

● Court sets aside order asking journalists to take down content against Adani firm

Judge Ashish Aggarwal said, “I am of the opinion that the court of the senior civil judge ought to have made observations of which material was defamatory. The posts, spanning over a substantial period, were questioned by the plaintiff (AEL) through the suit, but the court didn’t find it fit to grant the opportunity to the defendants. In my opinion, the judge should have granted the defendants a chance before prima facie declaring that they (the posts) were defamatory.”

In his September 6 order, Senior Civil Judge Anuj Kumar Singh had said: “...At this stage, instead of issuing a blanket order on restraining defendants No. 1 to 9 from fair, verified and substantiated reporting and from hosting, storing/circulating such articles/posts/URLs, it would suffice the interest of justice to restrain defendants... from publishing/distributing/circulating unverified, unsubstantiated and ex-facie defamatory reports about the plaintiff (AEL) allegedly tarnishing the reputation of the plaintiff till the next date of hearing.”

On Thursday, Advocate Vrinda Grover, who appeared for the four journalists via video link, said the ex parte interim order had been obtained for older articles. “Why the rush? Why no notice even of two days or three days? The court could have heard us. All posts were in the public domain,” she said.

Advocate Vijay Aggarwal, who appeared for AEL, said the law recognises ex parte orders. “They (the journalists) say the ex parte order was passed but today they are asking for an ex parte order,” he said. Another observation which the counsel of the journalists objected to was that the AEL was allowed to provide links of alleged defamatory material to intermediaries and the intermediaries were directed to take down such content.

The September 6 order had said: “The plaintiff is given opportunity to apply to intermediaries/concerned agencies with details of the URLs/posts/hyperlinks/articles on the basis of this order and intermediaries/concerned agencies are directed to take down/remove the alleged defamatory articles/posts/URLs whereby the

prime facie defamatory material is published against the plaintiff within 36 hours, however they shall preserve the contents and record till further orders.”

Setting aside this order, District Judge Aggarwal said: “The impact of such an order would be that the plaintiff (AEL) would send to intermediaries the material which the plaintiff thinks to be defamatory and seek removal of such articles. It has been left open to the intermediaries to determine whether the said articles are indeed defamatory.”

Meanwhile, a different court that heard Guha Thakurta’s challenge questioned the AEL on whether it was sure that the alleged posts were defamatory.

District Judge Sunil Chaudhary said, “What is the relief being asked by you? You are not yourself sure if it’s defamatory... You are seeking a declaration from the court. How can (an) injunction be granted if it hasn’t been declared defamatory.”

Following the September 6 order, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) had issued takedown notices to several journalists.

Senior Advocate Trideep Pais, who represented Guha Thakurta, told the court: “The urgency is that intermediaries have been asked to remove multiple articles. Who will determine what will be defamatory has been left to the plaintiff (AEL). That’s my problem with this order.” He also said, “It has nowhere been stated how the material is defamatory.”

Senior Advocate Anurag Ahluwalia, who represented the AEL before Judge Chaudhary, said: “Our agony is that the buck doesn’t stop here. Time and time again, there are articles to tarnish my reputation. Had he been a fair journalist, he would have cited the evidence.”

After hearing AEL’s arguments, the judge asked Pais: “Has he (Guha Thakurta) verified everything? Why is he only indicating? If he’s making a claim, why isn’t he making the data public?”

“The article is very general. You claimed that the government is changing its orders at the behest of Adani to benefit him... But which order? Till a legal notice is sent to you, you will publish whatever you want?” he said.

● **Adani gets clean chit from Sebi**

show-cause notice could be proved. It also confirmed there was no violation of the Sebi Act concerning fraudulent or unfair trade practices.

The alleged transactions were deemed genuine business dealings and not fraudulent or violative of RPT disclosure norms, given the legal framework applicable during the investigation period, Sebi said in two separate orders.

Following the Sebi orders, Adani Group Chairman Gautam Adani said that after a thorough investigation, SEBI has confirmed what the group has consistently maintained—that the Hindenburg allegations were “baseless”. “Transparency and integrity” have always defined the Adani Group, he said in a post on X’ platform.

“We deeply feel the pain of the investors who lost money because of this fraudulent and motivated report. Those who spread false narratives owe the nation an apology,” Adani said. “Our commitment to India’s institutions, to India’s people and to nation building remains unwavering,” he said.

On January 24, 2023, Hindenburg Research accused the Adani Group of pulling off “the largest corporate fraud in history,” alleging stock manipulation, accounting irregularities, and use of offshore shell companies to artificially inflate share prices. It also claimed violations of public shareholding norms and raised concerns about the group’s high debt levels and related-party transactions. Adani Group shares tanked sharply soon after the allegations and the group’s market capitalisation plunged by around \$150 billion and flagship Adani Enterprises tanked by 70 per cent.

Earlier this year, the short-seller’s founder Nate Anderson announced the “disbandment” of the firm. “Having considered the matter holistically, I find that the allegations made against Noticees (Adani group firms and officials) in the show-cause notice (SCN) are not established. Considering the above, the question of devolvement of any liability on Noticees does not arise and hence the question of determination of quantum of penalty also does not require any deliberation,” Sebi’s whole time member, Kamlesh Varshney said in the order.

“I hereby dispose of the instant proceedings against Noticees without any direction,” he wrote in the order.

According to the Sebi order, on merit, the impugned (related-

FROM PAGE ONE CEC protecting ‘vote chors’: Rahul

as many months, seeking the relevant information that would help unmask the entire operation, but the poll body was “not giving it”.

The EC dismissed Gandhi’s allegations as “incorrect and baseless”. It said it had got an FIR registered in the Karnataka case in 2023 and handed over the information to the police.

Gandhi alleged that while there was an attempt to systematically delete Congress voters in Aland in Kalaburagi district, bogus voters were added to the rolls in Rajura in Maharashtra’s Chandrapur district. The LoP, who addressed a special press briefing at the AICC headquarters in Delhi, said his revelations had yet again demonstrated that elections were being “rigged”, but added that these were not part of the “hydrogen bomb” he promised in recent weeks.

“Gyanesh Kumar, India’s Chief Election Commissioner, is protecting the vote thieves... This is proof that Gyanesh Kumar is protecting the vote thieves, and this is black and white proof, there is no confusion about it... This is not something I am saying lightly. I am the LoP in the Lok Sabha. This is something I am saying after solid proof I am going to show you, the people and youth of India. Proof that is black and white that the CEC is protecting the people who have destroyed Indian democracy. I am also going to show you the method with which votes are being added and deleted, and how that is done,” he said.

“In election after election, someone, some force, some group has been systematically targeting millions of voters for deletion across India... Different communities, mainly communities voting for the Opposition — Dalits, Adivasis, minorities and OBCs — are specifically targeted. We have heard this many times and now we have found 100% proof of it. I am not going to say anything on this stage that is not backed up by 100% proof,” Gandhi said.

Asked about the “mastermind”, he said, “That too, I will

show you with proof. We have it... In hydrogen bomb, it is black and white. I am just creating a foundation.”

Asked if he would approach the courts, Gandhi said, “My job as LoP in a normal situation is to be in Opposition, and pressure the government... If the country’s institutions want to do something, they will... Democracy of India has been hijacked. Brothers and sisters, democracy can only be saved by the people.”

● **What happened in Aland**

Gandhi claimed that in Aland — which the Congress won by 10,348 votes in 2023 — his party’s voters were targeted. “Someone tried to delete 6,018 votes. We don’t know the total number of votes deleted in Aland in the 2023 election... The top 10 booths with maximum deletions were Congress strongholds. Congress won eight out of the 10 booths in 2018. This was not a coincidence; this was a planned operation.”

About the alleged operation, he said, “The filing was done automatically using software... A software is picking up the first name in the booth and using it to delete voters. So someone ran an automated programme that ensured that the first voter in the booth was the applicant. The same person got cellphones from outside the state, used them to file the applications. We are pretty certain it was done in a centralised manner, and at scale... It was done at a call centre level... The question is whose numbers are these, how are they operated, where were they operated from, who generated the OTPs to disturb the process?”

The LoP said some of the people whose names were shown to have filed these applications “actually never did it”. He played a video of an elderly woman, Godabai, who said she had not filed any deletion form. He also called on stage a person named Suryakant who was shown to

● Maharashtra voters added within 7 months

Thane tops the list of districts with the highest increase, recording a rise of 2.25 lakh voters (total addition 2.71 lakh and 45,800 deletions).

Thane is followed by Pune with an increase of 1.82 lakh (total addition 2.26 lakh and 43,961 deletions) and Palghar with an increase of 97,100 (total addition 1.08 lakh and 11,016 deletions).

In Mumbai city, the number of electors has increased by 18,741 (total addition 33,201 and 14,460 deletions), while in the Mumbai suburban district, the increase is 95,630 (total addition 1.39 lakh and 44,172 deletions).

Of the total increased number, 1.96 lakh electors have been added due to shifting of residences.

Pune accounts for the highest number of shifted electors at 32,031, followed by Thane (27,386) and Mumbai suburbs (25,831).

The State Election Commission has reiterated that the electoral rolls updated till July 1, 2025, will be used for the upcoming local body polls.

“Earlier, it was discussed to use the voter list used for the assembly polls. The decision was changed and the date was fixed as July 1. The process of adding voters is a continuous one and it never stops. As of now, the commission has decided to use July 1 as the deadline,” said a senior official from the state government.

On the increase in the number of voters, Maharashtra Congress chief Harshvardhan Sapkal said, “There is need to study the increase of voters from Assembly polls till July 1 in detail. We will surely look into it.”

Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi and Maharashtra’s opposition parties have repeatedly raised questions about the increase of 40.81 lakh electors during the six months from the 2024 Lok Sabha polls to the Maharashtra Assembly polls in November that year.

The Opposition has termed it an “unnatural” growth and claims it affected the election outcome, in which BJP-led Mahayuti came back to power in the state.

The Election Commission of India has already stated that draft electoral rolls are available for scrutiny by every political party, and any objections regarding the increase should have been raised earlier.

infiltrators comes against the backdrop of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the electoral list in Bihar. Shah claimed that picking candidates from the Opposition’s Mahagathbandhan would lead to “every Bihar home having illegal immigrants”. Thakur accused Gandhi of seeking to create a Bangladesh and Nepal-like situation by raising questions against Constitutional institutions, such as EC.

Speaking at Delhi, Shah said: “Every time, they (Opposition) try to turn a false narrative. What was the topic of the recent yatra of Rahul Gandhi?” When the audience said “votechori” (vote theft), Shah responded: “It was not vote-chori... It was not about bringing quality education, employment, 24-hour electricity or a road to each corner of Bihar. The topic of the yatra was to protect infiltrators who have come from Bangladesh... Rahul Gandhi’s yatra was a ghuspethiya bachao (protect infiltrators) yatra.”

The Union Minister also sought to know from Gandhi and RJD leader Lalu Prasad if “illegal immigrants should have the right to vote”. “Should they get free ration, jobs, houses, up to Rs 5 lakh for treatment? Instead of giving jobs to our youth, they want to give jobs to infiltrators,” he said.

Shah then took a personal dig at Gandhi, saying Modi had not taken leave for “a single day for the last 24 years, first as Gujarat CM and now as the country’s PM”. “But there are people who go on vacation to foreign countries after six months. You must know whom I am talking about,” he said.

Shah also asked the audience to disregard the Opposition’s claims that the NDA would take away quotas for SC/ST and EBC.

The location of Shah’s rallies

● BJP fires back: Shah slams Bihar Vote Yatra

were significant because the BJP-led NDA, which had won 39 of 40 Lok Sabha seats in this belt in 2019, had suffered losses last year with only 30 seats. Shah also met Bihar Chief Minister and JDU leader Nitish Kumar in Patna earlier in the day with seat-sharing talks to be held soon.

In Delhi, meanwhile, Thakur sought to know why Gandhi had refused to submit an affidavit detailing his allegations against the EC and alleged that his politics hinged on “creating chaos and playing the victim card”.

“It has become a habit of Rahul Gandhi to make incorrect and baseless allegations. And after levelling these accusations, apologising and being rebuked by courts has become his job,” Thakur said.

“Sling mud and run away — there are many instances of his hit-and-run. He was going to detonate a hydrogen bomb in today’s press conference, but had to make do with a phuljhadi, which too went bust. What has happened to him?” he asked, referring to an earlier announcement by Gandhi.

The EC, Thakur said, had clarified that no deletion of votes can be done online by any member of the public. In 2023, “unsuccessful attempts” were made at deletion of names in the Aland Assembly constituency in Karnataka followed by the EC’s directions to file an FIR and investigation, he alleged.

Referring to Gandhi’s allegations of irregularities in Karnataka, Thakur said, “The EC has provided mobile numbers, IP addresses... what has the CID of Congress-ruled Karnataka done? I want to tell the people of the nation that, according to records, the Aland constituency was won by the Congress candidate in 2023 with 10,348 votes. So, Rahul Gandhi, did the Congress win

● Rs 2,796-crore fraud: CBI files chargesheet against Anil Ambani, others

federal agency said, Anil Ambani was the chairman of Anil Dhirubhai Ambani (ADA) Group and also the director of Reliance Capital Ltd, the holding company of RCFL and RHFL.

A CBI statement said that two criminal cases were registered against Rana Kapoor, and M/s Reliance Commercial Finance Ltd (RCFL), M/s Reliance Home Finance Limited (RHFL) and others on the complaint filed by Chief Vigilance Officer of Yes Bank in 2022.

Investigation revealed that Yes Bank invested around Rs 2,045 crore in non-convertible debentures and commercial debts of M/s RCFL and Rs 2,965

crore in non-convertible debentures and commercial papers of RHFL in 2017 on the approval of Rana Kapoor despite Care Ratings placing ADA Group Financial Companies “under watch” in view of deteriorating financial standing and adverse market assessment, the statement said.

Funds, thus, invested in M/s RCFL and M/s RHFL by Yes Bank were subsequently siphoned through multiple-layers, demonstrating a systematic diversion of public money, the statement said.

The CBI stated that the investigation revealed an alleged conspiracy between Rana Kapoor

constituency was won by Subhadh Guttadar (BJP) in 2018 and BR Patil (INC) in 2023.”

In further clarification, the Karnataka CEO said the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) in Aland received 6,018 Form-7 applications for deletion in December 2022 through various apps such as NVSP, VHA, and GARUDA. This raised suspicion and these applications were verified by the ERO, Assistant ERO, or Booth-Level Officers. They found only 24 applications to be genuine.

“Accordingly, 24 applications were accepted and 5,994 incorrect applications were rejected and not deleted,” read the CEO statement.

Based on the findings, the ERO got an FIR registered at the local police station on February 21, 2023. Following instructions from the EC, the state CEO on September 6, 2023, handed over to the Kalaburagi SP information such as “objector’s details, including Form Reference Number, name of the Objector, his EPIC number and mobile number used for log-in and mobile number provided by the Objector for processing, software application medium, IP address, applicant place, Form submission date and time, and user creation date”, read the statement.

“After providing the requested information, meetings were also conducted by the Chief Electoral Officer, Karnataka with the Investigating Officer and Cyber Security experts of the Police to review the progress of the investigation. CEO, Karnataka has already been providing any other assistance/information/documents to the investigating agency,” said the CEO.

In the evening, the Congress shared a letter the CID wrote to the state CEO on September 9, 2025, seeking “relevant information” for investigation. The letter says that details such as “Destination IP address, destination port address, functioning of the NVSP, VHA, Garuda applications” were not provided despite being sought several times earlier.

through vote chori?”

Thakur said, “One thing Rahul Gandhi admitted today, and ended up blasting the hydrogen on himself, was that he was not here to defend democracy — so have preparations been made to destroy it instead? Levelling false allegations repeatedly against the EC, sometimes questioning EVMs, sometimes VVPATs, sometimes election results and sometimes, with assistance from his toolkit, raising questions on India’s democracy and its constitutional institutions — has this become a habit?”

Citing former prime minister Indira Gandhi’s ouster after she won an election through the “misuse of the government and officials”, and the postponement of Lok Sabha polls following the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, Thakur questioned the appointment of election commissioners at the time who later joined the Congress.

“Rama Devi ji, MS Gill, TM Seshan — which party appointed them as Election Commissioners and which party did they end up joining? They have misused the EC... but if the EC is working impartially, it is Rahul Gandhi’s attempt to attack the democracy of India again and again, to weaken it, to mislead the people and to try and create a situation in the country like in Bangladesh and Nepal,” he alleged.

Referring to Gandhi’s other allegations, Thakur cited the Karnataka High Court verdict cancelling the results of the Malur constituency in 2023 and asked whether the Congress had won the seat at the time through misappropriation of votes. He also accused the Raebareilly MP of seeking to reduce the value of the votes of those belonging to the SC/ST/OBC and minority backgrounds with his allegations.

● What will be the fallout radius?

praising his “meticulous preparation” and “faultless execution” towards bringing out cases of “vote fraud”. Gandhi himself described his proof as being absolutely “black and white”. However, many others are uneasy that the stridency of the attack could “delegitimise Indian democracy”, with serious repercussions.

Plus, even the Gandhi faithfuls are not really clear about his endgame and how long can the campaign be sustained, given the micro charges that were unveiled Thursday after promising explosive revelations.

Asked at the press conference whether he would approach courts on the issue, Gandhi was not forthcoming. In fact, the party has not put forward any specific demand in the wake of the vote theft allegations. And most Congress leaders The Indian Express spoke to had no clarity on this.

Backing the Congress strategy, senior leader Abhishek Singhvi said the party was avoiding “the trap that the BJP is trying to set”. “They are waiting to say that the matter is subjective and everyone must await the outcome. Our job is to highlight and expose, which we are doing. It is the job of the Election Commission and government to transparently come out with material in rebuttal. That job they are not doing.”

Other Congress leaders too assert this, saying the EC’s response has been far from satisfactory. Plus, party leaders say, going to court carries the risk of an adverse ruling, in which case the Congress campaign would collapse.

However, even among those who back Gandhi, some are asking if “vote theft” should be the Congress’s primary line of campaign against the BJP — ahead of, for example, the social justice plank, that Gandhi himself was espousing not too long ago. In fact, even in Bihar, the Congress had earlier this year focused on bread and butter issues during a yatra, targeting the Nitish Kumar-led NDA government over migration from the state, the lack of job opportunities, and the string of alleged paper leaks.

But the Congress’s Bihar poll narrative has since then narrowed down to “vote theft”, partially driven by the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of poll rolls ordered by the Election Commission just months before voting. Party leaders are also worried about this due to the feedback from the ground which, as per sources, shows that the SIR issue is not resonating and may be forgotten by the time elections come.

In stark contrast is political strategist-turned-full-time politician Prashant Kishor’s campaign, which seems to be generating momentum among the youth by asking for votes on the issues of jobs and education.

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● **Pak Army Chief**

(Bahawalpur) and soldiers to attend the funeral of those killed and pay tribute to them.

JeM chief Masood Azhar’s 10 family members and four close associates were killed in India’s attack on the outfit’s headquarters in Bahawalpur on May 7 as part of Operation Sandoor.

