hiya,
A strong hold on academics, sports and co-curricular activities will help your future academic and career goals. Ivy League schools place significant emphasis on academic performance; so maintain top grades in Class 11, 12 and your undergraduate course. Excelling in CLAT and studying at a top law school in India will also help get your application noticed. Dedicate yourself to one or two extracurricular activities that you are passionate about and can excel in. Take on leadership positions that showcase your initiatives and start to build a wholesome profile. Begin participating in community service or social work via NGOs, school-led initiatives, or your own projects. Build a strong personal narrative via your SOP and LORs.

On scholarships, Ivy League schools offer limited merit-based scholarships, so strong academic and extracurricular achievements will be essential. Research the kinds of scholarships available and their eligibility criteria and pre-requisites on the college websites. Need-based financial aid will also be available. Lastly, explore external scholarships that support Indian students pursuing education at Ivy

League like the Inlaks Foundation, JN Tata Endowment, and Rhodes Trust.

I am in the final year of B.Tech. Biotechnology. What are the reputed institutions for a Master's? What are the pros and cons of going in for a Ph.D. directly after NET? Keshav

Dear Keshav,
The IITs in Bombay, Delhi, Kharagpur, and Madras offer specialised programmes in Biotechnology. You need to clear the Graduate Aptitude Test in Engineering (GATE) for admissions to M.Tech programmes at IITs and the NITs in Warangal and Rourkela. JNU and AIIMS in New Delhi conduct their own entrance exams for M.Sc. programmes. For overseas admissions, you need to take the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) with TOEFL or IELTS for non-native English speakers. The institutes known for Biotechnology programmes are Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Harvard University, Stanford University in the U.S.; University of Cambridge, University of Oxford, and Imperial College, London, in the U.K.; and Technical University of Munich (TUM), Heidelberg University in Germany.

The biggest benefit of pursuing a Ph.D. directly after clearing NET is that you to dive into research early and can specialise, potentially leading to a longer and more productive research career. NET qualifies you for the Junior Research Fellowship (JRF), which provides financial support during your Ph.D. You will also be well positioned for academic positions, research roles in industry, and

leadership roles in R&D. A Ph.D. is often required for postdoctoral positions and faculty roles in prestigious institutions worldwide. But a Ph.D. can requires significant commitment of time (4-6 years). While it provides depth, it could limit exposure to broader industry practices compared to gaining industry experience after a Master's. Entering the industry after a Ph.D. might mean you start at the same level as those who enter with just a Master's but have gained industry experience.

I'm opting for Humanities with Psychology in Class 11 (CBSE) and wish to do either English or Political Science later. What are my career options? Will not taking Maths affect my prospects? Sera

Dear Sera,
Career choices with English include a journalism, publishing and editing, creative writing, teaching, public relations, content creation, digital marketing or taking the UPSC exams. With Political Science, you can explore careers like the Civil Services, law, diplomacy and international relations, academia and research, public policy and governance. If you were considering Economics or other Social Sciences that require quantitative analysis, not having Maths could limit your options. But English or Political Science focus more on analytical thinking, writing, and critical analysis rather than mathematical skills and ability. Psychology will help improve your understanding of human behaviour, which is beneficial for both English and Political Science careers.

Disclaimer: This column is merely a guiding voice and provides advice and suggestions on education and careers.

The writer is a practising counsellor and a trainer. Send your questions to eduplus.thehindu@gmail.com with the subject line Off the Edge

From 'have to' to 'want to'

Our classrooms need to create a compulsive need to learn and an engaging atmosphere so that students do not mind the burdens and demands of learning

Francis M. Peter SJ

Learning is not the prerogative of an elite few! Social status, economic affluence, locational advantage and so on are not prerequisites or necessary conditions for learning to happen. One does not need to be wildly intelligent, especially talented, or "good at languages" to learn a foreign language. Every normal human being is pre-wired to learn. All that we need to trigger learning is a conducive atmosphere and an internal compulsion to learn. A compelling attraction to a topic that is comprehensible and sufficient opportunity to interact in the target language in the process of understanding issues and solving problems pertaining to the topic gets a learner to learn both the content as well as the medium. What is encouraging is that these opportunities are not impossible to introduce in our schools and colleges.

