NATIONAL HERALD ON SUNDAY

Freedom is in Peril, Defend it with all your might Jawaharlal Nehru

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NATIONAL ENGLISH WEEKLY NEWSPAPER

NATION

JUSTICE DELAYED OR JUSTICE DENIED?

What explains Gulfisha Fatima's 5-year-long incarceration without trial?

▸P2



NATION

STATES 360°

In focus this week: Bihar, Maharashtra

▸P2,4



WORLD

US VARSITIES FEEL THE HEAT

…and international students are especially vulnerable

▸P6



'We are building a new Congress'

India's grand old party is re-inventing itself. The last decade has been a particularly testing passage of time in its 138-year-old history. There has been a vicious campaign by the Sangh Parivar to belittle the party's role in the freedom struggle and its contributions to the independent nation. There has been a concerted attempt to misrepresent the party's pluralist ethos as an appeasement of Muslims and other minorities. Congress stalwarts like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru have been vilified and others like Vallabhbhai Patel and Netaji appropriated.

There is no denying that India is at a crossroads, that its democratic institutions are damaged, that Indians—certainly those who still think of India as the nation envisaged in our Constitution—are living in dread that their beloved country is turning into a place they no longer recognise. But luckily, there are still people around who think it's possible to turn the wheel back. Congress president **Mallikarjun Kharge** *spoke to* **Vishwadeepak** *on the party's determination to win back lost ground and to rebuild, brick by brick, what's broken in the party, in the country, in our Constitution. Excerpts:*

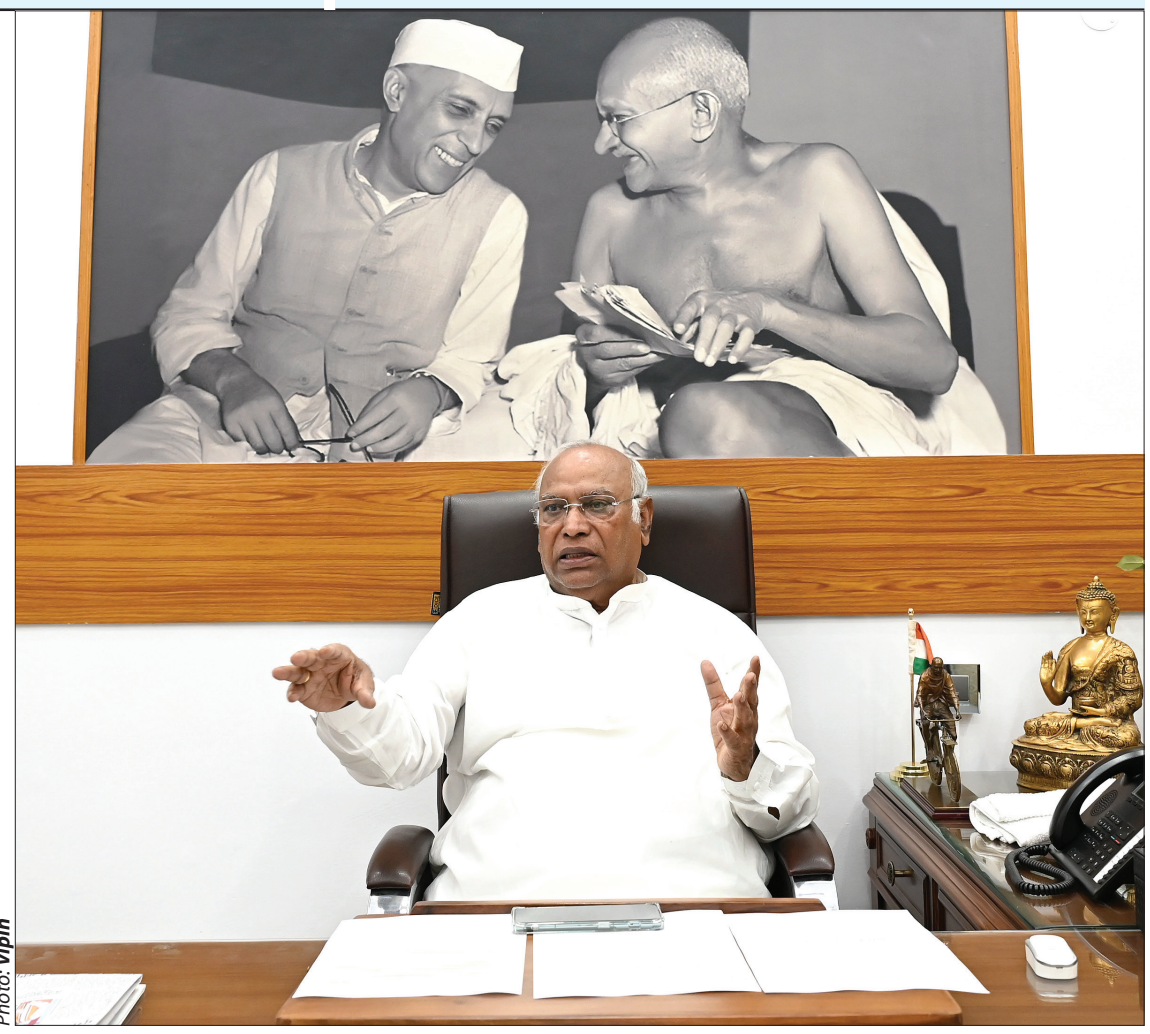


Photo: **Vipin**

Why was the AICC session held in Ahmedabad and what did it achieve?

Gujarat is the home state of both Prime Minister [Narendra] Modi and home minister Amit Shah. Many of the BJP's key officials are also from there. Together, they have disrupted rules and conventions; broken the morale of both public servants and the people. People in Gujarat were resigned to their highhandedness. We decided to hold the AICC session in Gujarat to dispel this fear, instilled over the past three decades.

We decided to meet people and listen to them. We took the opportunity to speak freely and demonstrate how we are different. No other AICC session, to my mind, was held with such an objective. That is why the session was significant and we are satisfied with the outcome.

We also wanted to reassure Congress workers and the Gujarat PCC leaders that we have their back, there is nothing to fear, that they should continue the good fight against state terror and injustice.

I believe we also succeeded in signalling that the Congress means business. It is serious about taking on the BJP and fearless on issues of public interest. It cannot be intimidated.

A resolution was adopted to rebuild the Congress. What does it really mean?

We resolved to build a 'new' Congress by strengthening the party organisation. An outline of the kind of organisation we envision is ready and we are going to see changes from the booth level onward to the Lok Sabha level. This overhaul will begin from Gujarat. We will form and strengthen district committees across the country. A senior leader will be responsible for a district. The district president will only engage in organisational work. The best leader across districts will become the district president of the party. A committee will be formed. The district committee will elect the block president and gradually we will go down to the booth level. We also look forward to greatly increasing women's participation.

The district committees will be supervised directly by the central leadership. These committees will run the organisation and their opinion will be solicited in ticket distribution. There will be performance reviews and rewards for those who do well. Wherever the party forms the government, ministers will be appointed from districts where the party performs better. Those who fail to perform should sit at home.

Critics of the Congress say they are tired of the party's excuses for its electoral failures, with all the hand-wringing about the takeover of institutions, including Parliament. How do you react to such criticism?

To cite just one example, look at the Supreme Court ruling in the case of the Tamil Nadu governor. Governors in all opposition-ruled states have sat over legislation passed by the assemblies. Look at the role of governors in opposition-ruled states like Telangana, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Kerala… not one opposition-ruled state has escaped!

Ever since the BJP came to power in Delhi, all stalled legislation is miraculously getting approved. The BJP of Modi and Shah does not know how to function democratically; they know how to get work done through intimidation. If rival politicians do not join the BJP—or do not splinter their own party and join hands with the BJP—central agencies like the CBI, the ED, the Income Tax [department] are ever ready to harass them. If intimidation does not work, they create other obstacles like sitting on legislation, not electing a deputy speaker in the Lok Sabha, not releasing central funds for programmes like MGNREGA, Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, stopping scholarships for students… the list of hurdles is long.

Wherever the party forms the government, ministers will be appointed from districts where the party performs better

The BJP never tires of accusing the Congress of being 'anti-Hindu'. Why has the party not responded?

The Congress is a secular party and does not make any distinction based on religion. Can you give me one example of the Congress taking any step directed against Hindus? All our welfare schemes and policies were designed to benefit people of all faiths. The BJP, on the other hand, is by its own admission a party for Hindus first—but what have they done for the Hindus? Given them jobs? The BJP claims that Dalits are Hindus, but does nothing to prevent atrocities against them. Is that not an anti-Hindu act?

For its hard stand on the caste census, the party faces criticism of fomenting casteism, of indulging in caste politics…

Let me ask you, what is the financial condition of backward people in our society? The Dalits? How much land do they own? What kind of jobs do they have? What is their income? We do not know. If plans are to be made and budget allocations made for them, how does one do it without a basic understanding of the social and economic structures in place? Every section must develop, but some need more assistance and hand-holding than others. It is only when we know the details that we can plan.

Who is backward? Anyone can be backward. Some can be backward on the basis of caste, others on the basis of their economic status. Upper castes can also be poor. We can make plans for them, too, if a survey is conducted. That is why we insist on a caste census.

Why is the Modi government so reluctant to conduct a caste census?

Forget about a caste census, this government is reluctant to conduct even the decennial census. The government stalled it in 2021 on the pretext of the pandemic. India is the only country in the world to have missed the decennial census because of the pandemic. Even during the two World Wars, the census was conducted and the survey results published. In the absence of a census, crores of people have been left out of the social security net.

Continued on page 2

Brick by brick, from the ground up

Vishwadeepak

One can sense the urgency. It was palpable at the recently concluded AICC (All India Congress Committee) session in Ahmedabad, the choice of venue a strategic declaration of intent. The Congress wanted its adversary to know that it wouldn't be intimidated, that it would reclaim what was inalienably a part of its own hallowed history.

Gujarat is the state of Sardar Patel—an icon of the freedom movement, a man who stood shoulder to shoulder with Pandit Nehru, before and after Independence. He is also the man the Sangh Parivar wants to project as an adversary of Nehru's, and to appropriate him as one of their own.

This, it has no way of doing without peddling fake history about the differences between the two leaders, or desperate recourse to grand memorialising, as if to declare: 'we built the Statue of Unity, the tallest in the world, so he (the Sardar) is ours.' Sorry, says the Congress, look someplace else.

The Sangh has trouble with Mahatma Gandhi as well, not quite sure whether to make him theirs or make a hero of his assassin. Hence the choice of Gujarat to hold the latest AICC session—incidentally the first in the state after 64 years.



Indira Bhawan, the new Congress headquarters in Delhi, inaugurated in January 2025, houses a collection of photographs that proudly display, for eyes that can see, the party's ease with dissent and difference; you'll find in this collection not just its most revered heroes but also people who fell out or walked out of the grand old 'tent for everyone' party over differences. This, too, is a sign of the new Congress in the making that party president Mallikarjun Kharge talks about (*see interview above*).

At its Belagavi conclave in December 2024, the Congress had declared that 2025 would be the year of organisational empowerment. Ahead of the Ahmedabad session of the AICC, which concluded on 9 April, general secretary Sachin Pilot reiterated the party's focus on organisational reforms, to its commitment in the Udaipur Declaration (of May 2022) to create more space for youth in the party organisation. The '*Nyaypath* resolution', adopted in Ahmedabad, is a roadmap to rebuild the party from the ground up.

At the heart of the revamp is a structural overhaul—the Congress wants to invert its top-down decision-making model, and reimagine the party's district units as its engines. Each District Congress Committee (DCC) will now have its own Political Affairs Committee, observers from both the AICC and state units—and the power to take critical decisions.

"We will make the District Congress Committees the foundation of the party," said Rahul Gandhi in his address, marking a significant departure from the era of centralised decision-making. In Gujarat, observers have already been appointed to all 41 DCCs. The list includes senior leaders like Manickam Tagore, Praniti Shinde, Imran Masood, Balasaheb Thorat and Meenakshi Natarajan.

AICC general secretary K.C. Venugopal announced that both Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi plan to conduct day-long workshops in every state. Later, speaking at one such workshop in Gujarat, Rahul Gandhi made the plan abundantly clear: performance—not proximity—will determine leadership roles and cabinet berths in government.

Continued on page 2

NATIONAL HERALD ON SUNDAY
www.nationalheraldindia.com
20 APRIL 2025

Brick by brick...

Continued from page 1

"This revamp opens a new window for those who want to contribute to public life, help formulate policy and politics with a difference—and shuts it for those who don't," he told party workers.

One of the most radical aspects of this transformation is the party's push towards internal democracy. For decades, the Congress has faced criticism for letting elitist, upper caste and wealthy leaders determine the course of the party. That, it seems, is beginning to change.

In Bihar, which goes to polls later this year, a Dalit leader now heads the state unit; Ajay Kumar Lallu, an OBC and former UP Congress chief, is now in charge of Odisha. Former Chhattisgarh chief minister Bhupesh Baghel, also an OBC, has been put in charge of Punjab. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, also incidentally a Dalit himself, told *National Herald* that while the party stands for all sections of society, "those who have historically lagged behind—like OBCs—will now be given their rightful space". The appointment of Anil Jaihind—a key organiser of the Samvidhan Sammelans Rahul Gandhi has been addressing—as head of the OBC department is seen as part of this course correction.

Once considered appendages of the party, the Congress's front organisations now have pivotal roles in its revival strategy.

The Indian Youth Congress (IYC) is visibly re-energised. Under the stewardship of Krishna Allavaru, it has launched initiatives like 'Young India Ke Bol', a talent hunt for future party spokespersons. At the culminating event of the party's recently concluded 'Palayan Roko, Naukri Do Yatra' in Patna, Allavaru told aspiring leaders: "Today, you don't need to do *parikrama*; if you have talent and understand ideology, you'll get a platform."