The Pakistan Army generals, senior police officers and top bureaucrats had attended the funeral of those killed. In an earlier viral clip uploaded to a YouTube channel on Tuesday, the JeM commander had admitted that Azhar’s family was “torn into pieces” in Indian missile strikes.

Kashmiri was reportedly speaking at the Mission Mustafa Conference in Pakistan’s Punjab province on September 6.

Standing among several gunwielding men, he said: “To protect the ideological and geographical boundaries of this country, we hit (waged a jihad in) Delhi, Kabul and Kandahar. And after sacrificing everything, on May 7, Maulana Masood Azhar’s family members in Bahawalpur were torn into pieces (in Indian strikes).”

tions to exclusion from welfare schemes. Sources said a strategy is being worked out that will elaborate on this “link”, along with the promise of guarantees. However, if the combined message is not coherent, many Congress leaders warn, the Mahagathbandhan will lose a golden opportunity to dethrone the “increasingly unpopular” Nitish Kumar government.

A former Congress Working Committee member also worries about the larger implication of Gandhi’s campaign. “It has the potential to delegitimise Indian democracy... Basically what Gandhi is trying to say is that Indian democracy is rigged... For any dataset, the universal principle is a standard deviation of plus/minus two. That is the thumb rule... If the integrity of 95% of the data is satisfactory, then the data set is acceptable. Anomalies will be there...,” the leader says.

A former Congress leader claims that Gandhi is trying to “cover up organisational neglect and decay, and nepotism at the top, by making these allegations”. “Congress people on the ground... the councillors, ward members, booth-level agents, they try to check malpractices. If this sort of voter additions and deletions, as Gandhi claims, have happened, the obvious question is what was your organisation on the ground doing?”

The leader refers to the Mahadevapur Assembly seat in Karnataka, brought up by Gandhi earlier, claiming that a lakh “extra” votes had been added there. “Your organisation did not know, then you don’t have a ground game. This is what happens when booth-level agents are appointed only on paper.”

The leader also says that it is dishonest to claim that a system can be foolproof. “Some anomalies will be there. Every party tries to (claim this). But to claim a national-level conspiracy to rig elections altogether is totally out of order.”

But as Gandhi glides ahead with his vote theft campaign, one thing on his side is that unlike in the past — say during his ‘Chowkidar chor hai’ campaign against the Modi government on the Rafale issue in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, or his Adani-Modi “nexus” line of attack, or his insistence on a caste census — a majority in the Congress are receptive to his vote theft campaign.

Says Singhvi: “(Gandhi’s) perspective must be understood. We are not the government in power, so we have to get our details from states ruled by non-BJP parties, which the EC is not prepared to furnish... The idea is to give an illustrative sample that even if a fraction of this is true... the repercussions as a whole — for a level-playing field, for democracy, for the basic structure — are humungous... This transcends all political parties, affects each and every citizen and impinges very gravely on the reputation of the EC.”

Tensions between India and Pakistan soared after terrorists killed 26 people, mostly civilians, in Jammu and Kashmir’s Pahalagam on April 22. In a powerful retaliation to the Pahalagam massacre, Indian Armed Forces carried out missile strikes on terror targets, including Bahawalpur, a stronghold of the JeM terror group, on May 7 as part of Operation Sandoor.

A statement attributed to Azhar at the time said that India’s attack on Jamia Masjid Subhan Allah in Bahawalpur resulted in the death of 10 of his family members and four close associates. Those killed included Azhar’s elder sister and her husband, a nephew and his wife, another niece, and five children from his extended family. The statement further mentioned that the attack also claimed the lives of one of Azhar’s close associates and his mother, along with two other close companions.

Bahawalpur became the hub of the JeM after the release of Azhar in exchange for the hijacked passengers of IC-814 in 1999. **● PTI**

The Indian

EXPRESS

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RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

EU’s OVERTURE

Brussels’ new strategy document shows keenness to recognise New Delhi as a valuable partner in shaping global order

THE EU’S LATEST strategy document on India, issued this week, marks a definitive moment in the evolution of Delhi’s relations with Brussels, long defined by mutual neglect. This had begun to change in the 21st century, but the two sides had struggled to boost the partnership quickly. In the last few years, there has been a determined effort by Brussels and Delhi to plug the gap between the promise of the partnership and its performance. Troubled by the assertion of Russia, the muscular economic policies of China, and the disruption of historic US alliances by President Donald Trump, Europe is in the middle of rebooting relationships with other powers. Its latest outreach to India is part of that effort. Framed as a “comprehensive strategic agenda” to deepen, broaden, and better coordinate cooperation, the EU strategy is a blend of ambition and pragmatism. In stating that “India’s success benefits the EU, just as the EU’s success benefits India,” Brussels has moved from treating New Delhi as a useful interlocutor to recognising it as an indispensable partner in shaping the international order.

The EU is the second most important commercial partner of India, after the US. Bilateral goods trade has climbed to €120 billion and services to €60 billion. Yet, India still accounts for less than 2.5 per cent of the EU’s total trade. The EU, therefore, focuses on securing a far-reaching Free Trade Agreement with India that reduces tariff and non-tariff barriers and unlocks the enormous possibility of trade and investment flows between Europe and India. After years of drift, India is now equally committed to an early conclusion of the FTA. Buffeted by a massive and persistent trade deficit with China, and shocked by Trump’s exorbitant tariffs, India sees free trade with the EU as a major strategic objective now. The EU also frames India as a rapidly expanding manufacturing and technology hub hosting nearly half of global capability centres; India appreciates Europe’s edge in research, regulation and green and digital technologies. Together, they could gain from EU-India Innovation Hubs, a Startup Partnership, and joint work in AI, semiconductors, and outer space.

In the emerging multipolar world, the EU also recognises the growing salience of security cooperation with India. The planned EU-India Security and Defence Partnership will anchor cooperation on maritime security, defence industrial expansion and modernisation, cyber and hybrid threats, counterterrorism, and crisis management. Yet the war in Ukraine casts a long shadow. The EU is not on the same page with Delhi on India’s oil imports and defence ties with Moscow. This is not surprising, given the fact that Europe is now in the middle of a prolonged and unwanted war with Russia since Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine in early 2022. It is time, though, for India to stop seeing Europe through the eyes of Russia, as it has since Independence. While Delhi must maintain a productive relationship with Moscow, it also needs to balance its ties with Brussels and Moscow. The rapidly rising stakes in India’s relationship with the European Union require such a recalibration.

FED’S PIVOT

US Central Bank has cut rate after nine months. It needs to ensure price stability and maximum employment

AFTER HOLDING STEADY for nine months, on Wednesday, the US Federal Reserve lowered the target range for the federal funds rate by 25 basis points to 4 to 4.25 per cent. The decision, though, was not unanimous. Stephen Miran, a recent appointee of Donald Trump, was in favour of a more aggressive rate cut of 50 basis points. Notwithstanding Trump’s repeated calls to reduce interest rates, the Fed’s pivot does indicate that further policy easing is on the cards. In fact, the central bank’s latest projections, which accompanied this “risk management rate cut”, do indicate the possibility of multiple rate cuts this year.

While the decision to lower rates is due to a weakening labour market, recent data also point towards inflation staying higher than previously expected, complicating the policy matrix. As per the US Bureau of Labour Statistics, non-farm payroll employment increased by just 22,000 in August, significantly lower than expectations. Alongside, the combined employment in June and July was also revised downwards. The Fed highlighted this weakness. It noted that “job gains have slowed, and the unemployment rate has edged up”, adding that the “downside risks to employment have risen”. Alongside this deterioration in the labour market, inflation risks are also surfacing. Inflation, as measured by the personal consumption expenditures price index, has been inching upwards – from 2.2 per cent in April to 2.6 per cent in July. But, while the central bank’s expectation of inflation this year remains unchanged at 3 per cent, it expects price pressures to remain elevated – it has raised its inflation projection for next year to 2.6 per cent, up from 2.4 per cent earlier. Inflation is now expected to return to the 2 per cent target only by 2028. The Fed has, however, also marginally revised upwards its growth forecasts. But, the uncertainty over the economic outlook continues to linger. Fed Chairperson Jerome Powell acknowledged that, saying, “It’s not incredibly obvious what to do”.

The decision to lower interest rates comes against the backdrop of increasing attacks on the central bank’s independence by Trump, who has not only been quite vocal about the path of monetary policy he prefers, but has also tried to fire Fed Governor Lisa Cook. Powell, whose term as Fed chair ends in May 2026, will have to navigate this period carefully as the central bank seeks to fulfil its dual mandate of price stability and maximum employment.

MORE THAN ICE CREAM

By resigning, Jerry Greenfield has highlighted that in the face of injustice, companies and people, always have a choice

IN 1977, TWO friends — one a failed potter, the other with a stack of rejection letters from medical schools — decided to go into business together. They realised the high costs of setting up a bagel shop and pivoted to selling ice cream, crepes and soups. In a renovated petrol pump, they set up the first parlour of what went on to become the multinational ice-cream brand, Ben & Jerry’s. That simple start sits at the heart of their operation to this date. On September 17, Jerry Greenfield resigned from the company over being “silenced” by their parent company, Unilever, saying, “Love, equity, justice — they’re part of who Ben and I are, and they’ve always been the foundation of Ben & Jerry’s.”

In 2021, B&J’s independent board sued Unilever over the renewal of an entrepreneur’s license to sell B&J’s in areas of Israeli-occupied West Bank. Since then, tensions have escalated. But, as they made sure with a deal guaranteeing their independence at the time of acquisition, for Ben Cohen and Greenfield, “it was always about more than just ice cream”. They have extended support to movements aimed at racial justice, LGBTQ+ rights, climate justice — and given away part of their profits to such causes. The founders are trying to find a way to buy the company back.