Making the abstract visible

In a way, learning, like seeing, is involuntary. Nobody needs to teach another normal human being to see. All one needs to do is to open one's eyes and everything before them becomes visible. You need only to determine what you want to grasp and judiciously omit all that is distracting. Some assistance from a caring expert or peers will help you not ignore what is critical but not obvious in what is visible. This helps rivet your attention on what is essential and to subliminal features that casual observance fail to detect, such as the impli-



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cational arrow in the Amazon logo connecting the A to Z, and the concealed 31 in Baskin Robbins logo subtly suggesting the varieties of ice cream on offer. One additional difference the expert can make is to make concrete and visible the abstract.

At this point, we need to address a dispiriting fact that not all of us acquire all that we desire to acquire. Despite firm resolutions and repeated attempts, many do not seem to progress. Let us explore what causes them to abandon their pursuit halfway. Call to mind any three resolutions you had made in the last six months, things you required to acquire, any three skills or information you wanted to achieve. Such as learning to drive a car, mastering a computer package or language, cooking something new, learning to speak a new language, trying to lose weight, or publishing an article in Scopus or UGC journals.

Now, which of these were you able to achieve? Which did you abandon? Analysing the factors for both, you would agree

that the predominant reason for giving up is one of the following: the task was beyond your capacity; had no immediate use or relevance; was boring and dull.

Thus, it becomes clear that we achieve or learn what we truly covet, what we desire and enjoy doing because it gratifies or rewards us. It is when our passion matures into persistence and becomes a pleasure that we begin to realise a symbiotic attraction; that what we are looking for is also looking out for us.

Tips from games

Watch the astounding mastery children achieve at learning video games such as Minecraft or Roblox. These are the same learners who find classroom subjects repulsive. Yet they easily master computer games much more confusing than the rules that govern language construction! They master complex concepts involving multiple interconnected parts, operating under specific conditions, and requiring an understanding of the rules. Playing

the game requires them to compute their most successful route, anticipate the competitors' probable move, develop strategies to counter them and take advantage of favourable assistance. Their mastery, competence, and expertise is astounding.

Their success is because the game creates in them a compulsive need to learn and an enjoyment and passion so engaging that they do not mind the burdens and demands taking them along the winning path.

To replicate this in the classroom, we need to consider features that make learning so compulsive, engaging, and effective. One salient feature is that the game is customised to suit their learning levels, both at the rate of speed and cognitive demand. The game becomes attractive because it is dynamic and in near-natural contexts. The fact that the player earns and accumulates rewards is a highly motivating factor. The provision to track one's progress, the on-request, just-in-time, just-for-you feedback are non-threatening helps to keep them on track and improve progress.

Classroom activities incorporating these features would make learners learn what teachers teach. Learning would turn to a joy and transforming the learners' current 'have to' attitude and struggle with learning into a welcome 'want to' processes of proactive learning yielding more assured and desired results.

The writer is Province Advisor, Educational Resource and Research Centre and director of Joseph's Hub for Languages (JHL), Tiruchi.



THINK
Aruna Sankaranarayanan

As you down your morning coffee, do you also solve Wordle? When you go for your morning run, do you take a slightly different route every day, soaking in the sights and sounds of the streets? Do you notice that the flower seller has moved to the opposite pavement and wonder what it is like to be her? On your morning commute, as you ride the Metro, do you scroll through Instagram feeds or do you listen to a podcast on global warming trends? Over the weekend, do you play chess with your friend or do you zone out in front of the TV?