The NSUI, under the leadership of Kanhaiya Kumar, is seeing a similar resurgence. It won the post of DUSU (Delhi University Students Union) president and did well in the recent Patna University elections.

The All India Professionals' Congress has launched the Manmohan Singh Fellowship Programme, which seeks to bring mid-career professionals into politics through structured mentorship and training. (*See interview with Praveen Chakravarty on page 4*)

The Seva Dal, founded in 1923 as a front organisation that organised volunteers for picketing, enrolled new Congress members and supported civil disobedience activism, has found renewed purpose. Its cadre played a crucial role in both the Bharat Jodo Yatra and the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, prompting fond reminiscences from old-timers of the Congress's ground-level organisation back in the day.

The Seva Dal's women's wing—which was banned by the British, a ban never formally revoked after Independence—has also been revived, adding a new dimension to the party's re-engagement with its legacy. Seva Dal chief Lalji Desai told *National Herald* that the organisation's 'Ravi Milan' programme, aimed at revitalising and expanding the party's grassroots presence, has been a big success.

On the last Sunday of every month, senior members of the Seva Dal meet with new recruits across the country. "We have organised meetings in over 300 districts," he said. About the Seva Dal's 'Har Park Mein Tiranga' campaign, Lalji said: "The RSS holds *shakha*s in parks and unfurls the saffron flag; our message is clear—neither saffron nor green, only the Tricolour should be displayed in public spaces."

The eponymous Minorities Department has started outreach programmes, under the leadership of the eloquent Imran Pratapgarhi, whose rousing speeches in Parliament have made him a minor social media phenomenon.

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For the first time in years, the party seems to be fighting back with not just slogans or nostalgia but with structure, planning and grassroots engagement. The ongoing transformation is simultaneously a reckoning with past failures, a battle plan and a blueprint for the future.

Political observers are watching the party's re-organisation moves with interest. Those who see the Congress at the nerve centre of the pushback against the BJP–Sangh's divisive politics are also keeping their fingers crossed. ■



'A new Congress'

Continued from page 1

The BJP argues that it has given representation to the OBCs, that the prime minister and several Union ministers and chief ministers are OBCs...

What kind of logic is that? If a person occupies a high position or is made a minister, does the backwardness of his or her caste and community go away? The progress of an individual does not determine the progress of the community. There is a difference between the two.

Do ministers in Modi's cabinet have the autonomy to take decisions? Does the highest Constitutional authority have the autonomy to turn down misplaced, poorly drafted, harmful laws?

There is a feeling among Congress workers that OBCs, despite being the largest caste group, still do not have enough representation. What would you tell them?

We do have to bring OBCs into the party, but a more urgent aim is to uplift the poorest of the poor in the country, irrespective of their caste. In the Congress, we do not formulate policies with caste in mind. Yes, those who are left behind have to be given representation but, to give you an example, when Indira Gandhi went for land reform, when she nationalised the banks, was it for any one caste? It wasn't directed at only OBCs, or only upper castes, or only Dalits; everyone benefited. We want people of every caste to rise, that is why we are trying to induct the backward and extremely backward people into the party and give them responsibilities.

Would you agree the BJP finds it easier to influence and attract the youth than the Congress?

How long can you divert them with a religious frenzy? There are no jobs. Education and healthcare are becoming more expensive. Household income is affected by inflation. Savings are at an all-time low. These are not ideal conditions for the youth. More and more young people are now sensing that they have been used—as tools to spread hatred. I can assure you that the youth are with us.

Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra from Kanyakumari to Kashmir and Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra from Manipur to Mumbai did connect the party with the youth. We are confident they will connect with us, as they see how Rahul [Gandhi] is becoming their true voice, as they see for themselves the party's efforts to address their issues.

How do you assess Prime Minister Modi?

Modi*ji* was chief minister of Gujarat for more than 13 years. He has been prime minister for the past 11 years—a total of almost 24 years. In 24 years, he has not been able to improve even his own state. Gujarat is a laggard on social indicators. The number of illegal immigrants from Gujarat, as you know, is high. Nobody reports it but drug addiction and alcoholism (in a state where liquor is prohibited) is of serious concern. In tribal areas, people do not have water to drink and unemployment is rampant. Dalits are exploited, but there is no one to speak up for them.

If he can't even manage his own state, how can he be expected to manage the country? Fiery and venomous speeches do not feed the hungry. ■

STATES 360° BIHAR



In Bihar, it's the 'INDIA bloc'



Vishwadeepak

There is both unity and clarity in the INDIA bloc, asserted Krishna Allavaru in Patna on 17 April. Allavaru was addressing the media along with Tejashwi Yadav and other state leaders of the INDIA bloc, featuring for the purposes of Bihar, the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), Congress, the Left parties—including the CPI(ML), CPI(M) and CPI—and the Vikassheel Insaan Party (VIP) led by Mukesh Sahani.

The meeting resolved that Tejashwi Yadav of the RJD would head the coordination committee, which will oversee all other committees including the campaign committee and those dealing with publicity and social media. Some observers remarked on a seemingly deliberate preference for the use of 'INDIA bloc' to refer to the Opposition alliance. If indeed the leaders were being careful to not use Bihar's default appellation '*mahagathbandhan*', it was possibly to keep the national alliance against the BJP in the frame even while focusing on a common minimum programme and a coordinated campaign strategy for Bihar under Tejashwi Yadav's leadership.

Allavaru also took a dig at the NDA, pointing out the confusion in their ranks—while the Haryana chief minister has publicly said the NDA's face in Bihar would be Samrat Chaudhary of the BJP, Union home minister Amit Shah still insists it will be Nitish Kumar of the JD(U) even as Prime Minister Modi claims he will be the face of the NDA in the state. When reporters pressed to know if the INDIA bloc had finalised its 'CM face', Allavaru quipped: "Please go and put the question to them."

Caste outreach

Bihar has seen a flurry of the 'Samvidhan Bachao Sammelan' meetings over the past few months, in a clear indication that the Congress is keen to be counted again in the state.

While each of these events was addressed by Rahul Gandhi, the focus significantly has been on specific caste groups at each event—important in a state where caste coalitions can swing elections. The last such event was focused on the Nonia and Kumhar castes. While the base notes of these Sammelans draw attention to the BJP's many assaults on the Indian Constitution, they also serve to heighten awareness about the caste groups. The last such Sammelan, for example, highlighted the contributions of Budhu Nonia and Ramchandra Vidyarthi—two practically forgotten icons of the freedom movement. Manjeet Sahu, one of the organisers, said the Congress aims to unify Extremely Backward Castes (EBCs) and Dalits, who together make up nearly 48 per cent of the population of the state.

"All three Samvidhan Sammelans held so far in Bihar have centred on the upliftment of OBCs, EBCs and Dalits," Sahu noted. "The Congress does not just speak of social justice—it practises it."

Dalit leader Rajesh Ram's appointment as the president of the state unit is seen as part of this outreach. All Congress front organisations have been revamped in the state, and most are headed by Dalit and OBC (especially Yadav) leaders.

The Nonias, historically linked to the salt trade, played a key role in the freedom movement. Despite their heroic past, they have remained at the bottom of the state's social ladder. Officially classified as EBC (Extremely Backward Class), they still face discrimination and are often treated as 'untouchables'. In a symbolic gesture of recognition, the Congress recently appointed a district president from the Nonia community.

The Sammelan also paid tribute to Ramchandra Vidyarthi, who was martyred during the Quit India Movement. On 9 August 1942, he hoisted the Indian tricolour at the Deoria court and was shot by the British forces. The party also remembered Babu Jagjivan Ram, one of India's tallest Dalit leaders and a key member of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's cabinet.

The focused outreach has drawn the attention of political observers, who see this as a serious attempt by the Congress to identify with these backward communities and position itself as the party that speaks for them and their aspirations.

All Congress front organisations have been revamped in the state, and most are headed by Dalit and OBC leaders

Season of new parties

With assembly elections just months away, new political parties are springing up in Bihar every few weeks leaving observers both amused and puzzled. With elections round the corner, the Plurals Party of Pushpam Priya Choudhary, an alumna of the London School of Economics, has popped up again. Nitish Kumar's former aide and retired IAS officer R.C.P. Singh has floated 'Aap Sabki Awaaz', while Shivdeep Lande, a former IPS officer, has launched the 'Hind Sena'.

The latest to enter the field is 'Indian Inquilab Party', floated by the scheduled caste community that goes by the name of 'Paan samaj'. They took everyone by surprise by holding a large and impressive rally at Patna's historic Gandhi Maidan.

What explains this sudden rash of new parties? Do these late entrants see space in an already crowded political field? Or are they opportunistic ventures to create both pressure and confusion and possibly jostle for bargains later? ■

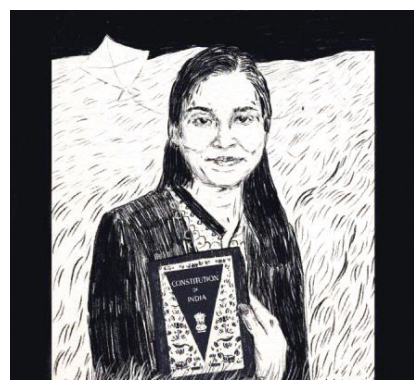
'Is this what justice looks like?' asks Gulfisha Fatima

Yogendra Yadav

Picture this: you're sitting at home when the police barge in and arrest you. You ask, "What have I done?" They rattle off charges, each one more grave than the other. You're stunned. It's all lies, a cooked-up story, you say... but who is listening? You're thrown behind bars. You ask, on what basis have these charges been brought against me? You hear: "Prove your innocence in court."

That strangely gives you hope. You ask, "How do I present the truth, the evidence before the court?" That'll happen once the trial begins, you're told. So, when does the trial begin? That could take years. "If the trial hasn't even begun, why am I in jail?" "That's the law. Technically, there is no bail in this offence. But if you want to get out, approach the court."

Hope flares again. You file a bail application. After months, your case finally comes up for hearing. Several appearances later, the arguments conclude. But there is no judgement for months. Meanwhile, the judge is transferred. A few months later, there is a new judge, and the whole hearing starts again. No verdict again. Another new judge. More dates, more delays.



Illustrator: ***Pariplab Chakraborty*** *courtesy:* ***The Wire***

After spending years like this, what would you make of words like 'law', 'justice', 'Constitution'? And what of those eloquent weekend speeches of our learned judges? Ask Gulfisha Fatima, or Khalid Saifi, or Umar Khalid. This isn't an imaginary nightmare scenario; it's the real story of dozens of activists jailed after the Delhi riots of 2020.

Our senior judges like to wax eloquent on constitutional values and human rights. The Supreme Court directs that bail pleas must be heard swiftly—and no matter what, a decision taken within two weeks. Yet, right under its nose, these activists have no decision on their bail applications—not in two weeks, not in two months, not even in two years. Their crime? That they are Muslim and they protested—peacefully, democratically—against a law.

The story of Gulfisha Fatima will go down in the annals of India's judicial history. After graduating from Delhi University and following it up with an MBA, Gulfisha became a radio jockey. She joined the protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), participating in a sit-in at Seelampur, inspired by the Shaheen Bagh protests. She was neither involved in nor accused of any act of violence. But in the crackdown on CAA protestors after the Delhi riots, Gulfisha too was picked up—on 9 April 2020. There was no straightforward case of rioting or vandalism against her, so the police booked her on the charge of being part of a secret conspiracy behind the riots—and to ensure she wouldn't get bail easily, they levelled charges under the draconian UAPA (Unlawful Activities Prevention Act).

Thus began a long, bruising court battle. A full year after her arrest, she applied for bail in a lower court. After several months, in March 2022, her application was rejected. At least that judge delivered a verdict, even if it was negative. But when she went to the high court, even that didn't happen. Her appeal was filed in May 2022. It finally came up for hearing in January 2023. The hearing concluded in a month, but there was no decision.

Meanwhile, three other activists arrested in similar circumstances—Natasha Narwal, Devangana Kalita and Asif Iqbal Tanha—did get bail from the same high court. Based on this, Gulfisha filed a fresh bail application in May 2023. But still no judgement, nor a fresh hearing. Coincidentally, in October, the presiding judge was transferred—and left without pronouncing a verdict.

So the case started all over again, with a new bench. More delays. Finally, the matter came up in March 2024. The hearing wrapped up in a day—as it should have. But again, no verdict. As luck would have it, this judge too was transferred in July. Another new bench, another hearing. Exhausted, Gulfisha turned to the Supreme Court.

By another strange coincidence, all these cases seem to land before a particular judge in the Supreme Court, who tends to give a particular kind of ruling. Despite the unconscionable delay in bail proceedings, the Supreme Court sent Gulfisha right back to the same high court that had driven her to approach the Supreme Court in the first place. Yes, the apex court did instruct that the hearing be expedited, but since November 2024, three benches of the Delhi High Court have heard her case. It's been five years now.

Do not make the mistake of thinking this is just a tragic symptom of the Indian justice system—that Gulfisha's case is no different from everyone else's. Sure, judicial delays are not new, but in cases where the government has a particular interest, it is extraordinary to not have a decision even on a bail plea. All this is happening in a country where the Supreme Court opens on a Saturday to grant bail to Arnab Goswami. Where the son of former minister Ajay Mishra Teni—accused of mowing down farmers—gets bail. Where a rape accused is released because maybe the girl was careless. Where convicted rapist and murderer Ram Rahim keeps getting parole after parole. But Gulfisha Fatima, Khalid Saifi, Sharjeel Imam and Umar Khalid? They are condemned to remain behind bars.