Today, the single-minded pursuit of profit is often accepted as the norm. Ben & Jerry’s model is proof that it is possible to measure a business’s performance against both financial gain and social impact. Some companies do see that the balance sheet does not have to make up the whole picture: In India, leather-goods company Hidesign, in July, made a public statement against Israel’s killing of children in Gaza. “That’s not how things work in the real world,” is the first line of defence against any challenge to the status quo. Ben & Jerry’s and Ben and Jerry have, for long, led the way in showing that the “real world” is what we make it.



PRATAP BHANU MEHTA

DONALD: MY DEAR friend, Narendra. Happy birthday to you. You are a great guy. 75! What a great age. Let me tell you that the best is yet to come. We can beat those youngsters on anything. Iaced my cognitive test.

Narendra: Donald, thank you very much. I am a mere servant of one-and-half-billion people. God has been kind.

Donald: We are both great countries, with leaders such as our countries have never seen before. But I envy you. I saw all the Indian newspapers. They have put out so many BIG ads wishing you. What a party you must be having. My media – that New York Times, ABC News — they hate me.

Narendra: But you sue them!

Donald: But at least I get them to pay me money. 15 million off ABC. Not bad.

Narendra: I just get them to work for me. Anyway, you know I should not be talking to you.

Donald: Why?

Narendra: You have got to lift that punitive tariff. I should have insisted on it before we let your trade negotiator back in. We don’t negotiate with a gun pointed at our heads. You cannot unfairly punish India. I know we are friends and all that. But India comes first, above personal deals, above friendship, especially above sportsmanship. I am giving you another chance because our countries go back a long way.

Donald: You know you did not quite give me the credit for stopping a nuclear war. But I am going to give you a birthday gift. I am going to thank you for your help in trying to stop the Russia-Ukraine war.

Narendra: India eternally deserves the Nobel Prize. We have always said, war is not the way.

Donald: If I had been around, there would have been no war. Because of Crooked Joe, I was saddled with both Hamas and Ukraine.

Narendra: So, what are we going to do?

Donald: You put pressure on Putin.

Narendra: You think the international community might want more pressure on Netanyahu as well?

Donald: Well, both are my friends.

An imaginary conversation on tariffs, trade and leaders who make nations great

Actually, the funny thing is, both are our best friends. Our friends do no wrong. It’s Zelenskyy and Biden’s war, not Putin’s. And Israel has done no wrong.

Narendra: You are forcing India to exercise leverage over Russia. Not forcing China or Europe?

Donald: I’d like to be friends with Xi, too. Then maybe I could force him too. Anyway, how was Tianjin? Heard they do great buildings over there.

Narendra: Not quite going over to the dark side, if that’s what you mean (laughs). Just keeping the neighbour happy. But, I’ll tell you the real dark side: TikTok. Now that we got rid of it, we are fine.

Donald: The people who use TikTok have always supported me. You, my friend, have got everyone supporting you.

Narendra: Not so easy. You know the Opposition is accusing me of stealing votes.

Donald: Oh, Democrats were stealing elections all the time. But it is ridiculous to accuse you of stealing votes. I have seen the crowds you draw. Must be that same left-wing gang. I have that problem too. Professional hate mongers, spewing hate against patriotic people like us trying to make our countries great. You got to get tough with them is all I can say.

Narendra: Don’t worry, Donald. These were the people who brought in infiltrators to change the demography of the country. I am weeding the infiltrators out. We have a great word: *Ghuspaitiya*, one who comes in without permission.

Donald: Cool word. We should share notes on this. I learnt a few tricks from you. By the way, I am one up on you on one thing. You only control universities. I now control and get them to pay up.

Narendra: We must. Our political challenges are so alike. Our opponents will stoop to any level.

Donald: Yes, they will. They did not spare poor Charlie.

Narendra: Both of us are victims of so much hate. Why do they hate people like us? All we want is for everyone to unite around peace and greatness. Anyway, deepest con-

dolences. But coming back to tariffs, don’t get addicted to them. We may be a poorer country, but we still manage our budgets. And next time you come — you are coming for Quad, aren’t you? — we will serve you some great “makai nu shaak” from my home state, Gujarat. You will understand why we won’t buy American corn...And you really should not have called India a dead economy

Donald: I don’t like corn. By the way, that economy thing was a joke. Who knows whether an economy is dead or alive. So many fake numbers around. We are fixing that. But you got a great stock market going. Congratulations.

Narendra: Thank you.

Donald: I know it’s your birthday, so now is not the time. But you have got to give me something. Xi won’t. Lula won’t. Europeans will give you everything so easily that it does not even count as giving. The Arab world really believes in family values, it has helped family investments a lot. Look at Pakistan. Generous people opened up their crypto market. I know you have an aversion to gambling, so I won’t bet India to buy bitcoins. Anyway, the point is, if I get a win with India, it is a win for both of us. And we personally share so much. Give me something,

Narendra: The goodwill of one-and-a-half billion people, and the steadfast values of our civilisation, will be with you, Donald. Our democracy and demography.

Donald: Yeah, but America does not make as much money from that. About the demography bit, some of our people don’t like having so many of your people. I am not saying that’s me. But you know how it is. And what’s your leverage?

Narendra: Since you asked, a billion warriors on X. And a will for self-reliance.

Donald: Oh, that’s one big company. I get that. But billion X warriors — and not a dime for me? Anyway, have a GREAT birthday, Narendra. Don’t forget the tariffs.

NOTE: Resemblance to any actual figure is purely coincidental.

The writer is contributing editor, The Indian Express

HERE’S TO THE SUNDANCE KID

Robert Redford’s greatest legacy is his championing of indie cinema



POOJA PILLAI

IN 1989, WHEN 26-year-old Steven Soderbergh made his filmmaking debut at a film festival in Park City, Utah, the American movie ecosystem looked a lot like today’s: Big money was thrown at franchises like *Indiana Jones* and *Lethal Weapon* that were fronted by stars like Harrison Ford and Mel Gibson, and which sought to do nothing more than entertain as many people as possible.

Enter Soderbergh, with *Sex, Lies and Videotape*, an intimate look at the falsehoods on which relationships are built. Amidst the “feel-good” and “family-friendly” movies of the time, it struck a note that was fresh in its discordance, announcing the arrival of a bold voice and laying the foundation of the American indie/independent film movement of the 1990s.

While individual geniuses often become catalysts for creative movements, they can only thrive in the right ecosystem. For Soderbergh, it was the Sundance Film Festival in Utah. Following Soderbergh’s breakthrough, the festival — originally called the Utah/US Film Festival — developed a reputation as Ground Zero for indie film talent. The visionary behind the festival’s new character was Robert Redford, the screen legend and filmmaker who had, in 1981, founded the Sundance Institute in Utah’s Provo Valley to support independent filmmakers. Named for the charming, scrappy outlaw Redford played in his breakout film, 1969’s *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, the

institute took over management in 1985 of what had until then a festival chiefly featuring retrospectives. Under Redford’s guidance, it did not just get a new name; the event underwent a complete overhaul, its focus shifting from celebrating the past to exploring the possibilities of the future. A series of filmmaking labs were established, with the idea that those with a story to tell should be able to, at the very least, realise it on the big screen.

All this was happening as Redford, who remained a busy actor, was charting his own course as a filmmaker. Beloved for his all-American good looks and warm screen persona, he was an easy choice to play the romantic lead in films like *The Way We Were* (1973), but there was always something in him that kicked at the notion of being reduced to his face. It may have had something to do with his early exposure on the stage and television, where he played a wide variety of roles unconstrained by his handsomeness. Or, maybe it was the same yearning for the artistic life that had once led him to leave college to pursue (unsuccessfully) a career in art in Europe.

As much as this streak of non-conformity shaped his choice of roles throughout his career — leading him to pursue projects like *The Sting* (1972), *All The President’s Men* (1976), *The Natural* (1984) and *All Is Lost* (2013) — it defined his oeuvre as a filmmaker. He had little interest in the blockbuster films that were be-

ginning to replace the auteur-driven fare of the 1960s and 1970s Hollywood. *Ordinary People* (1980), his first feature as director, told a story of grief that was several shades darker than many mainstream films of the day. It won him an Oscar for Best Director, but the point was never just winning hardware that could be proudly displayed on a mantle. It was about creating a legacy built on storytelling that was not afraid of the complicated and the offbeat.

This vision was more than realised at Sundance, which launched the careers of some of the most daring and creative minds working in cinema today, including Quentin Tarantino, Paul Thomas Anderson, Richard Linklater, Wes Anderson, the Coen brothers, Chloe Zhao and Ryan Coogler. In that sense, Redford the institution builder was simply an extension of Redford the actor and filmmaker who used his tremendous clout and goodwill — and his millions — to push the cause of cinema and foster talent that would otherwise have gone unrecognised. Those who love cinema and those who pursue this uniquely demanding art in the face of overwhelming odds owe much to Redford, for he helped keep the faith alive. As a nursery for indie cinema, if Sundance has few parallels, it is because there are few others like Redford who use the megawattage of their stardom to shine the light on others.

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SEPTEMBER 19, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

SEVENTH FIVE-YEAR PLAN

THE COUNTRY’S SEVENTH Five-Year Plan envisages an annual growth rate of five per cent, with increased emphasis on infrastructure and human resource development. “This is a financially sound plan which is eminently bankable,” Manmohan Singh, deputy chairman of the Planning Commission, told newsmen. He said that it was not only realistic but had no gaps in resources. The growth rate projected for agriculture was 4 per cent and for industry 8 per cent.