Mental workout
In the online magazine *Psyche*, Josephine Zerna writes that people differ on a trait called “need for cognition” or their desire to



Knowing and doing

When it comes to cultivating and maintaining healthy lifestyle habits, your actions rather than your reasoning skills are what matter.

expend mental effort. Whereas some people are prone to exerting “cogni-

tive effort”, others prefer to breeze through the day without necessarily work-

ing their mental muscles. Just as people differ in their need to stay physically fit

by working out regularly, people also vary in terms of their “need for cogni-

tion”. Zerna avers that the way we choose to spend our free time can be indicative of the potency of this need in us.

The need for cognition is not necessarily synonymous with intelligence, she says. However, there is some evidence to suggest that it might be correlated to fluid intelligence, or a person's ability to problem solve. Further, scoring high on this trait can even help a person who doesn't score too high on IQ tests. Because this trait propels you to seek conceptual linkages, it fosters deep learning.

While we would expect people with high levels of this trait to perform well in academic settings, Zerna argues that it has beneficial impacts in other arenas as well. The need for cognition correlates with “goal-directedness” as people with this need tend to approach problems with a proactive stance on how best to cope with a situation. However, the need for cognition should not be conflated with overthinking, which typically in-

volves worrying endlessly and needlessly without necessarily seeking solutions. Individuals with a high need for cognition tend to be confident and less prone to pessimism.

Knowledge vs. practice
People who score high on this trait also tend to have high levels of self-efficacy, says Zerna. These people tend to believe that they have the knowledge and skill sets to tackle most problems. However, this can come with a cost unless the thinking is also accompanied by action. For example, an overweight person who has a high need for cognition may be able to list all the benefits of exercise and a healthy diet. But knowing something intellectually doesn't always translate into practice.

Additionally, people with a high need for cognition may tend to be overconfident in their abilities, discounting the gap between knowing and acting. Zerna writes that smokers with a high need for cognition think they can quit ea-

sily but don't necessarily do better than those with a low need for cognition. Likewise, college students who score high on this trait don't curtail heavy alcohol usage, despite knowing the repercussions.

Overall, a high need for thinking does confer benefits to people. So, keep your grey cells working by doing crosswords, Sudoku and reading articles that engage and extend you. Listen to podcasts that challenge your world view. Even as you gain insight and new perspectives, be wary of intellectual hubris. Remind yourself that in many facets of life knowing and doing are not equivalent. When it comes to cultivating and maintaining healthy lifestyle habits, your actions rather than your reasoning skills are what matter. While your cognitive circuits need to be active, your self-regulation and self-control networks also need to be honed with practice.

The writer is the author of *Zero Limits: Things Every 20-Something Should Know* & blogs at www.arunasankaranarayanan.com

Build brands that last

What does it take to succeed in the field of Corporate Communications?

Durvesh Yadav

With the advent of globalisation, communications technology took a quantum leap and landed corporations in a cut-throat market, where thousands of brands come and go every year. What differentiates a stellar brand from middle-of-the-road ones?

Think! Can top-notch services and products make a breakthrough when the brand remains undefined and formless in the shadows? Seen as the backbone of building reputation, Corporate Communications has thus taken on the role of a key driver of business success. As a discipline that involves corporate design, advertising, internal communication, crisis management, media and investor relations and public affairs, corporate communications has four key aspects.

Internal communications: It is important to devise strategies that facilitate communication within the organisation to ensure that members align their actions to the organisation's goals and aspirations. It entails internal messaging with consistency and clarity across channels while maintaining transparency. Feedback mechanisms, appreciation, and rewards play a key role in employee engagement, retention, and building synergies between departments.

External communications: This includes anything that is communicated to the public from drafting press releases and statements to keeping audiences, retail investors, and other stakeholders updated about the organisation. It plays a defining role in brand building through branded stories, authored articles, advertisements, and newspaper features.