Is this justice? Maybe not today, but some day, history will ask this question of India's judicial system. And on that day, Lady Justice will hang her head in shame. ■

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Opening the doors to the political realm

*Applications have begun pouring in for the **Dr. Manmohan Singh Fellowship Programme**, recently launched by the All India Professionals' Congress. In a country where there is little to no institutional support for newcomers to enter politics, initiatives like this carry considerable promise.* **Herjinder** *spoke with* **Praveen Chakravarty**, *chairman of the All India Professionals' Congress, about the vision behind the fellowship and the potential it holds for Indian politics in general and for the Congress party, in particular. Excerpts from the conversation:*

How did the idea for the Manmohan Singh Fellowship come about?

Dr. Manmohan Singh was my mentor. I worked closely with him for over a decade. In 2018, Rahul Gandhi invited me to join the Congress, despite my lack of political background or lineage. With two decades in the private sector, I never imagined I would hold a significant role in a national political party like the Congress.

It made me reflect on how Dr. Singh himself entered politics—through merit and expertise. That led to the idea: why not create a platform in his name, one that allows professionals to enter politics through a lateral route?

To begin with, I needed the family's permission to use Dr. Singh's name. I reached out to his wife and two daughters. They were very supportive and graciously gave their consent, believing it to be a meaningful and timely initiative.

Was the Congress party already prepared for this initiative, or did you have to convince them?

I took the idea to them and laid out the entire structure and vision of the programme. The Congress is often referred to as an 'umbrella party'—a space that welcomes a wide spectrum of people and perspectives. I explained that this fellowship would reflect that spirit, by opening the doors of politics to individuals from diverse walks of life. The party was fully supportive.

Are you looking to attract professionals from specific sectors, or is it open to all?

This isn't an entry-level programme for fresh graduates. We're looking for seasoned professionals—whether from the private sector, public service, sports or other fields—who've spent 10 to 15 years in their careers and are now making a conscious decision to transition into public life. This isn't a short-term internship—it's a long-term commitment to politics and public service.

There are no rigid educational qualifications. What matters is your intent: if you want to serve the country through politics, and you believe in the values of social justice, secularism and inclusive politics, you're welcome—regardless of your professional background.

Will selection be based purely on merit, or will social diversity also play a role?

When we announced the fellowship, the panel reflected our commitment to diversity—K. Raju, an IAS officer and chairperson of our Dalit wing; Pawan Khera, a professional from the north, while I'm from the south. The list of mentors includes people from varied regions, communities, professions. The Congress party has always stood for inclusivity and this fellowship will uphold that legacy. We're looking for capable individuals, but we also want to ensure that the diversity of Indian society is genuinely represented.

Most political parties don't have an institutional set-up for new entrants. Are you aiming to build one?

Yes, that's precisely the idea. My own experience showed me how difficult it can be to enter politics. Dr. Manmohan Singh often told me: people like us, who come from professional backgrounds, face many hurdles because there's no system in place.

I was fortunate. Rahul Gandhi gave me an opportunity. Not everyone has that kind of access. That's why I felt there must be a formal, institutional structure that doesn't rely on personal connections or chance, but functions systematically.

Do you have a way to measure the success of the Fellows?

Yes. Their success will be reflected in the success of the party. Their mentors will provide detailed feedback. The senior members they work with will contribute evaluations. The programme aims to establish a new culture within political training—one that emphasises accountability and responsibility. It's not about being a protégé of a particular leader; it's about commitment, performance and contribution to public service.

How will the Fellows grow through this programme?

In the first year, they will undergo structured training and be attached to senior leaders to gain hands-on experience. For example, someone working with me will be involved in the activities of the Professionals' Congress. If attached to K. Raju, they could work on ground-level political engagement in Jharkhand. Someone working with Pawan Khera would understand the party's communications strategy.

Will they be mentored by senior party leaders?

Absolutely. That's an essential part of the programme. They will learn directly from experienced leaders by working alongside them on real political challenges.

There are different types of pressure groups and factions in every political party. Will these Fellows eventually become part of one faction or the other?

No. That is exactly why I want us to create a different kind of culture. If we succeed, if we can show that working outside factional lines leads to better outcomes, then hopefully, others in the party will be inspired to follow suit.

Transitioning from a professional or corporate career to a political one can be difficult. What challenges do you face personally?

The biggest challenge is cultural. I was a managing director with major banks for over two decades. The work culture there is very different. In the private sector, people move as a team, aligned towards one goal. That doesn't always happen in politics.

Earlier, I used to think—if I'm doing good work, why are some people still opposing it? I didn't understand. But now I do. Politics works differently.

Can you give an example of how the culture in politics is different from that in the corporate world?

Sure. Suppose three people are hoping to get a party ticket for a Lok Sabha or vidhan sabha seat. Only one gets it. You'd think the other two would support the chosen candidate for the sake of the party—but often, they end up working to ensure that the candidate loses. In politics, someone can give a big speech, create a buzz and then move on. In corporate life, that doesn't work. You can't just make a presentation and leave—you're expected to deliver results. The entire system is result-oriented. Politics doesn't always demand that.



Do you believe that future political leaders will emerge through a process similar to the one you've just begun?

No, I wouldn't say they will emerge from the same process. I'm not saying that professionalism is superior—not at all—but I do believe that there's some merit in this approach. Professionals should have a space in future leadership, and that's why I see this as a parallel process, not a replacement.

Professionals have entered politics before—Manmohan Singh, for example. Even Rajesh Pilot.

Yes, Manmohan Singh is a very good example—that's one reason why this fellowship is named after him. But he's just one prominent case. There are others, but they're exceptions, not the rule. We're trying to create a more structured path for professionals who are serious about public life.

There are other fellowships such as the Nehru Fellowship by Inclusive Minds, or Ashoka University's Young India Fellowship which includes politics and community work. How is yours different from those?

In many of those programmes, young students go through a year of training, receive a stipend and leave with a certificate. That's good, but ours is not for students looking for exposure. It's for mature individuals. A serious programme for serious professionals who are genuinely committed to public service. ■

Entrepreneurship is a different ballgame

Aakar Patel on India's business predicament and the secret of China's ability to stand up to the United States

Commerce ministries around the world are, according to Donald Trump, lining up to plead their case with the United States. Is India among them? Apparently not.

A headline last weekend quoted commerce minister Piyush Goyal saying: "We don't negotiate at gunpoint." I agree, this is the right way; sovereign nations should insist they are treated as equals, not as vassals.

China has retaliated firmly, in a way that only Canada has so far, but in the absence of clarity from the Americans on what their endgame is, waiting is also an appropriate response.

However, there was something else Goyal said—only somewhat related to this—that got him into trouble. He said Indian new businesses were focused on trade—though '*dukandari*' was the word he used—rather than innovation.

He compared the situation here to that in China, where start-ups were working in robotics, advanced manufacturing and artificial intelligence. Goyal received pushback from entrepreneurs, who pointed out that many fledgling firms in India were doing exactly the sort of work he said they 'should' be doing.

The history of business in India will show that the mercantile communities were primarily traders and bankers until the 20th century. The Birlas forayed into manufacturing in 1919, Tata Steel came up in 1907.

A business history of trading rather than manufacture—and its extension to things such as delivery apps—was likely what Goyal was referring to. Again, I agree with his broad point. The question, though, is: what would it take for India's start-ups to look more like China's? It is right to put that question to businesses. It is equally right to ask it of the government.

How did China get to where it is? An analysis from last year framed the reality thus: 'China is now the world's sole manufacturing superpower. Its production exceeds that of the nine next largest manufacturers combined.' A lot of this is down to what the *government* did, through industrial policy and statecraft.

Photos: **Getty Images**





(Top) **China's production exceeds that of the nine next largest manufacturers combined;** (above) **can Indian start-ups like Ola Electric compete with China?**

China established relations with mineral-rich nations in Africa and Latin America and set up ports and railway lines in many of these nations. Its public sector companies, owned by the government, built its own commercial ships and airplanes so it would not be dependent on anyone else.

China managed to convince all its neighbours, including those it had fought wars with and those it has ongoing disputes with, to not let these issues get in the way of trading. China's largest trading partner is not the United States or even the European Union but the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), many of whom China has serious disputes with.

Against the US's military alliances such as NATO (the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation), AUKUS (Australia, United Kingdom, United States), Quad and so on, China set up a developmental alliance strategy through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). While engaging with western criticism of the BRI, we should also examine what nations participating in it say and think of China.



Commerce minister Piyush Goyal

The Chinese government's interventions are precisely the reason why the country is where it is and why its entrepreneurs have been able to shine

Now consider that the whole world has been worrying about climate change for decades, but the Chinese government built an industrial strategy to not just tackle the problem but also take advantage of it.

Having concluded that its automobile sector could not compete against the experience of Japanese and German firms and the patents they held in internal combustion engines, China decided to focus on electric cars. It produced 0.5 million new energy vehicles in 2016, 1 million in 2018 and 10 million in 2024. It exported 5.8 million of those 10 million cars—almost 60 per cent—last year.

Solar panels tell a similar story. Here too, China's government looked into the future and saw opportunity. Today, it produces more than 80 per cent of the solar cells used around the world and two-thirds of the planet's EV (electric vehicle) batteries.

The world's biggest supply chains—from mining to refining to manufacturing and assembly—run through China. It is dominant to the point of being a monopoly in entire sectors, particularly those that will be more important in future.

It is true that Chinese entrepreneurs have done remarkable things, as we have seen most recently with DeepSeek. It is also true that their success in areas considered America's domain—such as social media and retail—can be seen in the popularity of TikTok, Shein and Temu in America.

It is the Chinese government that organised the strategy and industrial policy that produced these wins. This is the opposite of what is generally understood to be liberalisation, where the State largely does not intervene in the economy. But the Chinese government's interventions are precisely the reason why the country is where it is and why its entrepreneurs have been able to shine.

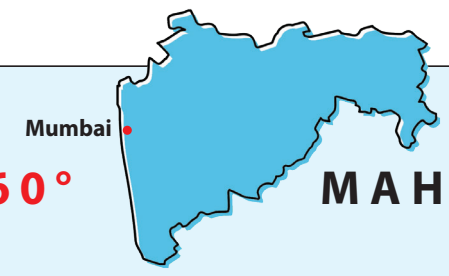
This is the reason US stock and bond markets react violently to the impact of tariffs on only one nation in this war that Trump has started—and that nation is China.

China has the confidence to stand up to the US because it knows that what it has built through strategic planning and hard work is difficult to replicate. Just as it knows that the world will continue to depend on it irrespective of the 'decoupling' fantasies of the people currently governing America. ■

Views are personal

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STATES 360° MAHARASHTRA



Supreme Court sets the record straight on Urdu



Navin Kumar

The signboard on a new building at Patur (Akola district) displayed 'Municipal Council, Patur' in Marathi on top and in Urdu below. Patur municipal council area had a population of just 21,000 in the 2011 census, more than half of whom were Muslims. Yet, unhappy at the use of Urdu, a former council member Varshatai Sanjay Bagade first approached the district collector, stating that only Marathi should be used in the state for official purposes. The collector ruled in her favour but the council appealed to the divisional commissioner who turned down the collector's ruling.

That was in 2020. Since then, an "aggrieved" Varshatai Sanjay Bagade twice approached the Bombay High Court and twice the Supreme Court to get the Urdu display dropped from the signboard. The Supreme Court finally brought down the curtain on this bizarre case on 15 April 2025. A bench of Justices Sudhangshu Dhulia and K. Vinod Chandran held that the display of an additional language did not violate any law and there was no prohibition on the use of Urdu. The purpose of any language, including Urdu, was 'effective communication', and 'there should not be any objection if Urdu is used in addition to the official language i.e. Marathi, at least on the signboard of the Municipal Council', the bench held.

In the judgement, Justice Dhulia, who is due to retire in August, said it was important to dwell at some length on the language issue because the petitioner, a former member of the municipal council, had taken great pains to move the High Court and Supreme Court twice each; and also because many others too may subscribe to the petitioner's argument.

'Urdu is a language born in this land, which developed and flourished in India, attained greater refinement and became the language of choice for several acclaimed poets,' the judgement went on to record.

'It would not be incorrect to say that one cannot have a day-to-day conversation in Hindi without using Urdu words or words derived from Urdu (pointing out that the word vakalatnama used in Indian courts is an Urdu word). The word 'Hindi' itself comes from the Persian word 'Hindvi',' the order noted.

According to linguists and literary scholars, Urdu and Hindi are not two languages, but one language. The judgement quotes noted Urdu scholar Gyan Chand Jain, who wrote in 1974, 'It is absolutely clear that Urdu and Hindi are not two separate languages. To call them two languages is to belie all principles of linguistics and to deceive oneself and others… even though Urdu literature and Hindi literature are different and independent literatures, Urdu and Hindi are not two different languages… enumerating Urdu and Hindi as two languages, in the Indian Constitution, is political expediency, not a linguistic reality.'

The judgement moved poet and author Javed Akhtar to post, 'In 1798 an Islamic scholar Shah Ubdul Qadir translated Quran for the first time in Urdu. Almost all the muftis and qazis of that time gave fatwas against him for daring to translate the holy book in such s heathen language like Urdu. After many years, Jinnah, who could not speak Urdu to even save his life, declared Urdu to be the language of Muslims. What actually surprises me is that there are still so many people who seem to believe Jinnah.'

"Enumerating Urdu and Hindi as two languages, in the Indian Constitution, is political expediency, not a linguistic reality"

Caste is fine, just not in films

Anant Mahadevan's Hindi film *Phule*, a biopic on reformer couple Jyotiba and Savitribai Phule, was due for release on Jyotiba Phule's 197th birth anniversary on 11 April. Despite a 'U' certificate granted by the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC), the release was held back following protests by Brahmins in Maharashtra.

The film, complained Anand Dave, president of the Brahmin Mahasangh, is designed to promote 'casteism'. Even the censor board has reportedly requested the filmmakers to drop a few dialogues, voice overs and words like Mahar, Mang, Peshwai and Manu's system. Brahmin boys throwing cow dung balls at Savitribai in the film is fine but the scene in which a Dalit man walks with brooms tied to his back is not.