CEASEFIRE IN SRI LANKA

THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT appeared to have persuaded the representatives of Sri

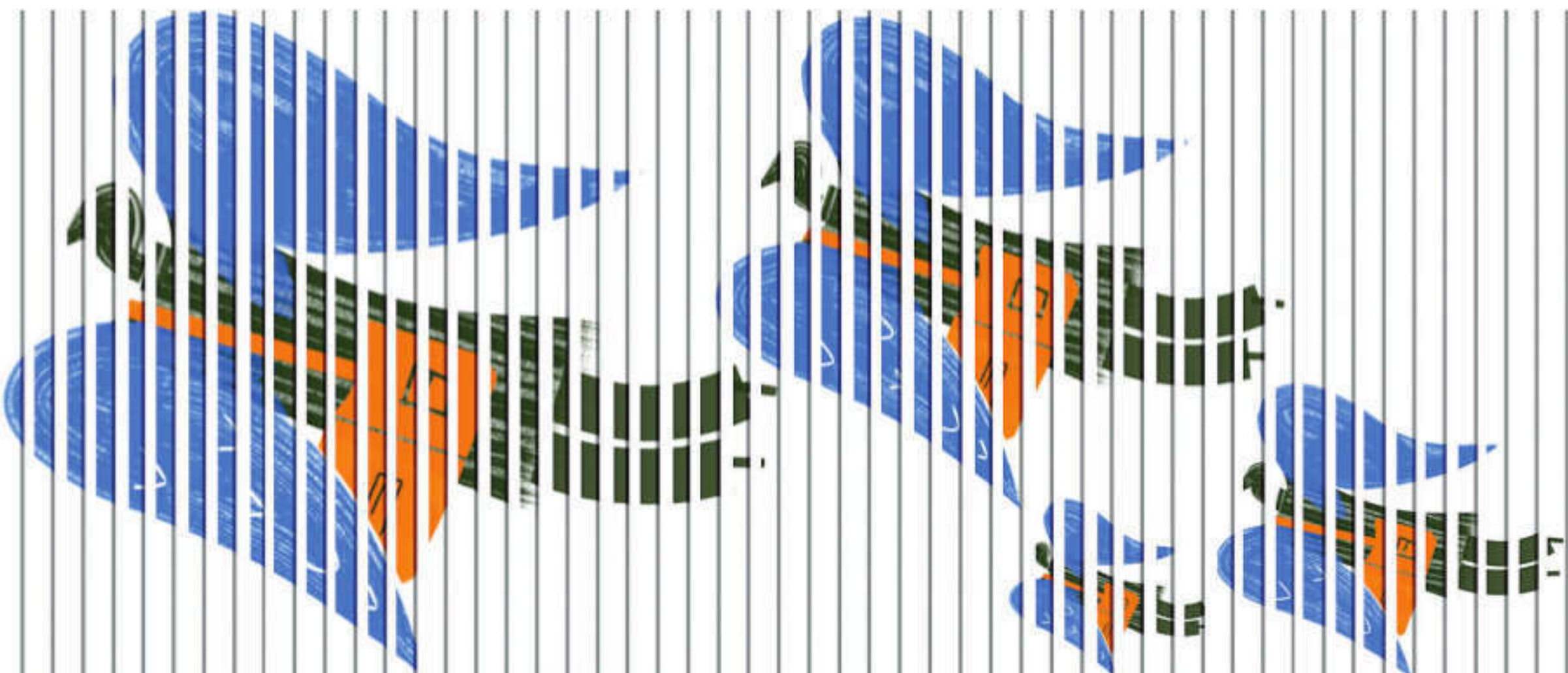
Lanka’s Eelam National Liberation Front (ENLF) to agree to observe the extended ceasefire on the island. At the end of yet another round of talks in New Delhi between the ENLF leaders and the Foreign Secretary, Romesh Bhandari, the government expressed the hope that the Tamil militants and the Sri Lankan government would “faithfully observe” the extended ceasefire. The ENLF leaders are believed to have given their assurance to observe the ceasefire after a great deal of cajoling and persuasion. All through their discussions with the Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, and Bhandari, they reportedly underlined the need to secure proper guarantees from the Sri Lankan government that its security forces would strictly observe the truce.

INDIA REFUSES THE US

INDIA ALL BUT turned down the US plea for taking initiatives to avoid nuclear competition in the Subcontinent. Reacting to the plea made by the two visiting US officials, during their talks with Indian officials and leaders, an External Affairs Ministry spokesman, pointed out that India was already committed “not to produce nuclear weapons”. “If it can be ensured that Pakistan likewise becomes committed, and the US can assist in this process, where then is the need for a regional agreement?” he asked. India believed that Pakistan’s nuclear programme was directed towards acquiring weapons capability. In its view, the best way to deal with the situation was to prevent Pakistan from acquiring it.

DIS/AGREE
THE BEST OF BOTH SIDES

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



C R Sasikumar

With widespread anti-migrant sentiment in Western countries, is the era of large-scale immigration over?

Migrants make for convenient villains

They have been woven into the moral fabric of receiving countries as the evil that is required to prove the goodness of the hosts



SANJAY SRIVASTAVA

IT HAS BEEN exactly 50 years since the publication of John Berger and Jean Mohr's *A Seventh Man*. The book poignantly documents the lives of migrant workers in a Europe that needed their labour but rejected their presence. In the Preface to the 2010 edition, Berger wrote, "It can happen that a book, unlike its authors, grows younger as the years pass." *A Seventh Man* has grown younger because, though its facts and figures may now be outdated, the mirror it held up to the privileged about their treatment of beleaguered migrant workers is as clear as ever. The book's subject, as Berger also noted, "is European, its meaning global". Now, around the globe, migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers have become scapegoats for all that is wrong with the present and thought experiments for a future that, ironically, is based on the past.

According to UN data, around 4 per cent of the world's population currently lives in a country other than where it was born, whether legally or (according to the laws of host countries) illegally. That is, just over 300 million people are living outside their countries of birth. Not all migrants are equal and those at the top of the mobility pecking order — white collar professionals and "golden visa" holders, for example — enjoy legal and cultural rights similar to citizens of host countries. What is clear is that migrants at the bottom of the heap — those Berger identified as seeking an "opportunity to earn a living, to have enough money to act" upon the barest necessities of a decent life — have become sites of significant moral dramas of our times. And though they are actors in such dramas, they are also bit players in what are morality plays that seek to define our times.

The first of these is the demand for a strong state that will secure the borders against "too much" or any immigration. This is extraordinary as those who demand a strong state simultaneously rail against state control and regulations, arguing that market forces should be allowed to take over state activities. In the United Kingdom, politicians and activists such as Nigel Farage and Tommy Robinson propagate the narrative that a "weak" state has allowed national borders to be breached by undesirable populations. And in the US, Trump's MAGA movement has thrived on similar sentiments. It is important to recognise the key moral argument here: That just as a family can only flourish if there is a strong father figure, the national family too needs a patriarch, the strong state.

The second aspect concerns the ways in which the migrant is a vessel for ideas

about culture and the past. There is gathering support for the idea that culture is like a commodity and that if you cover it in stain-resistant wrapping, it will stay pristine and, more importantly, just as it was 100 years ago. Here, migrants and asylum-seekers become threats to culture-as-commodity: They grab it with their grubby hands, exhale their strange smells upon it and paint it in their own colours. Ignoring the fact that the only unvarying truth about cultures is that they are forever changing is a crucial aspect of this morality play. It is also ironic that those who hold this view have no problems with the idea of trans-border global financial and economic flows. And yet, such flows also carry within them the forces that are constantly transforming cultures. However, morality tales need clearly identifiable villains: In India, these might be Rohingya refugees and in France, those of Arabic origin.

The culture-as-commodity perspective is strongly linked to another important idea. This the morality tale of a Golden Age, the idea of a past we must return to in order to solve the problems of the present. In this Golden Age, culture was homogenous and harmonious and the presence of "outsiders" has deeply disturbed the equilibrium. The Golden Age narrative is one of the key ways in which arguments about migrants and asylum seekers are currently expressed.

Finally, it is in the nature of morality tales to present a black-and-white view of the world such that those who are their readers are able to distance themselves from the conditions of "evil" that are being described. It is crucial that the audience for such stories does not itself become implicated in the problem that is identified. The audience is always positioned as needing clear-cut solutions whilst having nothing to do with its cause. So, it is rarely

Who created the conditions for the making of refugees? What has been the role of the French in its former colonies, and the Euro-American policies of self-interest that have supported murderous regimes in different parts of the world and created the conditions that make for refugees?

asked: Who created the conditions for the making of refugees and asylum-seekers? What, for example, has been the role of the French in its former sub-Saharan colonies, and the Euro-American policies of self-interest that have supported murderous regimes in different parts of the world and created the conditions that make for refugees? And, what of the making of Palestinian refugees and asylum-seekers?

But morality tales require that the propagation of violence in faraway places, that may have material and financial benefits but also create conditions for the making of immigrants, refugees and asylum-seekers, must be hidden from view. It requires that those who create such conditions can view themselves as under threat from those whose miseries their governments have created.

In our time, the migrant, the refugee and the asylum-seeker are not just workers necessary to do the jobs others might refuse. They have been woven into the moral fabric of receiving countries as the evil that is required to prove the goodness of the hosts.