Media relations: In order to be seen, heard, and trusted, it is important to be seen on organic media and third-party websites. As such writings do not involve paid promotion and are unbiased, they bring authenticity to the company.

Reputation management: This involves opinions about a company and its brands and aims to mitigate negative perceptions and reinforce positive ones. Effective reputation management is seen as a preventive measure for a public crisis.

Strategic planning: This entails identifying the company's objective and analysing the market to identify the area where the brand fits. Marketing positioning, which shapes public opinion of the business in comparison to its competitors, is key.

Education and skills

While there is no bar, a degree in related subjects is preferable as is



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hands-on exposure through internships. At the Bachelor's level, one can pursue a degree in Mass Communications and Media, Journalism, Business Administration, Marketing, or Public Relations. A Master's degree allows specialisation. Graphic design and UX/UI also offer great opportunities to engage in aspects of messaging. Several certified courses in related fields from recognised institutes can help advance one's career and gain recognition. Diplomas provide skills, knowledge, and workplace exposure and can be great for those who come from a different educational background.

One needs to have a knack for storytelling, learn the art of persuasion and master problem solving and analytical thinking. The ability to draft press releases, write pitches for media, use critical analysis to identify unique angles and make accurate associations between events is highly valued. Other skills include conflict resolution, which is not only important during crisis management and rebranding but also in day-to-day communication. One must have a high emotional quotient to communicate ideas, understand others, and regulate emotions to adapt and grow.

Prospects

From entry level roles as a public relations associate to the CEO and founder of a communications agency, the possibilities are endless. Some of the job roles are listed below.

- Corporate communications manager
- Content writer, editor and strategist
- Public relations officer and manager
- Brand strategist
- Creative head
- Crisis communication specialist
- Business consultant and coach
- Entrepreneur
- Investor relations manager
- Marketing and advertising head

Those aspiring to make their career in the blooming sector of Corporate Communications must have a deep understanding of the fundamentals and a penchant for creating brand-led stories. Most important, the skill to articulate ideas and thoughts into words will lead to a successful career.

The writer is Founder and CEO of Rising Star Communication.

Komal Panda

Growing up in a typical Odia family, design was never on my radar. Like many with a Humanities background, my parents envisioned a future for me in law or government services.

In 2021, I lost my mother to cancer and COVID-19, just days before the final round of the entrance exams at the National Institute of Design. My father has battled multiple illnesses over the past few years, leaving me to care for my younger sister and myself. These challenging personal experiences and personal loss influenced my approach to design, as did growing up surrounded by Odisha's rich cultural heritage and beautiful architecture.

Having struggled with complex medical equipment, I know the frustration and anxiety that come with using intimidating and often impractical devices. This

YOUNG ACHIEVER

Design for change

Komal Panda talks about how she won the India round of the James Dyson Award 2024 with her product Novocarry



first-hand experience ignited my passion to transform healthcare through design.

My introduction to James Dyson came in my first year through Dyson products. So, when the opportunity came to apply for the James Dyson Award, I didn't hesitate.

Personal inspiration

The inspiration for Novocarry comes from my father, who has diabetes and works in a steel factory. Every day, he has to rush home during his lunch break to take his insulin because there's no reliable way to store it at the right temperature at his workplace.

Novocarry is a porta-

ble cooling solution designed for medications like insulin that require refrigeration during transport. I focused on creating a design that is sleek, discreet, and unobtrusive, addressing concerns like theft, tampering, and the stigma often associated with managing insulin in public.

The goal was to make Novocarry feel more

like a personal accessory than a medical product, helping to normalise its use and alleviate feelings of embarrassment.

Throughout the design process, I was inspired by the makeshift solutions people often rely on, like storing insulin in cold water bottles during train rides or using thermos flasks with constant water changes. Hearing horror stories of tampered medication leading to medical emergencies fuelled my determination to create something that could genuinely improve people's lives.