Mahadevan, a Brahmin himself, cannot believe what is happening; this is not the first film made on the couple who inspired B.R. Ambedkar. It was Savitribai who is said to have coined the word Dalit to replace the erstwhile usage the Shudra. Mahadevan is bewildered because Brahmins in or outside Maharashtra had not objected to any of the earlier films on the couple. He sees it as the expression of a different, more intolerant and more strident generation. Times have changed.

As far back as in 1954, Marathi litterateur Prahlad Keshav Atre made a Marathi film on Mahatma Phule, which received the National Award (Silver Medal) for the Best Marathi Feature Film. B.R. Ambedkar wrote the screenplay. A biopic in Kannada was released in 2018. A series called *Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule* was aired on *DD National*.

The film *Satyashodhak* directed by Nilesh Raosaheb Jamalkar was released just last year in January 2024. There were no protests by Brahmins.

Two explanations have been offered for the recent protests. With Dalits' renewed assertion of their rights and place in society, with demand for a caste census gaining ground and protests against Dalit atrocities and discrimination, there is a new edge to discourses on caste. The pushback from Brahmin organisations could be an expression of their anxiety or insecurity is one explanation. The other explanation is that Brahmins find the present political climate and culture more conducive for their belligerent stand.

Raju Parulekar, political analyst, author and Marathi TV personality, believes the pushback to be a kind of state-sponsored terrorism against the history of Bahujans. Social reforms initiated by Jyotiba and Savitribai Phule, he says, benefitted Brahmin women and widows alike. Brahmin women, he feels, actually benefitted the most from the work of the couple and Fatima Sheikh. Brahmin male mentality, however, is narrow, casteist and steeped in arrogance.

Writer Darab Farooqui and a few others have named censor board chairman Prasoon Joshi and others who supported the demand for changes in the film. They include Vidya Balan, Vivek Agnihotri, Vaman Kedre, Mihir Bhutia, Ramesh Patange, Gautami Tadimalla, Vani Tripathi Tiku, Jeevitha Rajasekhar and Naresh Chandra Lal. Almost all of them, they point out, are Brahmins.

Rahul Gandhi reacted to the protests and alleged that BJP and RSS wanted to erase Dalit-Bahujan history at every step. Writer and academic Kancha Ilaiah asked, "How can CBFC ask to remove caste-related references from the film when Mahatma Phule's struggle was against caste and the inhuman practices of the Brahmin communities of the time?" Shiv Sena (UBT) mouthpiece *Saamana* in an editorial titled 'Phule vs Fadnavis', questioned the chief minister's silence.

Fadnavis had freely commented on films like *Kashmir Files, Kerala Story, Tashkent Files* and *Chhava,* and exhorted people to watch them. Why is he quiet now? Is it not his job to rein in the Brahmin busybodies issuing threats against the film, it asked.

"How can CBFC ask to remove caste-related references from the film when Mahatma Phule's struggle was against caste and the inhuman practices of Brahmins of the time?"



The CBFC has also demanded cuts in the Marathi film *Chal Halla Bol*, a biopic on Namdeo Dhasal (1949–2014), Dalit poet, writer, activist and founder of the Dalit Panther movement. The board demanded that the film drop Dhasal's poem '*Rakta Petlela Aganit Suryano Ko'* (Innumerable Suns Burning in Blood). Mahesh Bansode, the producer, says he is not ready to drop it and points out that it was this poem that earned Dhasal the Padma Shri in 1999. He also points out that the film was primarily crowdfunded and was screened at 252 film festivals in India and abroad, winning 32 awards. The demand to drop the poem makes no sense, he says adding that today's youth need to be told Dhasal's story and that is what the film aims to do.

There is also simmering resentment over reports that a board official had apparently asked, "Who is Namdeo Dhasal?", exhibiting his ignorance that Dhasal was not just a Padma Shri awardee but also recipient of awards from the Sahitya Akademi. He had received the Maharashtra State Award for Literature four times. A google search would have saved the official the blushes.

Incensed over the deemed insult, a group in Pune organised a poetry recital and called the event 'Namdev, Tujhe Baap' (Namdev, Your Father).



Maha betrayal by Mahayuti?

In the latest twist in the Mukhya Mantri Majhi Ladki Bahin Yojana launched before the assembly election last year, the Maharashtra government has slashed the monthly payout from Rs 1,500 to Rs 500 for 8 lakh women who are also receiving Rs 1,000 per month under the Namo Shetkari Mahasanman Nidhi scheme. The reduction is part of the ongoing scrutiny to ensure the scheme is limited to those who meet the eligibility criteria and do not receive a cash transfer of more than Rs 1,500 a month from the government.

The cash transfer was offered to all women aged between 18 and 65, who were domiciled in the state and had an annual family income of less than Rs 2.5 lakh. Families with a government employee or a four-wheeler vehicle were not eligible.

The government had received about 2.63 crore applications for the scheme and after verification, this figure dropped by 11 lakh to 2.52 crore by February 2025 with 2.46 crore beneficiaries receiving the payout in February and March, according to media reports.

No screening was done before the election and the question is why. With digital transactions and the Aadhaar database, it would have taken the government no time to find the unique beneficiaries. ■

Governors must know their place

Sanjay Hegde

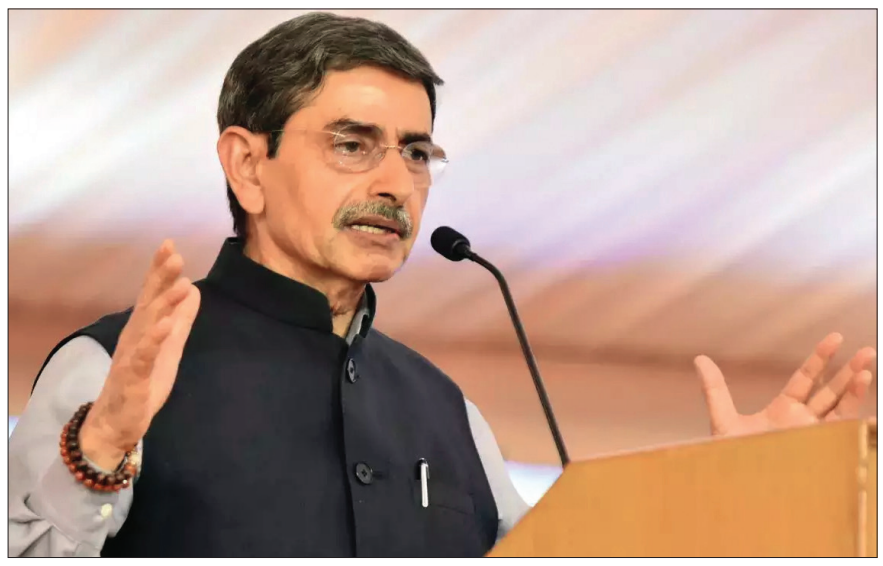
In a much needed and clear-headed judgement, the Supreme Court has reminded Governors across India of a basic fact: they are not political gatekeepers. They are constitutional functionaries. And when they forget this, the Court will step in—as it did in *State of Tamil Nadu v. Governor of Tamil Nadu*.

At the centre of the case was Tamil Nadu governor R.N. Ravi, whose tenure has been marked by political friction, constitutional brinkmanship and a blatant disregard for democratic norms. That's not a partisan statement—it's what the record shows.

A pattern of obstruction

R.N. Ravi has made a habit of undermining the elected government in Tamil Nadu. He has refused to read full speeches prepared by the state government in the assembly. He has publicly dismissed the Dravidian model—a policy vision endorsed by Tamil Nadu's voters—as 'anti-national'. And more troublingly, he sat on bills for months, even years, without explanation.

One such bill was aimed at regulating online gambling—something Ravi himself claimed to support. Yet when it came back to him after being re-passed by the legislature, he escalated the matter to the President instead of giving his assent. It was a move that served no purpose other than delaying the bill.



Tamil Nadu governor R.N. Ravi

The principle of 'reasonable time' is baked into the Constitution. Delaying governance is not a constitutional right; it's a dereliction of duty

Let's call it what it was: a political manoeuvre in constitutional clothing.

The Supreme Court steps in

The Supreme Court was unambiguous. Governors are not allowed to drag their feet to stall the will of elected governments. The Constitution allows them to return a bill once for reconsideration or to reserve it for the President. That's it. What it does not allow is indefinite delay—a silent veto by inaction.

Critics of the judgement claim the apex court overreached, especially by insisting on timelines. But this isn't judicial invention. The principle of 'reasonable time' is baked into the Constitution. A governor cannot take years to do something that should take weeks. Delaying governance is not a constitutional right; it's a dereliction of duty.

Others claim this weakens the President's powers. That's the wrong frame. The court's ruling actually brings the states and Centre into better constitutional alignment. When Parliament re-passes a bill, the President must assent. The same now applies to states; Governors who don't like the ruling party have no special veto powers.

And those upset about the use of Article 142? They miss the point. When a constitutional office-bearer refuses to do their job, the court has a duty to step in. Article 142 is not judicial overreach—it's a constitutional safety net.

A signal to other governors

R.N. Ravi may have been the focus of this case, but the judgment sends a message well beyond Tamil Nadu. Governors in Kerala, Punjab and elsewhere should take heed: partisan posturing has no place in a constitutional office.

The Supreme Court has reaffirmed a crucial principle—India's democracy is powered by its legislatures, not its governors. When unelected officials stand in the way of elected governments, they betray the very spirit of federalism.

The bottom line

This isn't about one Governor or one party. It's about restoring balance to a system that has tilted too far in favour of political appointees wearing constitutional robes. The Supreme Court has drawn the line. Ravi crossed it. The Court pushed back. And democracy is better for it. ■

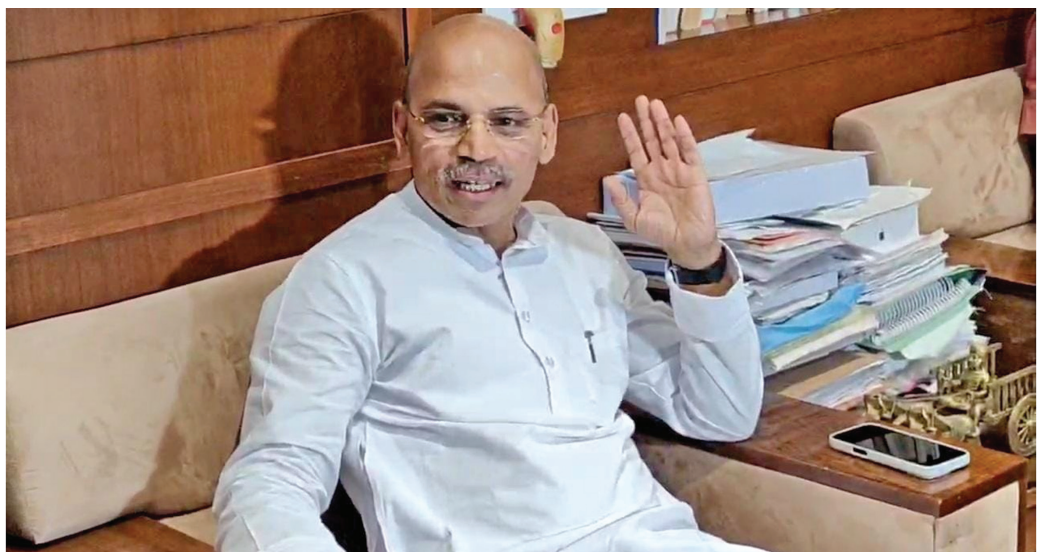
SANJAY HEGDE *is a Senior Advocate in the Supreme Court of India*

Karnataka govt steps upto protect senior citizen rights

Minister calls for cancelling wills, property transfers if children abandon parents in government hospitals

After observing a disturbing trend of children abandoning their parents in government hospitals after ensuring that these parents transfer the properties in their name, Karnataka government has stepped into protect these senior citizens by way invoking provisions of the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007, and cancel property transfers and cancelling wills.

Minister of Medical Education & Skill Development, Entrepreneurship and Livelihood Department, Dr Sharan Prakash Patil during one of his review meetings with various heads of government district hospitals, came across that over 150 senior citizens were deserted in just one hospital at the Belagavi Institute of Medical Sciences (BIMS) and around 100 similar cases



recorded in other medical institutions across the state

Dubbing this trend as a "shocking and inhumane", Dr Patil directed hospital authorities to take support of revenue department officials to cancel property transfer and wills in such cases to ensure that children take care of their parents.

He underlined that under the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007, parents have the legal right to cancel property transfers if their children fail to take care of them. Section 23 of the Act states that if a child takes property from a parent and later abandons them, the property can be returned to the parent by law.

"This move aims to put an end to this heartbreaking reality and hold those responsible accountable," he said in his statement.

Patil also instructed the Director of Medical Education, Dr BL Sujatha Rathod, to direct all institute heads to file complaints with the assistant commissioners.

Many abandoned parents stated that their children deserted them in hospitals, knowing they would receive food, clothing and shelter.

"While some cite economic hardships, most cases involve elderly individuals being left behind after transferring their properties to their children," the statement noted.

To support these seniors, the BIMS has arranged shelter facilities in retirement homes for at least 70 affected individuals, while others continue to reside in hospitals. The minister emphasized the need for hospitals to take an active role in reporting these cases so that appropriate legal measures can be taken.

Legal action

He pointed out that under the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007, children and relatives are legally obligated to provide financial and medical care for their elderly parents. If they fail in these duties, the law allows senior citizens to revoke property transfers made in favor of their children.

As per Section 23 of the Act, if a child abandons or neglects their parents after inheriting property, the transfer can be legally reversed, restoring ownership to the elderly individuals. Patil reiterated that many people remain unaware of this provision, and the government is committed to ensuring justice for affected senior citizens.