The writer is Distinguished Research Professor, Department of Anthropology and Sociology, SOAS University of London

Immigration is not ending. It's changing

Boom-and-bust cycles of the past may be broken. But what we may now have to deal with is forced migration on account of climate change



AMIT JULKA

FOR ALMOST a decade now, global politics has churned around a singular issue — migration. While migration is usually seen as a recent phenomenon (and an exception), it has been a norm for most of humanity — at some point in history, someone from our ancestry has migrated. Thus, to talk about its origins is to acknowledge the limits of memory — a native place is the point beyond which we can no longer trace our story of our migration(s).

That being said, there was something unique about the specific form of migration the world has witnessed in the last few decades. Specifically, this was the migration caused by the rise of neoliberalism. The end of the Cold War and the globalisation of the free market not only meant loosening of flows of capital, but also human bodies. Secondly, this was also the time of the rise of the service economy and informational capitalism. This meant that in core economies (the first world), companies needed access to cheaper, skilled labour from the periphery, that is, the developing world. Thus, it is not a coincidence that the H1-B programme, the sustainer of middle class dreams in countries like India, was launched in the year 1990, just as America was entering the unipolar era. Conversely, this was also a win-win for developing countries — it provided a much-needed outlet for their talented youth especially at a

The rise of industrial capitalism has led to a double movement — the opening of immigration to increase labour supply (and thus keep domestic wages in check) but also increased reliance on xenophobic politics to prevent consolidation among the working class.

rebuild the factories, railroads, and ports, and, as a result, millions of erstwhile colonial subjects were "let in", to fuel this demand. Soon after though, the racist backlash followed — excrement was thrown on the shops and bodies of the outsiders, and (relatively) native Anglo-Saxons moved out of immigrant neighbourhoods such as Southall or Brick Lane in London. Hence, by the 1960s, England had already paused the freedom of mobility within the commonwealth, and the world once again seemed to be moving towards an era of restricted migration. A similar politics impacts domestic migration. For instance, in Punjab, there has been a rise in hatred against migrants from UP and Bihar, even as Punjabi (and other South Asian) immigrants to Canada and the global North are themselves caricatured as "Pajeets" in online discourse. This online hate has also resulted in increased physical violence against Indians, such as the gruesome beheading of Chandra Nagamallaiiah in Dallas.

On a macro-scale however, this is where the logic of capital is important to understand. The rise of industrial capitalism has led to a double movement — the opening of immigration to increase labour supply (and thus keep domestic wages in check) but also increased reliance on xenophobic politics to prevent consolidation among the working class. This has meant that there is a contradiction — free markets need immigrants to keep themselves running, but this also fuels xenophobia and cultural nationalism in host societies, and that leads to a phase of increased cultural and economic anxiety over immigration. As a result, over the last century, the world has gone through these periodic boom-and-bust cycles of immigration.

So — does this mean an end of the immigrant's dream? The answer is simultaneously, yes, no, and for now. Let me explain. For us, sitting in South Asia, who have always looked towards the West as a destination for upper mobility, that dream may have hit a temporary pause for the next few years. However, here, the picture gets more complicated. While countries like the United States are closing down, nations with falling birth rates like Japan are welcoming migrants. So, on a global level, what we may be looking at is not a macro-decline, but a shift in flows. And yet, there are bigger problems on the horizon. While the

last century has been dominated by the secular advance of industrial and financial capitalism, the next few decades could also be the era of ecological collapse thanks to climate change. This means that the boom-and-bust cycles of the past may be irretrievably broken — and what we may now have to deal with is forced migration on account of climate change. Climate change and mass migration may permanently rearrange societies, economies, and state capacity. Thus, generations ahead may no longer have the comfort of the "wait for a few years, this will pass".

The writer is an assistant professor of International Relations, Ashoka University. Views are personal

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"There should be a global, UN-backed arms, economic and diplomatic embargo of Israel until it stops its campaign of extermination in Gaza. And if states refuse to cooperate and continue to arm and fund Israel, they must be considered partners in crime with Tel Aviv."

— DAWN, PAKISTAN

Tech as grammar of governance

PM Modi has made innovation India's greatest equaliser. Today, the poorest farmer has the same digital identity as the richest industrialist



ASHWINI VAISHNAV

REMEMBER WHEN GETTING a government document involved multiple trips, long queues, and random fees? Now it's in your phone. This transformation has happened because Prime Minister Narendra Modi turned technology into India's greatest equaliser. A street vendor in Mumbai uses the same UPI payment system as a corporate executive. This reflects the philosophy of *antyodaya* — reaching the last person in the queue.

As Gujarat Chief Minister, Modi ji used innovation to transform the state. The Jyotigram scheme used feeder separation technology. Rural industries revived with 24x7 power while groundwater depletion slowed through scheduled farm electricity. Women could study at night, and small businesses flourished, reducing rural-urban migration. The project involving solar panels on the Narmada canal generated 16 million units annually, enough for 16,000 households. It slowed the rate of evaporation, which increased water availability. This dual-benefit approach — generating energy while conserving water — showcases PM Modi's vision. The adoption by the US and Spain adds credibility to the innovation's efficacy. The e-Dhara system digitised land records. SWAGAT allowed citizens to meet the CM through video conferencing. Online tenders eliminated corruption. These initiatives improved the ease of accessing government services.

In 2014, Modi ji brought the Gujarat experience to Delhi. Under his leadership, India Stack, the world's most inclusive digital public infrastructure, took shape. The JAM trinity was at its core. Jan Dhan accounts brought more than 53 crore people into the banking system, bringing the financially excluded into the formal economy. Street vendors, daily wage workers, and rural families who lived on cash now have bank accounts. It has enabled them to save securely, receive government benefits directly, and access credit. Aadhaar gave citizens a digital identity. Direct Benefit Transfer has eliminated middlemen and reduced leakages. DBT use has led to savings of more than Rs 4.3 lakh crore so far. They are used for building more schools, hospitals and infrastructure projects.

Customer verification used to involve physical document checks, manual processes, and multiple touchpoints. This would cost service providers hundreds of rupees per verification. Aadhaar-based e-KYC reduced this to just Rs 5 per authentication. UPI has transformed how India pays. Today, India handles half the world's real-time digital payments. When COVID struck and the PM urged digital transactions, the ecosystem delivered. UPI now processes more transactions than Visa globally.

PRAGATI brings the PM directly into project monitoring. When officials know the PM will review their work on live video, accountability becomes automatic. Officials have to explain the delays. This ensures swifter course correction.

Technology has transformed agriculture and healthcare fundamentally. Take Jagdev Singh, a farmer in Haryana, who now uses AI apps to make crop decisions. He receives real-time weather updates and soil health data on his phone.

Driving licenses, degree certificates, Aadhaar, and other official documents now live securely in a phone. Police checks no

longer require fumbling for papers while on the road. Just show your DigiLocker digital license. Filing income tax returns has become seamless with instant Aadhaar authentication. What once meant carrying folders of documents now fits in pockets.

In space research, India achieved what seemed impossible once. Reaching Mars on the first attempt and that too with a budget smaller than a Hollywood movie. Chandrayaan-3 made India the fourth country to achieve a soft lunar landing and the first to land on the Moon's South Pole. Indian rockets now carry satellites for 34 countries. The Gaganyaan mission will make India the fourth nation to send humans to space using indigenous technology.

When Covid struck, the world struggled with vaccine distribution. India responded through its strength. The CoWIN platform, built in record time, managed 200 crore vaccine doses with digital precision. Unused vaccines were redirected instantly to areas with higher demand. This achievement demonstrated how technology, when driven by political will can deliver at a massive scale and with fairness.

Under PM Modi's vision, our strong base in electronics is now enabling the leap into advanced semi-conductor manufacturing. India has long been a hub for design talent. It now has design capabilities for advanced 2nm, 3nm, and 7nm chips. These are being designed for the world. But the approach extends beyond manufacturing. The chemicals, gases, and specialised materials that feed semiconductor production are being supported. This creates an entire ecosystem, not just isolated factories.

The PM Gati Shakti portal uses GIS technology on an unprecedented scale. Every infrastructure project gets mapped digitally. Roads, railways, airports, and ports are planned together. No more working in silos. No more delays due to poor coordination.

Through the India AI Mission, over 38,000 GPUs are available at one-third global cost. This has given startups, researchers, and students Silicon Valley-level computing at an average rate of Rs 67 per hour. The AIKosh platform hosts 2,000+ datasets, ranging from weather to soil health. These can power indigenous LLMs developed for India's languages, laws, health systems, and finance. Instead of rigid regulations that could stifle innovation, the government today invests in technological safeguards.

The Statue of Unity at Kevadia, the world's tallest statue, was built using 3D modeling and bronze cladding technology. The project created thousands of jobs and has transformed Kevadia into a tourism hub. The Chenab bridge connects Kashmir to the rest of India. The Aizawl railway line uses the Himalayan Tunnelling Method to pass through tunnels and bridges in tough terrain. The new Pamban bridge replaces a century-old structure with modern engineering. All these represent PM Modi's vision of connecting India through technology and determination.

PM Modi understands technology, but he understands people even better. The poorest farmer has the same digital identity as the richest industrialist. The G20 endorsed Digital Public Infrastructure as essential for inclusive growth. Japan has granted a patent for this. What started as India's solution became the world's template for digital democracy.

PM Modi has made technology the grammar of governance. He has shown that when leaders embrace technology with humanity, entire nations can leapfrog into the future.

The author is Union Minister for Railways, Electronics & Information Technology, and Information & Broadcasting

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

THE FLOOD PROBLEM

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Check the deluge' (IE, September 18). Punjab's floods have claimed 55 lives and left thousands of people homeless. Punjab has experienced floods in 2023, 2019, 2013, 2010, 2008, and 2004. Besides suggesting a range of flood protection measures, revival of village ponds, construction of water harvesting structures and preventing waste disposal in canals and rivers is imperative. The flood problem needs a holistic approach.