Having won the James Dyson Award 2024 for India region

Navigate the MBA journey

Here are 10 tips to help students get through the two years of the degree

tion with faculty and mentors to add to your skill set. Your academic performance can open doors to prestigious internships, scholarships, and job opportunities.

Use academic resources: Make maximum use of the facilities on your campus. The library offers a wealth of material, including books, journals, research databases, software, and a conducive environment to study. Instead of relying solely on those provided by professors, use these tools to enrich your learning. Seek guidance from professors and faculty mentors if you have concerns. Form study groups with your peers for collaborative learning experiences. Read business newspapers daily to stay abreast of industry developments.

Network: Develop relationships with peers, seniors, alumni, visiting speakers, and internship mentors. Attend and engage in events like conferences, seminars, alumni reunions, and corporate mentor meets. Expand your networking efforts beyond collecting busi-



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ness cards; build meaningful relationships. Approach your internship with a willingness to learn and adapt and maintain relationships with your mentors and colleagues even after it's over. A robust professional network can open doors to countless opportunities, including mentorship, job referrals, and lasting friendships.

Develop soft skills: Maximise participation in curricular and co-curricular activities and develop leadership, communication, and team-building skills. Take the initiative in group projects, participate in club activities, and assume leadership roles. Involve yourself in two or three clubs or societies but don't join too many, as active par-

ticipation is crucial. Learn to manage conflicts constructively and develop conflict resolution skills through active listening, empathy, and effective communication.

Time management: Prioritise tasks and set realistic goals to meet project deadlines. Avoid procrastination and whining. Time management also helps manage stress. The two years can be demanding and overwhelming; so practise mindfulness, work out regularly, and set aside time for hobbies to stay relaxed and overcome anxiety.

Maintain a healthy lifestyle: This enhances productivity, concentration, and overall happiness. Many of you will stay in a hostel for the first time and may expe-

has given me a level of exposure I never could have imagined.

Future plans

Recently, I received a message from a father whose six-year-old child has type 1 diabetes. He asked if he could buy Novocarry, believing it could help his child manage their insulin needs more comfortably at school. Knowing that something I created has the potential to make a tangible difference in someone's life is incredibly humbling. Since the award's announcement, I've had the opportunity to connect with people whose lives could be impacted by Novocarry. I'm committed to continuing this journey until the product can be produced on a larger scale and can reach and help as many people as possible.

To aspiring designers, I would say: think beyond simply solving functional problems. Design is about more

rience homesickness. Prioritise a nutritious diet, regular physical activity, and adequate sleep for cognitive performance and overall well-being.

Keep learning: Embrace challenges, engage in continuous learning, and enjoy the new experience. Adapt to new surroundings, friends, class schedules, hostel timings, and university regulations. Try to minimise distractions and stay focused on your goals. Seize every opportunity to grow, network, and engage with professionals beyond your cohort.

Career guidance: Leverage the university's career counselling services not just for internships and job placements, but also for valuable learning opportunities like resume building, career-fit assessments, interview preparation, and effective networking strategies. Seek help whenever needed; don't hesitate to ask questions and clarify doubts.

Plan ahead: Define your short-term and long-term career goals, as this will help you make informed decisions. Be adaptable and open to new opportunities and changing circumstances.

Pratik Modi is Dean, School of Management, and Akshita Arora is Assistant Professor (Finance), School of Management, BML Munjal University.

ON THE SHELF



■ Negotiating India's Landmark Agreements

An examination of five pivotal agreements signed by independent India — India-China Agreement on Tibet (1954); The Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace; Friendship and Cooperation (1971); The Simla Agreement (1972); The India-Sri Lanka Accord (1987); and The India-United States Civil Nuclear Energy Agreement (2008) — the book dissects the prevailing political, economic, and social dimensions that underpinned these accords, provides readers with an understanding of the long-term impact of these crucial negotiations and documents and serves as a guide to deciphering the strategic decisions that have defined Indian foreign policy and global affairs

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