With approximately 5.7 million senior citizens in the state, the state government had allocated Rs 10.47 crore for the welfare of the elderly in the 2024-25 fiscal year, enabling various community-friendly programs. As many as 63 old age homes have been established statewide through self-help organizations to support weak and destitute elderly individuals and about 1,575 elderly individuals are residing in these facilities. Besides this the state government is in process to open an additional 19 old age homes,

"Anna Suvidha" scheme to be extended to senior citizens above 75 years of age from this year

With the launch of the Karnataka Anna Suvidha Scheme 2025, the Karnataka government had created a historic initiative in the state of supplying ration - rice distribution - under Anna Bhagya at their doorstep.

Last year, when this innovative scheme was launched in the State was meant only for the beneficiaries who are 90 years of age and above and from this year on wards this scheme will be extended to senior citizes above 75 years too.

Chief Minister, Siddaramaiah made this announcement during his budget speech presented on March 7, 2025.

According to him over two lakh beneficiaries have been identified under this scheme. "This service will be extended to include households with only senior citizens above 75 years of age in the present year. 3.30 lakh beneficiaries will benefit from this initiative," he explained.

He stated that individuals who wanted to receive their rations at home would have to apply for the scheme.

Karnataka Anna Suvidha Scheme

The primary objective of the Karnataka Anna Suvidha Scheme is to provide ease and comfort to the elder citizens of the state. The scheme was launched by the government for the delivery of monthly Ration at the doorsteps of the elder citizens. To ensure that people 90 years of age and older do not go without rice because they are unable to get affordable prices stores. The government has currently suggested delivering rice right to their doorsteps. The program may, if necessary, be expanded to include additional beneficiaries, such as people with physical disabilities. This scheme is a very wise and kind initiative launched by the government of Karnataka. It will help the citizens a lot.

Key highlights of the Karnataka Anna Suvidha Scheme

- Application mode - offline
- Eligibility Criteria
- The applicant should be a resident of Karnataka
- The applicant must be holding a government Ration Card
- The applicant must be of 75 years of age or above

Benefits of the Karnataka Anna Suvidha Scheme

- The Karnataka Anna Suvidha Scheme was launched by the Karnataka government to help its citizens who are having financial difficulties.
- This program was started by the government to make life easier for the state's elderly and impoverished residents.
- Any state resident with a ration card can fill out the application and benefit from the Scheme.
- The selected candidates will receive their rations at their residences from the state authorities.
- With the help of this program, the applicants can receive a ration at home and save a substantial amount of time.
- A valid Karnataka state-issued ration card is required for applicants to be eligible for benefits under the Karnataka Anna Suvidha Scheme.

The government introduced a program to provide monthly Senior citizens' rations delivered right to their doors, to guarantee that individuals who are 75 years of age or older do not go without rice due to a lack of access to reasonably priced stores.

Right now, the government is proposing to deliver rice to their doorsteps. The Karnataka government has launched this scheme, which is a very kind and intelligent initiative. It will greatly benefit the citizens.

Required Documents for Anna Suvidha

- Aadhar card
- pan card
- Ration card
- Age proof
- Income proof
- Residence proof
- Date of Announcement

FAQs

What is the Karnataka Anna Suvidha Scheme?

An innovative scheme in the State is for the beneficiaries who are 90 years of age and above. They will soon receive rice distribution under Anna Bhagya at their doorstep, according to the Minister for Food and Civil Supplies.

Who is eligible for this scheme?

The applicant should be a resident of Karnataka. The applicant must be holding a government Ration Card. An applicant must be of 90 years of age or above

When and who launched this scheme?

The budget for 2024–2025 was presented by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on February 16.



Karnataka formulated senior citizen policy way back in 2003 to ensure better quality life

The Government of Karnataka led by the Congress party had formulated state policy for Senior citizens in 2003 with the motto of ensuring better quality of life.

Objective of the State Policy:

1. To ensure safety of Senior Citizen.
2. To protect the Senior Citizens by providing economic security, Health Care and by protecting them against exploitation and ill treatment.
3. To formulate programme for Senior Citizens in rural areas to ensure that they also get the benefits that their counter parts in Urban Areas enjoy.
4. To create opportunities for Senior Citizens to lead a productive, perusal and satisfactory life.
5. These policy intents to have an objective of creating a society which includes people of all ages.
6. The state recognizes the fact that senior citizens were also resource full person's resourceful persons and are contributing members of the society.
7. This policy has realized importance of allocating budget for the welfare of senior citizens who belong to economically weaker sections.

The State Policy with an objective of providing Health Care Services, Social Security, Housing and shelter and protection of property and life are some of the aspects are complained under this policy to be monitor implements for the State Policy.

A Task Force has been constituted under the Chairmen ship of the Chief Minister of the State.

Indira Gandhi National Old age Pension

Senior Citizens aged between 60 to 65 years are being paid Rs.600/- as old age pension every month and for senior citizen aged between above 65 are paid Rs.1000/- This scheme is being implemented by the Social Security and Pension Department.

Senior Citizen ID Cards

Senior citizens in the age 60+ were provided Identity Card through "Seva Sindhu" Portal.

Concession to Senior Citizens in Bus pass

The Senior Citizens who have obtained identity cards, voter ID, driving license are eligible to avail 25% concession in KSRTC/BMTC Busses. Under Shakti scheme, one of the five guarntees, elderly women can travel across state freely.

Maintenance of Parents & Senior Citizens Act 2007:

Department is implementing Government of India Maintenance of Parents & Senior Citizens Act 2007 from 2008 and rules have been framed.



Maintenance Tribunals have been constituted under the chairmanship of Assistance Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner of the Districts concerned.

Maintenance of Parents and Senior Citizens Act-2007 (central Act – 2007 Rule-56) provided for Establishing Appellate Tribunals under the Act for appealing against the verdict of the Board under sub rule (1) of rule 15 of the Act. Accordingly the Government of Karnataka has established appellate tribunals in each District as per sub rule (2) Deputy Commissioner of the respective Districts are the heads of the tribunals.

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The siege of US universities

The Trump administration has declared war on dissent, demanding that universities toe the line or face drastic fund cuts, writes Ashok Swain

The US higher education system is under siege. Independent thinking in the 'land of the free…' has become a rude joke. What began as public criticism of universities over perceived ideological leanings has expanded into a broader effort to influence institutional policies and practices. The Trump administration's actions signal a shift from rhetorical opposition to universities to more structured and far-reaching measures—through legal frameworks, funding mechanisms and administrative scrutiny.

One of the most high-profile developments involves Harvard University, which is now facing an immediate freeze of over $2.2 billion in federal grants and $60 million in contracts. This action followed Harvard's rejection of a sweeping list of demands issued by the Trump administration. These demands are said to be part of a campaign to stop anti-semitism. However, they also involve major changes to how universities are run. They include requiring all departments to represent different political opinions; shutting down diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) programmes; reporting students who are seen as against American values; and, letting government-approved outsiders review university departments. Harvard president Alan Garber publicly refused the Trump administration's terms, stating that the university "will not surrender its independence or relinquish its constitutional rights."

Columbia University, also under federal pressure, had $400 million in federal funding pulled out before ultimately agreeing to comply with several of the administration's demands. These include policy changes that critics argue risk undermining academic freedom and students' rights. The Columbia case appears to have set a precedent that the federal government is now seeking to extend to other institutions.

The pressure on universities also extends to their financial structures. Prominent institutions have been warned of a possible freeze on federal funding unless they adhere to specific administrative expectations. Despite their large endowments—Harvard's reportedly exceeds $53 billion—university leaders have generally been cautious in their response. They cite the long-term constraints tied to endowment funds and the necessity of financial prudence. However, this caution is being seen as a sign of institutional risk aversion and an overreliance on financial metrics in defining success.

International students are emerging as particularly vulnerable within this changing environment. For instance, an Indian PhD student at Columbia University left the US for Canada after her visa was revoked following her participation in campus protests in support of Palestine. Mohsen Mahdawi, a Palestinian student holding a US green card, was detained by immigration officials in Vermont after attending a citizenship interview. These actions are not isolated.

Other cases echo these concerns. A Turkish doctoral student at Tufts reportedly lost her visa and was detained after co-authoring an article critical of US foreign policy. At Stony Brook University, at least 11 international students have had their visas revoked, although the university has not clarified whether being "involved" in protest was a factor. Data from Inside Higher Ed suggests that over 600 international student visas have been cancelled by the Trump administration so far. These developments appear to have a chilling effect on free expression, particularly among non-citizen students.

Faculty members also report feeling heightened pressure to self-censor. There is evidence of curriculums being revised to avoid controversial subjects, and some DEI initiatives have been dismantled under increased scrutiny. Rather than encouraging academic inquiry, some universities are preemptively altering programs to minimise perceived risk from federal intervention.

Scientific research in areas such as climate change, reproductive health and racial justice is being subjected to closer ideological vetting. Proposals are increasingly evaluated not only on scholarly merit but also for their alignment with broader political narratives. There are instances where peer review processes have been bypassed or influenced, and scholars working on politically sensitive topics have reportedly been removed from projects or denied funding renewals with limited explanation.

Government-affiliated institutions that historically supported global dialogue and conflict resolution have also been impacted. The United States Institute of Peace, which Congress established to promote international conflict resolution, has faced significant staff reductions. Similarly, the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, a long-standing policy research hub, was closed through an executive order. These closures suggest a narrowing of the space available for policy scholarship and intellectual exchange.



Photo: Getty Images

Protesters in Massachusetts urge Harvard to resist the Trump administration's bullying sanctions

Faculty members also report feeling heightened pressure to self-censor. There is evidence of curriculums being revised to avoid controversial subjects

These domestic shifts are having international consequences. The US has traditionally been a global leader in academic freedom and higher education. However, foreign governments are now cautioning students about studying in the US, and some international collaborations are being delayed or suspended. As perceptions change, the US university system may lose some of its appeal as a destination for international scholars and students.

The potential implications extend well beyond individual campuses. If the United States—long admired for its academic openness—begins imposing restrictions based on political considerations, it may set a precedent that other governments around the world could follow. For countries with weaker protections for academic freedom, such a shift could serve as a justification for increased state control over universities.

ASHOK SWAIN *is a professor of peace and conflict research at Uppsala University, Sweden*

China's trade diplomacy in the time of war

As the world braces for the next whimsical tariff announcement by Trump, Sarosh Bana assesses the fallout of the bruising trade war

With his tariff showdown with most of the world, and especially China, US President Donald Trump is very knowingly letting the genie out of the bottle, inciting the Chinese dragon into a new Cold War and veering the world into a recession with his ham-handed policies. Last week, J.P. Morgan raised its forecast from 40 to 60 per cent on the global economy entering a recession by the end of the year.

Trump's unfettered trade hooliganism will also shatter the 'American dream', hurting Americans more than any other country. His punitive taxes on all imports will indubitably escalate costs for domestic businesses that will inflate prices for US consumers, and consequently edge his country into a sustained economic decline and eventual recession. If American importers decide upon absorbing the costs of the tariffs, their profitability could dwindle, leading them to downsize operations and lay off workers. And if they more likely pass on the tariff costs to consumers, consumer demand will capsize, hitting manufacturing and thereby throwing workers out of jobs.

The Tax Foundation, the world's leading nonpartisan tax policy non-profit, estimates that even before accounting for any foreign retaliation, Trump's tariffs will reduce long-run US GDP by 0.8 per cent. 'Combined, the US-imposed tariffs and the threatened and imposed retaliatory tariffs reduce US GDP by 1 per cent,' it notes. The US dollar too has been sliding against other major currencies in a clear signal that investors may be starting to shun what has long been the safest haven in global financial markets.

The President's commercial war against Beijing, moreover, buries all prospects for a G-2 partnership that had been envisioned during the early days of the first Obama administration. He had broadly hinted at his push against the Asian superpower with his anti-China rhetoric during his electoral campaign.

Chinese President Xi Jinping is a powerful leader who will do all he can to stand up to Trump's excesses. Indeed, the 2022 US National Security Strategy cites the People's Republic of China as the "only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it".

In a mutually devastative tit-for-tat between the world's two largest economies, Trump's absurd 245 per cent tariff on imports from China has roused retaliation by Beijing, which hiked tariffs on all US goods from 34 per cent to 84 per cent to 125 per cent, starting 12 April. China termed the Trump administration's actions a "joke", and said it no longer considered them worth matching. Trump has tried to soften the impact by exempting $100 billion worth of tech imports, but tensions prevail as Washington contemplates a national security probe on electronics.

China has also halted exports of six rare earths, cutting off the US and other countries from these minerals that are vital for tech, auto, aerospace, defence and manufacturing. Besides, it has ordered Chinese airlines not to take further deliveries of the Seattle-based Boeing Company's aircraft. China is Boeing's largest customer and in line to receive deliveries of 9,000 airplanes—20 per cent of Boeing's production—over the next two decades.

It is a fact though that the US suffers a massive trade deficit with China that exceeded $295.4 billion last year; its exports worth $143.5 billion to China (down 3 per cent from 2023) pale before $438.9 billion worth of imports from that country.

The US's overall trade deficit in goods and services was $918.4 billion in 2024, a 17 per cent increase from 2023, and its current-account deficit, which includes trade in goods and services, widened to $1.13 trillion, representing 3.9 per cent of current-dollar GDP.

In contrast, China's overall trade surplus surged to a record $992.2 billion in 2024, its exports climbing 5.4 per cent, which helped tide over the sluggish growth at home as it gradually recovers from a crisis in its property market and the persisting effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. Even last month in the thick of Trump's tariff war cries, China recorded a trade surplus of $102.64 billion. Its balance of trade has averaged $16.81 billion from 1981 until 2025, soaring to an all-time high of $170.52 billion in February, and a record low of $61.99 billion in February of 2020, at the onset of Covid.