SS Paul, Noida

HEED DISTRESS SIGNS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Heed the hills' (IE, September 17). The recent extreme weather events in our hilly regions demonstrate that, while we were aware of the Himalayan mountains' fragility, the heightened likelihood of landslides during such events, exacerbated by mountain slope blasting and widespread deforestation, have not been sufficiently factored in. The decision by the Road Transport Ministry to reassess the safety

of certain parts of an under-construction roadway may be a bandaid, since there might be many similar cases with other highways in the Char Dham project. Without regulated development, and climate adaptation, these areas will always be vulnerable to calamities.

Kamal Laddha, Bangalore

A GUIDING LIGHT

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'A star, an idealist' (IE, September 18). Robert Redford acted in many Hollywood classics like *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, *Three Days of the Condor* and *All the President's Men* and he won the Oscar for Best Director for *Ordinary People* in 1980. He was instrumental in bringing the Watergate scandal to the screen and founded the Sundance film festival which became a nursery for new talents away from the pressures of Hollywood. He never really retired from acting. He was last seen in *Avengers Endgame* in 2019. With him, the industry has lost a big star and a guiding light.

Bal Govind, Noida

Jurel’s counter, solid Padikkal lead India A strong response

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
SEPTEMBER 18

WICKETKEEPER BATSMAN Dhruv Jurel put up a commanding show to lead India A’s strong reply against Australia A in the first unofficial Test at Lucknow’s Ekana Stadium on Thursday. Jurel’s unbeaten 113 and his unbroken 181 run stand with Devdutt Padikkal helped India A recover from a slight wobble in the middle as they ended Day 3 at 403/4 with one day to go in the match which is headed for a draw unless the host’s attack puts up an inspiring show on the final day, Friday.

For the third consecutive day in the match, the day’s proceedings were delayed because of wet outfield due to the overnight rain. And in the first session where only 30 minutes of play was possible, India A ended up losing its overnight batsman opener N Jagadeesan for 64 with pacer Xavier Bartlett inducing an edge to the wicketkeeper.

Once Jagadeesan departed, the other overnight batsman B Sai Sudharsan and Padikkal added 76 runs for third wicket with the former doing the bulk of the scoring. The promising left-hander who made his Test debut in England, played a vital knock of 73 off 124 deliveries in an innings that included 10 boundaries. However, the 23-year-old failed to convert his inning into a big one as he was trapped in front by left-arm spinner Cooper Connolly.

Sai Sudharsan’s dismissal brought Shreyas Iyer into the middle. The Mumbai’er who lost out on his Test spot during the 2024 home series against England, has struggled to earn his spot back with his appearances in red-ball cricket being limited due to his India white-ball commitments.

Poor show by Shreyas
With a strong game against the spinners, Shreyas is still looked at by India’s think tank as an option, in particular for the home conditions where his aggressive intent would suit the team.

After making 25 & 12 in the lone Duleep Trophy fixture against Central Zone, leading the India A side, Shreyas’ stay lasted all of 13 deliveries as he returned to the pavilion after making 8 to off-spinner Corey Rocchiccioli.

Though they lost two quick wickets, Padikkal and Jurel then took control of situation. The left-right duo recovered slowly with the Karnataka batsman showing immense patience in the middle as he went about constructing a big knock in the traditional old fashion, getting to his half-century off 117 deliveries.

With Padikkal being solid at one end, Jurel once again showed why he remains the next best wicketkeeper behind Rishabh Pant.

Having made strong calls for his inclusion as a specialist batsman even with Pant around, this was another knock where he made a strong case. Despite the pressure firmly on the hosts, he launched a stunning counter-attack scoring 10 boundaries and four sixes in all.

The UP wicketkeeper brought up his century off 114 deliveries. His three sixes came in the V, while his 10 boundaries were spread across the park with six of them coming between deep square-leg and mid-wicket.

He was particularly severe on off-spinner Rocchiccioli, taking him for 47 runs off just 46 deliveries including three sixes.

Connolly too ended up conceding over a run a ball to Jurel (25 off 24) as he safely played out Todd Murphy, the mystical off-spinner who has a well disguised carrom ball up his sleeve.

Going into the final day on Friday, India A’s still trail Australia A by 129 runs.

BRIEF SCORES: Australia A 532 for 6 dec vs **India A** 403/4 (D Jurel 113 n.o., D Padikkal 86 n.o., B Sai Sudharsan 73, N Jagadeesan 64).

Too many cooks spoil Pak broth

Instability, revolving doors and musical chairs have put the country’s cricket in danger of going the hockey way



SANDIP G
DUBAI, SEPTEMBER 18

TWO EX-PAKISTAN Cricket Board chairmen – Ramiz Raja and Najam Sethi – got together with the incumbent Mohsin Naqvi in a common space to discuss a common crisis, celebrated a common “victory” and spoke to the media about the common goal of making Pakistan a great cricketing nation again. The visuals saw them hugging, smiling and shaking hands, like long-lost friends rather than antagonists who had flung accusations at each other over the last four years.

Towards the end of the press conference, keeping aside the Dubai no-handshake drama, Naqvi momentarily reflected on his team’s performance in the tournament: “We will review this tournament and whatever weakness emerges, my promise is we will sit together and solve.”

Review is often a word used after losing a series badly or a premature exit from a tournament. But Pakistan’s drop in standards, despite regulation victories over minnows UAE and Oman, has been so perceptible in the Asia Cup that fears of an imminent fall from mediocrity to ignominy are not irrational.

It has not so much been a question of diminishing talent as it is a case of gaping structural flaws and colossal mismanagement, the country’s cricket churning in an endless cycle of hope and regret.

The evidence on the field is nauseating. The batting has been a cruel parody of their batting legacy; no one seems to know which batsman should bat where. Hasan Nawaz cracked the fastest T20I hundred by a Pakistan batsman in Auckland last year, yet walks in at No.5.

Sahibzada Farhan was injected as an antidote to Pakistan’s conservative batting approach. His strike rate, in the tournament, has been 87.05. Saim Ayub, his partner and touted the most thrilling T20 batsman of his country, has three ducks in four balls.

The middle order is brittle, unable to seize moments and are wrecks against the turning ball. But for the expertise of Fakhar Zaman, their batting in the tournament has been closer to the standards of associate nations than the elites.

Bowlers have often been the redeemers against the smaller teams, but often get exposed when encountering more evolved batting firms. Shaheen Shah Afridi doesn’t hit the blockhole as frequently or accurately as he once used to; the curve in the air into right-handed batsmen is but a moth-eaten memory.

The speed seldom stretches the speedometers. Worse, there is no one keeping him on his toes, no bustling teenager from the back-of-beyond to jeopardise his spot in the side. Afridi is a walking metaphor for Pakistan’s state of stasis – once destined to reawaken his side’s world-conquering ambitions, but now struggling to redeem himself.

Alarming situation

A freefall as severe as the West Indies in scale and sweep is not beyond the realms of possibility. Former wicketkeeper Kamran Akmal, who played in far rosier times, fears Pakistan cricket could plummet like the country’s hockey. “It is happening with planning; it is being pulled down,” he says.

Shoaib Akhtar, numbed by the tepid display against India, fumed: “The difference is clear now. Other teams are playing at a very high level, but we can’t even manage club-level cricket, even though there is no shortage of cricketing talent in the country.”

This is the Pakistan paradox. It has talent, charisma and cricket hard-wired into its daily



In the space of last four years, Pakistan men’s cricket team has had 11 different captains across formats. AP

ROLLING STONES (last 4 years)	
COACHES	5 full time; 5 interim
SELECTORS	26
CAPTAINS	6 (T20Is), 3 (Tests), 2 (ODIs)
PLAYERS	T20Is (33), ODIs (26); Tests (19)
PCB CHAIRMEN	3

life. Except for power, stability, and settled structures. No cricketing nation could thrive if it has regular changes in board chairmen, each change coinciding with a change in government.

Each chairman brings his own plans and personnel, but has to leave the office even before one gets used to the physical chair. In the last five years alone, they have had five different chairmen. Naqvi, 17 months into his tenure, is the longest serving one.

Raja lasted barely three months before being ousted; Sethi, in his fourth tenure, survived only seven months, followed by Zaka Ashraf’s six-month reign.

As always, the appointments have a political subtext. Naqvi, for instance, is the interior affairs minister and considered the second-in-charge of the country. Blunt questions have been posed about the merit of his appointment.

“Favourites have been imposed to run a technical sport like cricket. What are Mohsin Naqvi’s qualifications?” asked Imran Khan, the former Pakistan captain and prime minister. “Nations are destroyed when corrupt and incompetent people are placed in positions of power in state institutions.”

Instability has a ripple effect. Captains, coaches and selectors have been hired and fired with bewildering frequency. The journey from being a messiah to pariah is frighteningly short.

In the past four years, five different permanent coaches, apart from as many interim ones, have passed through the fickle carousel in cricket terminal. Contrastingly, India has had only three in the last eight years.

Coaches galore

Celebrated foreign coaches arrived,

Each chairman brings his own plans and personnel, but has to leave the office even before one gets used to the physical chair. In the last five years alone, they have had five different chairmen. Current chairman Naqvi is the longest serving one with 17 months in the office.

among them Gary Kirsten, Mickey Arthur and Jason Gillespie. Local legends were tried, like Saqlain Mushaq and Aaqib Javed. Three have captained them across 34 Tests in the last five years.

The 50-over format has been comparatively stable, with Mohammed Rizwan and Babar Azam splitting 63 games between them in this time. Most fitful has been T20Is – six have led them this year.