However, a brutal slugfest was certainly not expected of the world's largest economy that the US clearly is, with its GDP of just under $29 trillion in 2024 still overshadowing China's 2024 GDP of $18.6 trillion even as the world's second largest economy. A calibrated approach to trade rectification would have been more acceptable, even welcomed, by the international community. It would have expected Trump to seek mutually compatible trade agreements with countries and blocs, rather than wield a sledgehammer to structure an economic order pandering to his whims.

In a post on Truth Social, Trump said that no country, especially China, is getting a free pass when it comes to trade. 'NOBODY is getting 'off the hook' for the unfair trade balances, and non-monetary tariff barriers, that other countries have used against us, especially not China which, by far, treats us the worst!' he wrote.

UBS expects China's exports to the US to drop by two-thirds in the coming quarters, with overall Chinese exports declining 10 per cent in US dollar terms in 2025, factoring in weaker American and global economic growth. In a report on 15 April, the bank also downgraded China's GDP growth forecast to 3.4 per cent in 2025, assuming current tariff hikes will remain and that China rolls out additional stimulus.

"We anticipate some of China's other trading partners may also impose tariffs on Chinese goods in the months ahead, though likely limited to specific products and at smaller scales than the US tariffs," UBS said. While acknowledging difficulty in predicting how the US-China tariff tensions will unfold, the bank finds potential for both sides to reopen talks and possibly ease some recent tariff hikes within the next month or two.

On 14 April, legal advocacy group, The Liberty Justice Center, urged the US Court of International Trade to block President Trump's sweeping tariffs, contending that he exceeded his authority. Arguing that only Congress can set tax rates, including tariffs, the lawsuit was filed on behalf of five small US businesses that import products from tariff-targeted countries, and challenges Trump's 'Liberation Day' tariffs and earlier duties on China. "No one person should wield such power," said the Center's counsel Jeffrey Schwab, while the White House spokesman, Harrison Fields, defended the tariffs, calling them essential to US interests.

Meanwhile, President Xi has embarked on a diplomatic outreach, warning that a "trade war and tariff war will produce no winner, and protectionism will lead nowhere" as he began a trip to Vietnam, Cambodia and Malaysia in a bid to "resolutely safeguard the multilateral trading system, stable global industrial and supply chains, and open and cooperative international environment".

Xi presented China as a reliable partner, in contrast to Washington, which imposed—then suspended—tariffs of more than 40 per cent on some countries in Southeast Asia, which is an export-reliant region. The US has announced reciprocal tariff rates of 46, 49 and 24 per cent against Vietnam, Cambodia and Malaysia respectively.

In a rare gesture, Beijing also sought to galvanise New Delhi to 'stand together' with Chinese Embassy spokesperson Yu Jing saying in a post on X: 'China-India economic and trade relationship is based on complementarity and mutual benefit. Facing the US abuse of tariffs, which deprives countries, especially Global South countries, of their right to development, the two largest developing countries should stand together to overcome the difficulties.'

Her post followed a congratulatory message by the Chinese President himself on 1 April to President Droupadi Murmu, on the 75th anniversary of the establishment of China–India diplomatic relations, that India and China should work together, as two neighbouring major countries that are home to one-third of the world's population. 'A stable, predictable and friendly bilateral relationship will benefit both countries and the world,' she added.

India did not respond to this statement, though External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said the bilateral relationship was moving in a "positive direction".

Prime Minister Narendra Modi walks a tightrope between the authoritarian Trump and Xi, but India will be more disposed to capitalise on any Chinese debacles in the tariff war, considering it is already seeking conciliation with the Trump administration in pursuit of a credible free trade agreement.

Xi extended his outreach to the European Union (EU) as well. As he hosted Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez in Beijing last week, he urged the EU to embrace a "fair international trade environment and jointly resist unilateral and intimidating practices". He added, "China and Europe should fulfil their international responsibilities... and jointly resist unilateral bullying practices." The 20 per cent tariffs the EU was saddled with were suspended by the US for 90 days after the bloc's prompt retaliation. China also said it is ready to fight a trade war if the US continues to act "recklessly".

Possibly feeling he was buttonholing himself into a quandary with China, Trump hailed Xi as "a very smart man", adding, "I think he is going to want to make a deal..." ■



Photo: Getty Images

US President Donald Trump unveiling his weapon of trade destruction

India has to walk a tightrope between Xi and Trump, but it is predisposed to looking at China's losses as gains

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Time to book your condo on Mars?

The future of Viksit Bharat is surely interplanetary, writes Avay Shukla

Elon Musk has just declared that there will be 1 million humans living on Mars by 2045.

Perfect timing, you will agree—because by then Trump would have digested Greenland, Panama, the Gaza Riviera, maybe even Canada, and would, like Alexander the Great, be shedding tears because there would be no new real estate left for him to conquer on Earth.

The resort on Mars would be called—what else?—Mars-a-Lago.

One is not aware whether the Martians have been consulted on this little matter of forcible occupation of their planet, or whether they would be deported to Saturn—but we shall doubtless get to know shortly, the very next time Pete 'Eggshead', the defence secretary, leaks their classified chats on Telegram.

But this interstellar land grab raises other important questions.



Photo: Getty Images

Soft Landings. Elon Musk and his son X Æ dropped off by Marine One right on to the White House lawns, 13 April 2025

How would this 1 million horde be selected?

It has been rumoured that DOGE (a.k.a. DOUCHE) had considered setting up a Guantanamo Bay type of facility there for deporting illegal migrants. But someone pointed out that with 2.29 million potential Indian deportees, Mars could soon become a Khalistan or a Hindu Rashtra, and so the idea was dropped.

Instead, since Hamas refuses to play ball or catch-the-grenade in Gaza, the Jared Kushner idea of a new Riviera would be shifted to Mars and the world's billionaires invited to move to the unpolluted, land-mine free, unbombed environs of the 52nd state of the USA.

Trump is likely to demand the planet as compensation for America having been left out of the first wave of global colonisation in the 18th and 19th centuries

Considering the success of Trump's Gold Card offer—1,000 were sold on the first day at $1 million each, we learn—a similar model could be followed, with a $10 million price tag, perhaps.

Since only SpaceX rockets would be used, Musk would get half of the revenues, with which he could shore up Tesla's plummeting share prices and pay alimony to the additional half-dozen wives he would have acquired by then.

Going by SpaceX's current record, about 40 per cent of the space ships would blow up in space along with their occupants—but there would be no refunds since space has neither gravity, nor expiry dates.

So, who would comprise this one million? Not many Americans, I predict, because by then they would all have been reduced to penury under Trump's MABA ('Make America Broke Again') policy and would be unable to pay for the ticket.

Putin and Netanyahu may want to go, but could face arrest under the ICJ warrants when they land on Mars, so they are unlikely to apply.

Many from the South Pacific—Tonga, Vanuatu, Fiji—would be interested, since, by then, their islands would be drowning under rising sea levels. Unfortunately, they wouldn't have enough seashells to pay for the tickets.

But by far the biggest catchment area would be India, which by then would have a GDP of $35 trillion, according to our ministers, and about a thousand billionaires and a million ultra-HNIs or high net-worth individuals as a consequence of the Viksit Bharat programmes.

Since roughly 40 per cent of our GDP is siphoned off to make these billionaires and another 25 per cent taken abroad by the thousands of millionaires who adopt foreign citizenship every year, there should be no shortage of applicants from India.

Their motivation? There would be no ED, CBI, FCRA, Interpol or extradition rules on Mars; the only rule being 'what you grab is what you get'. There would also be no political parties or judges to 'voluntarily' donate money to.

I believe certain eminent absconders from Gujarat—where else?—have already sent feelers to Musk to check whether dhokla will be served on the flight. I should think so, since the airport contract on Mars will probably be awarded to the Adani group once all Indian import duties are removed on Tesla in the national interest: you see, Musk can make rockets but not dhokla.

But one problem still has to be sorted out by the new sheriff in town.

Who will Mars belong to?

There exists an international treaty on the sharing of the Antarctic for research purposes, I learn, but none for Mars. So naturally the US will lay claim to it, based on the oldest covenant of all: 'Finders keepers'.

Plus, Trump is likely to demand the planet as compensation for America having been left out of the first wave of global colonisation in the 18th and 19th centuries, when England, France, Portugal, Spain and Belgium had carved out the world amongst themselves like a Thanksgiving turkey.

Well, that particular chicken has now come home to roost—on Mars.

It's COLAnisation time again, folks!

Advance bookings for the condos, I believe, will begin on the day that Mr Drumpf is sworn in as President for the third time, with Vice President Musketeer looking on.

Looks like Gurgaon and DLF will finally get some competition. ■

AVAY SHUKLA *is a retired IAS officer and author of* Disappearing Democracy: Dismantling of a Nation



State in Focus

The Hyderabad GCC is designed as a next-generation innovation hub

Citizens Financial Group Chooses Hyderabad for First India GCC in Partnership with Cognizant

Citizens Financial Group (NYSE: CFG), a US-based premier financial institution, has chosen Hyderabad to establish its Global Capability Centre (GCC) in India, in strategic partnership with Cognizant (Nasdaq: CTSH), a leading global technology and professional services company. The Hyderabad GCC is designed as a next-generation innovation hub to support Citizens' digital transformation and technology modernisation journey. The launch event was held in Hyderabad in the presence of **Shri Duddilla Sridhar Babu**, honourable Minister for Information Technology, Electronics, Communications, Industries and Commerce and Legislative Affairs, government of Telangana.

The GCC is designed to help Citizens more quickly and effectively foster innovative solutions for its customers. It will also serve as an innovation hub, implementing cutting-edge technologies and fostering a culture of continuous learning and development. The centre is expected to scale to a headcount of 1,000 IT and data & analytics professionals by March 2026, and will play a key role in strengthening Citizens' technology capabilities across enterprise platforms, customer experience, and data-driven decisionmaking.

Hyderabad has emerged as one of the world's top destinations for GCCs, hosting over 350 GCCs across BFSI, healthcare and technology. The year 2024 marked a milestone, with the city attracting nearly one GCC every week. This momentum is visible on the ground—in the surging demand for top tech talent, rapid absorption of commercial and residential space and record-breaking investments across sectors.

Honourable Minister **Shri Duddilla Sridhar Babu** said, "Our growth is clearly visible across metrics—Hyderabad's Rajiv Gandhi International Airport recorded the highest passenger traffic growth among all Indian metro airports in 2024. Commercial space absorption soared by 56 per cent, the highest in the country, while our retail sector leased 1.8 million sq ft last year. This boom is backed by a clear vision: to not just build infrastructure, but to build the future. Hyderabad is on track to add 200 million sq. ft. of Grade A office space by 2030."

"But we are aiming even higher. We want to transform Hyderabad from a GCC hub into a Global Value Centre, a place where companies lead with innovation, build IP, and drive product development. This aligns with our larger ambition: to make Telangana the first Indian state to contribute $1 trillion to the national GDP over the next decade. Strategic partnerships like this one between Citizens Bank and Cognizant bring us a step closer to that goal."

He emphasised that Hyderabad's rise is grounded not in hype or headlines, but in thoughtful policy, visionary leadership, robust infrastructure, a focus on sustainability, and meaningful public-private partnerships.

Nageswar Cherukupalli, SVP and BU head (BFSI), Cognizant, said, "Hyderabad is already home to leading BFSI GCCs, including Goldman Sachs, Citi Group, JP Morgan Chase, Bank of America, and Wells Fargo. Citizens Financial Group now joins this distinguished list as the next top global bank to establish a GCC in the city. We are proud of our partnership with Citizens Bank and of further expanding that collaboration to help set up their GCC in Hyderabad."

"Our partnership with Cognizant on the establishment of a GCC in Hyderabad is core to our strategy to scale digital transformation, strengthen innovation capabilities, reduce reliance on vendor partners, and improve time to market for new-age banking products," said **Michael Ruttledge**, Chief Information Officer and Head of Enterprise Technology and Security at Citizens Financial Group. "With its rich talent pool, the city has emerged as a leading global destination for technology-driven businesses. It will not only enhance customer experience but also create exciting opportunities for India's tech talent to redefine the future of banking."

"The establishment of Citizens' first GCC in Hyderabad underscores our shared commitment to driving innovation and transformation in the financial services sector," said **Surya Gummadi**, President – Americas, Cognizant. "We are excited to partner with Citizens and plan to leverage Cognizant Neuro® and Flowsource™ platforms to advance modern banking with future-ready, GenAI-enabled solutions. In addition, Cognizant plans to create a Banking and Financial Services Innovation Center to help clients foster innovation, facilitate collaboration, improve operational security and compliance, data and analytics, cybersecurity and customer experience."

Cognizant's total headcount in Hyderabad stands at nearly 57,000, making it one of the city's largest technology employers. The Citizens–Cognizant partnership, supported by the government of Telangana, reinforces the state's emergence as a global hub for high-value digital capabilities.





Bhu Bharati

New ROR Act Introduced

in Telangana by
Hon'ble Chief Minister
A. Revanth Reddy

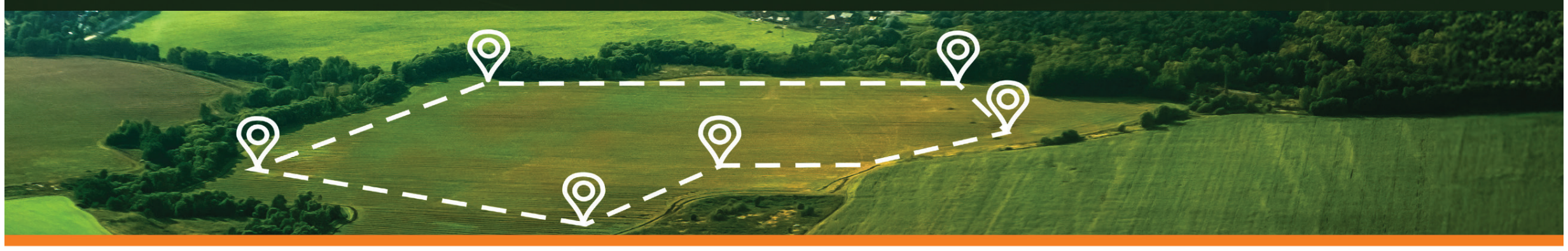




Bhu Bharati

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PEOPLE'S GOVERNMENT: PATH TO PROGRESS AND WELFARE FOR ALL

Issued by: Special Commissioner, Department of Information and Public Relations, Government of Telangana.