Players flowing in & out

Inevitably, players have flown in and out of teams. From Asia Cup 2022 to 2025, they have handed out T20Is caps to 28 different players. Only six of them have featured in more than 20 games. From August 2021, they have had 26 different selectors.

One of them, Inzamam-ul-Haq, had to resign midway through the 2023 World Cup because he was a stakeholder in a milk-based beverage firm which was co-owned by a player agent.

A raft of celebrated former players had been in the panel, such as Mohammad Yousuf, Wahab Riaz and Abdul Razzaq, but none lasted long.

The vision under current coach Mike Hesson is clear and simple. Pakistan want to play like all modern and successful teams, an attacking, entertaining brand that could fill both hearts and galleries.

But will Hesson get the time to implement his ideas, will he get the men he wants, will the players not stumble into regional cliques? Or will Naqvi get the time to successfully complete “a major surgery”, or practise his plan to select teams relying “80% by AI and 20% using humans”? Or will they show as much unity for the betterment of Pakistan cricket as they did during the non-handshake-gate drama?

Kuldeep drops insights on his subtle art of spin bowling

SANDIP G
DUBAI, SEPTEMBER 18

HOLDING THE microphone, **Kuldeep Yadav** grinned and sound-checked: “Ready 1,2,3...” And smiled impishly, reflecting his buoyant mood in the tournament. Two games, seven wickets; average of 3.57; economy rate of 4.05, a wicket every fifth ball; man of the match in both of India’s games in the tournament. After the two-month-long dressing-room suffocation, the hot and humid Dubai has been like a breath of fresh air for him.

But a harsh self-critic, he quipped when asked whether he felt he was bowling at the peak of his T20 prowess. “Who told you I am happy with my bowling?” he asked, before he dwelled on the pitfalls of self-contentment. “I don’t feel that I am bowling that well, I feel that I can improve and become better. I keep making choti choti mistakes. I feel I can become better because sometimes you make a mistake in reading the batsman in this format. The margin for error is too little. When you are at the top of the game and you make small mistakes, you don’t notice it, but you feel that you have made a mistake.”

He specified the feeling he gets when the ball leaves his hand. “It is important to know how the ball is going from your hand and whether you are happy with it or not. Only you can be the best judge and I feel that there is a need to work more on that,” he said.

Later, he was asked to describe that contended feeling when the ball leaves his hands. “Mein aapko kyu bathoonga?” he asked. Then he contemplated for a moment and elaborated. “Mujhe kaisa feel hoga?” he muttered to himself and replied: “When you bowl, you rate the batsmen.”

The implication was that he judges himself on how well he has bowled against a good batsman. By good batsmen, he explained, he doesn’t mean specialist batsmen with towering numbers. He brings up the

Sri Lanka thrash Afghanistan; enter Super 4 of Asia Cup

Abu Dhabi: Opener Kusal Mendis blazed away to an unbeaten 52-ball 74 as Sri Lanka defeated Afghanistan by six wickets in their last group league match to qualify for Asia Cup Super Fours stage along with Bangladesh. Afghanistan were eliminated from the tournament after this result. Batting first, Afghanistan rode on Mohammed Nabi’s 22-ball 60 to post 169 for eight and then saw Mendis guide Sri Lanka past the tricky target of 170 with eight balls to spare. The Afghanistan bowlers made some important breakthroughs to peg Sri Lanka back in their chase, but Mendis had other plans and the batter got support from Kusal Perera (28) and Kamindu Mendis (26 not out). Nuwan Thushara was the most successful bowler for Sri Lanka, returning figures of 4/18.

BRIEF SCORES: Afghanistan 169/8 (Mohammad Nabi 60, Nuwan Thushara 4/18) lost to **Sri Lanka** 171/4 in 18.4 overs (Kusal Mendis 74*, Azmatullah Omarzai 1/10) by 6 wickets and 8 balls to spare. PTI

name of Shaheen Shah Afridi. He has looked Pakistan’s most natural hitter in this tournament,

“He has been playing well in the last two matches. Bahut tudai khelte hain! Sometimes, you make small mistakes.” He then goes philosophical: “The game is such that you learn even if you fail. Not every game is perfect for you. Not every game is a failure for you.”

There were times in the interaction when the disappointment of not playing a single Test in the England series surfaced. Like

when he said, he could “have played 3–4 Tests” and he thought he “would be playing in a Test.” But he asserts that there was clear communication from the team management about “the conditions and combinations” that went against him. He gleaned less well, I feel that I can improve and become better. I keep making choti choti mistakes. I feel I can become better because sometimes you make a mistake in reading the batsman in this format. The margin for error is too little. When you are at the top of the game and you make small mistakes, you don’t notice it, but you feel that you have made a mistake.”

He worked on his fitness and put in an incredible amount of bowling volume in the nets. So that he was in his rhythm, whether he was playing a Test or not.

Coming to the Asia Cup, it was about how to use the small angles, how he finishes his run-up and whether his body weight is transferring smoothly during the release. His passion for football and his obsession with analysing the sport also helped him during the frustrating period.

Kuldeep explains the chemistry with Varun Chakaravartthy and Axar Patel. “Everyone knows their job and my job is to take wickets in the middle overs. Axar bowl in the powerplay and he does the controlling job for us. We three are experienced in the T20 format and understand the roles.”

WRESTLING WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

Antim, who considered ‘quitting after Olympics’, wins second bronze

MIHIR VASAVDA
MUMBAI, SEPTEMBER 18

THE VIDEO, just over a year old, shows a visibly distressed 20-year-old in national team gear, stepping out of the Delhi airport. A soft toy bounces on her shoulder bag as the byte-hungry cameras swarm. Her family forms a shield, hustling her past the prying mics and into a waiting SUV. Antim Panghal had just returned from Paris – out in the first round of the Olympics, then deported for breaking Games protocol. No glory, just intense scrutiny.

Thirteen months later, the wrestler will fly home from another major championship. This time, with a medal around her neck and, her father Ramniwas hopes, a warmer welcome. “Iss baar mein khud jaonga beti ka swagat karne (I’ll myself go to welcome my daughter),” he says.

Antim, on Thursday, became only the second Indian woman, after Vinesh Phogat, to win two World Championship medals, defeating two-time European champion Jonna Malmgren of Sweden 9–1 to win the bronze in the 53kg category. Incidentally, Vinesh had beaten the same opponent three years ago for her second World Championship medal.

It’s an elite, exclusive club comprising – ironically – the two wrestlers who were pitted against each other for one spot ahead of the 2023 Asian Games. “She did what she could; I am doing what I can. Both of us have worked very hard,” Antim, who had won a bronze in the 2023 edition as well, says. “Vinesh ji... I admire her courage. It’s very tough to struggle so much. She cut her weight to 50kg, then fought...”

Antim’s medal also ensured India’s first medal at these World Championships in Zagreb. She also made sure the country’s medal streak at the Worlds – Indian wrestlers have won at least one medal at the championship since 2018 – continued.

This isn’t Paris redemption for Antim. But it’s a medal that underlines the 21-year-old’s status as one of India’s foremost wrestlers across categories; a medal, which her coaches say, shows that the Olympics were ‘just an aberration’. “For us, for her, this medal will rank high compared to the one in 2023,” Antim’s coach Siyanand Dahiya says. “She has endured some really hard days to reach this level once again.”

Antim says she remembers that August day, when the media scrum chased her, vividly – and sombrelly. The disappointment



Antim Panghal defeated Jonna Malmgren of Sweden 9–1. FilePhoto/UWW

turned into lingering sadness and Antim says she ‘thought of quitting the sport’. Scared of facing people, she did not even go home from the airport. “I went to my mama’s place and

stayed there for five days away from everyone,” she says.

When she finally returned home, Antim locked herself in a room. “She didn’t step out

of that tiny room for a week,” Ramniwas says. “We had to talk her out of that zone. We reminded her that this wasn’t the end of the world for her.”

Antim adds: “Yeh bhi hua ki chod de (I also felt like quitting). It had become that kind of a situation. But my family and my coach told me that it was just one bout. You are still young, you will get another shot at the Olympics.”

The way she is wrestling now – on the attack all the time – Antim hasn’t shown signs of any residual disappointment from last year. When Ramniwas spoke to her on Wednesday after she lost in the semifinals, Antim was ‘sad’. She’d landed in Zagreb hoping to win a gold medal. But she did not brood much. “I told myself, ‘Let’s win the bronze at least.’”

Maturing wrestler

It’s a sign of a maturing wrestler. A year ago, emotions would have gotten the better of Antim. This time, she was better prepared to handle different situations. Emotionally and technically. Her bout against Malmgren – a wrestler who had defeated the Indian last year at the Ranking Series – was as clean as they come. The Swede was so preoccupied

with defending that she could not launch an attack of her own. She was penalised for the passivity, which gave Antim the first point.

She built on that slender lead with some slick leg attacks, the speed and relentlessness of which gave Malmgren no chance. In the rare moments when Malmgren would get hold of Antim’s ankle, the Indian would snake out of it comfortably and protect her lead.

“I analysed every bout I have had with her,” Antim says. “Earlier, I did not have so much gyaan (knowledge). Now, I understand the importance of these things. I was determined to return with a medal.” And she did.

Antim knows that the mood and the reception, perhaps, might be different when she returns to the Delhi airport this time. Not that she will be reading too much into it.

“Apne India mein aise hai ki, jiska medal aaya usko itna upar utha lete hai. Jiska nahi aaya... (In India, whoever wins a medal, we lift them so high. And those who don’t...)” she says. “People do not see what situation she was in, mentally, physically... they don’t see anything, or understand the reasons behind a defeat. So eventually, you realise you just have your coach, physio, partner and family in your corner.”