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Freedom is in Peril, Defend it with all your might Jawaharlal Nehru

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NATIONAL ENGLISH WEEKLY NEWSPAPER

NATION

JUSTICE DELAYED OR JUSTICE DENIED?

What explains Gulfisha Fatima's 5-year-long incarceration without trial?

▸P2



NATION

STATES 360°

In focus this week: Bihar, Maharashtra

▸P2,4



WORLD

US VARSITIES FEEL THE HEAT

…and international students are especially vulnerable

▸P6



'We are building a new Congress'

India's grand old party is re-inventing itself. The last decade has been a particularly testing passage of time in its 138-year-old history. There has been a vicious campaign by the Sangh Parivar to belittle the party's role in the freedom struggle and its contributions to the independent nation. There has been a concerted attempt to misrepresent the party's pluralist ethos as an appeasement of Muslims and other minorities. Congress stalwarts like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru have been vilified and others like Vallabhbhai Patel and Netaji appropriated.

There is no denying that India is at a crossroads, that its democratic institutions are damaged, that Indians—certainly those who still think of India as the nation envisaged in our Constitution—are living in dread that their beloved country is turning into a place they no longer recognise. But luckily, there are still people around who think it's possible to turn the wheel back. Congress president **Mallikarjun Kharge** *spoke to* **Vishwadeepak** *on the party's determination to win back lost ground and to rebuild, brick by brick, what's broken in the party, in the country, in our Constitution. Excerpts:*

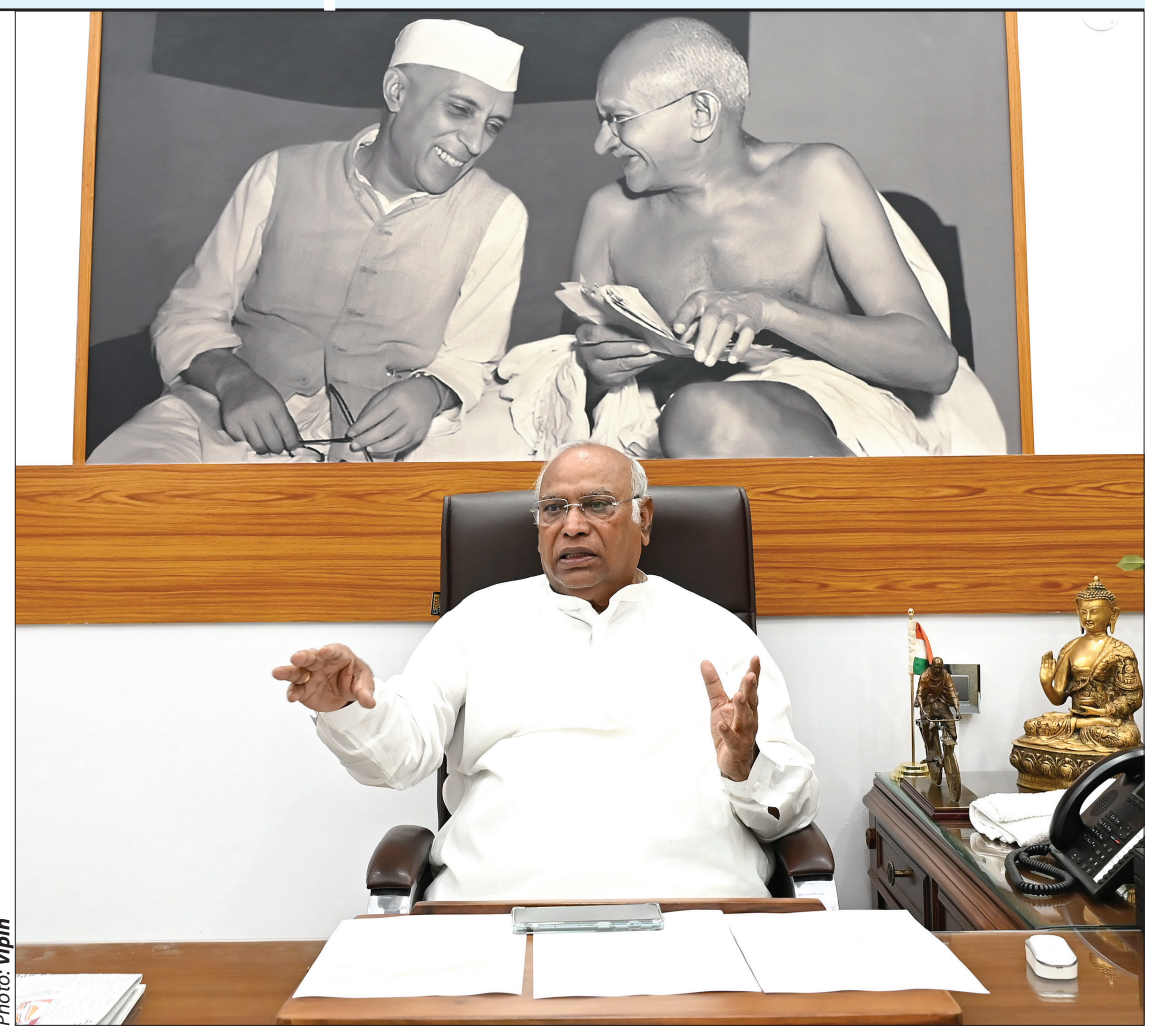


Photo: **Vipin**

Why was the AICC session held in Ahmedabad and what did it achieve?

Gujarat is the home state of both Prime Minister [Narendra] Modi and home minister Amit Shah. Many of the BJP's key officials are also from there. Together, they have disrupted rules and conventions; broken the morale of both public servants and the people. People in Gujarat were resigned to their highhandedness. We decided to hold the AICC session in Gujarat to dispel this fear, instilled over the past three decades.

We decided to meet people and listen to them. We took the opportunity to speak freely and demonstrate how we are different. No other AICC session, to my mind, was held with such an objective. That is why the session was significant and we are satisfied with the outcome.

We also wanted to reassure Congress workers and the Gujarat PCC leaders that we have their back, there is nothing to fear, that they should continue the good fight against state terror and injustice.

I believe we also succeeded in signalling that the Congress means business. It is serious about taking on the BJP and fearless on issues of public interest. It cannot be intimidated.

A resolution was adopted to rebuild the Congress. What does it really mean?

We resolved to build a 'new' Congress by strengthening the party organisation. An outline of the kind of organisation we envision is ready and we are going to see changes from the booth level onward to the Lok Sabha level. This overhaul will begin from Gujarat. We will form and strengthen district committees across the country. A senior leader will be responsible for a district. The district president will only engage in organisational work. The best leader across districts will become the district president of the party. A committee will be formed. The district committee will elect the block president and gradually we will go down to the booth level. We also look forward to greatly increasing women's participation.

The district committees will be supervised directly by the central leadership. These committees will run the organisation and their opinion will be solicited in ticket distribution. There will be performance reviews and rewards for those who do well. Wherever the party forms the government, ministers will be appointed from districts where the party performs better. Those who fail to perform should sit at home.

Critics of the Congress say they are tired of the party's excuses for its electoral failures, with all the hand-wringing about the takeover of institutions, including Parliament. How do you react to such criticism?

To cite just one example, look at the Supreme Court ruling in the case of the Tamil Nadu governor. Governors in all opposition-ruled states have sat over legislation passed by the assemblies. Look at the role of governors in opposition-ruled states like Telangana, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Kerala… not one opposition-ruled state has escaped!

Ever since the BJP came to power in Delhi, all stalled legislation is miraculously getting approved. The BJP of Modi and Shah does not know how to function democratically; they know how to get work done through intimidation. If rival politicians do not join the BJP—or do not splinter their own party and join hands with the BJP—central agencies like the CBI, the ED, the Income Tax [department] are ever ready to harass them. If intimidation does not work, they create other obstacles like sitting on legislation, not electing a deputy speaker in the Lok Sabha, not releasing central funds for programmes like MGNREGA, Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, stopping scholarships for students… the list of hurdles is long.

Wherever the party forms the government, ministers will be appointed from districts where the party performs better

The BJP never tires of accusing the Congress of being 'anti-Hindu'. Why has the party not responded?

The Congress is a secular party and does not make any distinction based on religion. Can you give me one example of the Congress taking any step directed against Hindus? All our welfare schemes and policies were designed to benefit people of all faiths. The BJP, on the other hand, is by its own admission a party for Hindus first—but what have they done for the Hindus? Given them jobs? The BJP claims that Dalits are Hindus, but does nothing to prevent atrocities against them. Is that not an anti-Hindu act?

For its hard stand on the caste census, the party faces criticism of fomenting casteism, of indulging in caste politics…

Let me ask you, what is the financial condition of backward people in our society? The Dalits? How much land do they own? What kind of jobs do they have? What is their income? We do not know. If plans are to be made and budget allocations made for them, how does one do it without a basic understanding of the social and economic structures in place? Every section must develop, but some need more assistance and hand-holding than others. It is only when we know the details that we can plan.

Who is backward? Anyone can be backward. Some can be backward on the basis of caste, others on the basis of their economic status. Upper castes can also be poor. We can make plans for them, too, if a survey is conducted. That is why we insist on a caste census.

Why is the Modi government so reluctant to conduct a caste census?

Forget about a caste census, this government is reluctant to conduct even the decennial census. The government stalled it in 2021 on the pretext of the pandemic. India is the only country in the world to have missed the decennial census because of the pandemic. Even during the two World Wars, the census was conducted and the survey results published. In the absence of a census, crores of people have been left out of the social security net.

Continued on page 2

Brick by brick, from the ground up

Vishwadeepak

One can sense the urgency. It was palpable at the recently concluded AICC (All India Congress Committee) session in Ahmedabad, the choice of venue a strategic declaration of intent. The Congress wanted its adversary to know that it wouldn't be intimidated, that it would reclaim what was inalienably a part of its own hallowed history.

Gujarat is the state of Sardar Patel—an icon of the freedom movement, a man who stood shoulder to shoulder with Pandit Nehru, before and after Independence. He is also the man the Sangh Parivar wants to project as an adversary of Nehru's, and to appropriate him as one of their own.

This, it has no way of doing without peddling fake history about the differences between the two leaders, or desperate recourse to grand memorialising, as if to declare: 'we built the Statue of Unity, the tallest in the world, so he (the Sardar) is ours.' Sorry, says the Congress, look someplace else.

The Sangh has trouble with Mahatma Gandhi as well, not quite sure whether to make him theirs or make a hero of his assassin. Hence the choice of Gujarat to hold the latest AICC session—incidentally the first in the state after 64 years.



Indira Bhawan, the new Congress headquarters in Delhi, inaugurated in January 2025, houses a collection of photographs that proudly display, for eyes that can see, the party's ease with dissent and difference; you'll find in this collection not just its most revered heroes but also people who fell out or walked out of the grand old 'tent for everyone' party over differences. This, too, is a sign of the new Congress in the making that party president Mallikarjun Kharge talks about (*see interview above*).

At its Belagavi conclave in December 2024, the Congress had declared that 2025 would be the year of organisational empowerment. Ahead of the Ahmedabad session of the AICC, which concluded on 9 April, general secretary Sachin Pilot reiterated the party's focus on organisational reforms, to its commitment in the Udaipur Declaration (of May 2022) to create more space for youth in the party organisation. The '*Nyaypath* resolution', adopted in Ahmedabad, is a roadmap to rebuild the party from the ground up.

At the heart of the revamp is a structural overhaul—the Congress wants to invert its top-down decision-making model, and reimagine the party's district units as its engines. Each District Congress Committee (DCC) will now have its own Political Affairs Committee, observers from both the AICC and state units—and the power to take critical decisions.

"We will make the District Congress Committees the foundation of the party," said Rahul Gandhi in his address, marking a significant departure from the era of centralised decision-making. In Gujarat, observers have already been appointed to all 41 DCCs. The list includes senior leaders like Manickam Tagore, Praniti Shinde, Imran Masood, Balasaheb Thorat and Meenakshi Natarajan.

AICC general secretary K.C. Venugopal announced that both Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi plan to conduct day-long workshops in every state. Later, speaking at one such workshop in Gujarat, Rahul Gandhi made the plan abundantly clear: performance—not proximity—will determine leadership roles and cabinet berths in government.

Continued on page 2

NATIONAL HERALD ON SUNDAY
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20 APRIL 2025

Brick by brick...

Continued from page 1

"This revamp opens a new window for those who want to contribute to public life, help formulate policy and politics with a difference—and shuts it for those who don't," he told party workers.

One of the most radical aspects of this transformation is the party's push towards internal democracy. For decades, the Congress has faced criticism for letting elitist, upper caste and wealthy leaders determine the course of the party. That, it seems, is beginning to change.

In Bihar, which goes to polls later this year, a Dalit leader now heads the state unit; Ajay Kumar Lallu, an OBC and former UP Congress chief, is now in charge of Odisha. Former Chhattisgarh chief minister Bhupesh Baghel, also an OBC, has been put in charge of Punjab. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, also incidentally a Dalit himself, told *National Herald* that while the party stands for all sections of society, "those who have historically lagged behind—like OBCs—will now be given their rightful space". The appointment of Anil Jaihind—a key organiser of the Samvidhan Sammelans Rahul Gandhi has been addressing—as head of the OBC department is seen as part of this course correction.

Once considered appendages of the party, the Congress's front organisations now have pivotal roles in its revival strategy.

The Indian Youth Congress (IYC) is visibly re-energised. Under the stewardship of Krishna Allavaru, it has launched initiatives like 'Young India Ke Bol', a talent hunt for future party spokespersons. At the culminating event of the party's recently concluded 'Palayan Roko, Naukri Do Yatra' in Patna, Allavaru told aspiring leaders: "Today, you don't need to do *parikrama*; if you have talent and understand ideology, you'll get a platform."

The NSUI, under the leadership of Kanhaiya Kumar, is seeing a similar resurgence. It won the post of DUSU (Delhi University Students Union) president and did well in the recent Patna University elections.

The All India Professionals' Congress has launched the Manmohan Singh Fellowship Programme, which seeks to bring mid-career professionals into politics through structured mentorship and training. (*See interview with Praveen Chakravarty on page 4*)

The Seva Dal, founded in 1923 as a front organisation that organised volunteers for picketing, enrolled new Congress members and supported civil disobedience activism, has found renewed purpose. Its cadre played a crucial role in both the Bharat Jodo Yatra and the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, prompting fond reminiscences from old-timers of the Congress's ground-level organisation back in the day.

The Seva Dal's women's wing—which was banned by the British, a ban never formally revoked after Independence—has also been revived, adding a new dimension to the party's re-engagement with its legacy. Seva Dal chief Lalji Desai told *National Herald* that the organisation's 'Ravi Milan' programme, aimed at revitalising and expanding the party's grassroots presence, has been a big success.

On the last Sunday of every month, senior members of the Seva Dal meet with new recruits across the country. "We have organised meetings in over 300 districts," he said. About the Seva Dal's 'Har Park Mein Tiranga' campaign, Lalji said: "The RSS holds *shakha*s in parks and unfurls the saffron flag; our message is clear—neither saffron nor green, only the Tricolour should be displayed in public spaces."

The eponymous Minorities Department has started outreach programmes, under the leadership of the eloquent Imran Pratapgarhi, whose rousing speeches in Parliament have made him a minor social media phenomenon.

*

For the first time in years, the party seems to be fighting back with not just slogans or nostalgia but with structure, planning and grassroots engagement. The ongoing transformation is simultaneously a reckoning with past failures, a battle plan and a blueprint for the future.

Political observers are watching the party's re-organisation moves with interest. Those who see the Congress at the nerve centre of the pushback against the BJP–Sangh's divisive politics are also keeping their fingers crossed. ■



'A new Congress'

Continued from page 1

The BJP argues that it has given representation to the OBCs, that the prime minister and several Union ministers and chief ministers are OBCs…

What kind of logic is that? If a person occupies a high position or is made a minister, does the backwardness of his or her caste and community go away? The progress of an individual does not determine the progress of the community. There is a difference between the two.

Do ministers in Modi's cabinet have the autonomy to take decisions? Does the highest Constitutional authority have the autonomy to turn down misplaced, poorly drafted, harmful laws?

There is a feeling among Congress workers that OBCs, despite being the largest caste group, still do not have enough representation. What would you tell them?

We do have to bring OBCs into the party, but a more urgent aim is to uplift the poorest of the poor in the country, irrespective of their caste. In the Congress, we do not formulate policies with caste in mind. Yes, those who are left behind have to be given representation but, to give you an example, when Indira Gandhi went for land reform, when she nationalised the banks, was it for any one caste? It wasn't directed at only OBCs, or only upper castes, or only Dalits; everyone benefited. We want people of every caste to rise, that is why we are trying to induct the backward and extremely backward people into the party and give them responsibilities.

Would you agree the BJP finds it easier to influence and attract the youth than the Congress?

How long can you divert them with a religious frenzy? There are no jobs. Education and healthcare are becoming more expensive. Household income is affected by inflation. Savings are at an all-time low. These are not ideal conditions for the youth. More and more young people are now sensing that they have been used—as tools to spread hatred. I can assure you that the youth are with us.

Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra from Kanyakumari to Kashmir and Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra from Manipur to Mumbai did connect the party with the youth. We are confident they will connect with us, as they see how Rahul [Gandhi] is becoming their true voice, as they see for themselves the party's efforts to address their issues.

How do you assess Prime Minister Modi?

Modi*ji* was chief minister of Gujarat for more than 13 years. He has been prime minister for the past 11 years—a total of almost 24 years. In 24 years, he has not been able to improve even his own state. Gujarat is a laggard on social indicators. The number of illegal immigrants from Gujarat, as you know, is high. Nobody reports it but drug addiction and alcoholism (in a state where liquor is prohibited) is of serious concern. In tribal areas, people do not have water to drink and unemployment is rampant. Dalits are exploited, but there is no one to speak up for them.

If he can't even manage his own state, how can he be expected to manage the country? Fiery and venomous speeches do not feed the hungry. ■

STATES 360°  BIHAR

In Bihar, it's the 'INDIA bloc'



Vishwadeepak

There is both unity and clarity in the INDIA bloc, asserted Krishna Allavaru in Patna on 17 April. Allavaru was addressing the media along with Tejashwi Yadav and other state leaders of the INDIA bloc, featuring for the purposes of Bihar, the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), Congress, the Left parties—including the CPI(ML), CPI(M) and CPI—and the Vikassheel Insaan Party (VIP) led by Mukesh Sahani.

The meeting resolved that Tejashwi Yadav of the RJD would head the coordination committee, which will oversee all other committees including the campaign committee and those dealing with publicity and social media. Some observers remarked on a seemingly deliberate preference for the use of 'INDIA bloc' to refer to the Opposition alliance. If indeed the leaders were being careful to not use Bihar's default appellation '*mahagathbandhan*', it was possibly to keep the national alliance against the BJP in the frame even while focusing on a common minimum programme and a coordinated campaign strategy for Bihar under Tejashwi Yadav's leadership.

Allavaru also took a dig at the NDA, pointing out the confusion in their ranks—while the Haryana chief minister has publicly said the NDA's face in Bihar would be Samrat Chaudhary of the BJP, Union home minister Amit Shah still insists it will be Nitish Kumar of the JD(U) even as Prime Minister Modi claims he will be the face of the NDA in the state. When reporters pressed to know if the INDIA bloc had finalised its 'CM face', Allavaru quipped: "Please go and put the question to them."

Caste outreach

Bihar has seen a flurry of the 'Samvidhan Bachao Sammelan' meetings over the past few months, in a clear indication that the Congress is keen to be counted again in the state.

While each of these events was addressed by Rahul Gandhi, the focus significantly has been on specific caste groups at each event—important in a state where caste coalitions can swing elections. The last such event was focused on the Nonia and Kumhar castes. While the base notes of these Sammelans draw attention to the BJP's many assaults on the Indian Constitution, they also serve to heighten awareness about the caste groups. The last such Sammelan, for example, highlighted the contributions of Budhu Nonia and Ramchandra Vidyarthi—two practically forgotten icons of the freedom movement. Manjeet Sahu, one of the organisers, said the Congress aims to unify Extremely Backward Castes (EBCs) and Dalits, who together make up nearly 48 per cent of the population of the state.

"All three Samvidhan Sammelans held so far in Bihar have centred on the upliftment of OBCs, EBCs and Dalits," Sahu noted. "The Congress does not just speak of social justice—it practises it."

Dalit leader Rajesh Ram's appointment as the president of the state unit is seen as part of this outreach. All Congress front organisations have been revamped in the state, and most are headed by Dalit and OBC (especially Yadav) leaders.

The Nonias, historically linked to the salt trade, played a key role in the freedom movement. Despite their heroic past, they have remained at the bottom of the state's social ladder. Officially classified as EBC (Extremely Backward Class), they still face discrimination and are often treated as 'untouchables'. In a symbolic gesture of recognition, the Congress recently appointed a district president from the Nonia community.

The Sammelan also paid tribute to Ramchandra Vidyarthi, who was martyred during the Quit India Movement. On 9 August 1942, he hoisted the Indian tricolour at the Deoria court and was shot by the British forces. The party also remembered Babu Jagjivan Ram, one of India's tallest Dalit leaders and a key member of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's cabinet.

The focused outreach has drawn the attention of political observers, who see this as a serious attempt by the Congress to identify with these backward communities and position itself as the party that speaks for them and their aspirations.

All Congress front organisations have been revamped in the state, and most are headed by Dalit and OBC leaders

Season of new parties

With assembly elections just months away, new political parties are springing up in Bihar every few weeks leaving observers both amused and puzzled. With elections round the corner, the Plurals Party of Pushpam Priya Choudhary, an alumna of the London School of Economics, has popped up again. Nitish Kumar's former aide and retired IAS officer R.C.P. Singh has floated 'Aap Sabki Awaaz', while Shivdeep Lande, a former IPS officer, has launched the 'Hind Sena'.

The latest to enter the field is 'Indian Inquilab Party', floated by the scheduled caste community that goes by the name of 'Paan samaj'. They took everyone by surprise by holding a large and impressive rally at Patna's historic Gandhi Maidan.

What explains this sudden rash of new parties? Do these late entrants see space in an already crowded political field? Or are they opportunistic ventures to create both pressure and confusion and possibly jostle for bargains later? ■

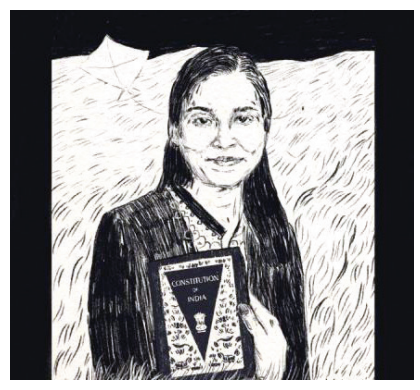
'Is this what justice looks like?' asks Gulfisha Fatima

Yogendra Yadav

Picture this: you're sitting at home when the police barge in and arrest you. You ask, "What have I done?" They rattle off charges, each one more grave than the other. You're stunned. It's all lies, a cooked-up story, you say… but who is listening? You're thrown behind bars. You ask, on what basis have these charges been brought against me? You hear: "Prove your innocence in court."

That strangely gives you hope. You ask, "How do I present the truth, the evidence before the court?" That'll happen once the trial begins, you're told. So, when does the trial begin? That could take years. "If the trial hasn't even begun, why am I in jail?" "That's the law. Technically, there is no bail in this offence. But if you want to get out, approach the court."

Hope flares again. You file a bail application. After months, your case finally comes up for hearing. Several appearances later, the arguments conclude. But there is no judgement for months. Meanwhile, the judge is transferred. A few months later, there is a new judge, and the whole hearing starts again. No verdict again. Another new judge. More dates, more delays.



Illustrator: ***Pariplab Chakraborty*** *courtesy:* ***The Wire***

After spending years like this, what would you make of words like 'law', 'justice', 'Constitution'? And what of those eloquent weekend speeches of our learned judges? Ask Gulfisha Fatima, or Khalid Saifi, or Umar Khalid. This isn't an imaginary nightmare scenario; it's the real story of dozens of activists jailed after the Delhi riots of 2020.

Our senior judges like to wax eloquent on constitutional values and human rights. The Supreme Court directs that bail pleas must be heard swiftly—and no matter what, a decision taken within two weeks. Yet, right under its nose, these activists have no decision on their bail applications—not in two weeks, not in two months, not even in two years. Their crime? That they are Muslim and they protested—peacefully, democratically—against a law.

The story of Gulfisha Fatima will go down in the annals of India's judicial history. After graduating from Delhi University and following it up with an MBA, Gulfisha became a radio jockey. She joined the protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), participating in a sit-in at Seelampur, inspired by the Shaheen Bagh protests. She was neither involved in nor accused of any act of violence. But in the crackdown on CAA protestors after the Delhi riots, Gulfisha too was picked up—on 9 April 2020. There was no straightforward case of rioting or vandalism against her, so the police booked her on the charge of being part of a secret conspiracy behind the riots—and to ensure she wouldn't get bail easily, they levelled charges under the draconian UAPA (Unlawful Activities Prevention Act).

Thus began a long, bruising court battle. A full year after her arrest, she applied for bail in a lower court. After several months, in March 2022, her application was rejected. At least that judge delivered a verdict, even if it was negative. But when she went to the high court, even that didn't happen. Her appeal was filed in May 2022. It finally came up for hearing in January 2023. The hearing concluded in a month, but there was no decision.

Meanwhile, three other activists arrested in similar circumstances—Natasha Narwal, Devangana Kalita and Asif Iqbal Tanha—did get bail from the same high court. Based on this, Gulfisha filed a fresh bail application in May 2023. But still no judgement, nor a fresh hearing. Coincidentally, in October, the presiding judge was transferred—and left without pronouncing a verdict.

So the case started all over again, with a new bench. More delays. Finally, the matter came up in March 2024. The hearing wrapped up in a day—as it should have. But again, no verdict. As luck would have it, this judge too was transferred in July. Another new bench, another hearing. Exhausted, Gulfisha turned to the Supreme Court.

By another strange coincidence, all these cases seem to land before a particular judge in the Supreme Court, who tends to give a particular kind of ruling. Despite the unconscionable delay in bail proceedings, the Supreme Court sent Gulfisha right back to the same high court that had driven her to approach the Supreme Court in the first place. Yes, the apex court did instruct that the hearing be expedited, but since November 2024, three benches of the Delhi High Court have heard her case. It's been five years now.

Do not make the mistake of thinking this is just a tragic symptom of the Indian justice system—that Gulfisha's case is no different from everyone else's. Sure, judicial delays are not new, but in cases where the government has a particular interest, it is extraordinary to not have a decision even on a bail plea. All this is happening in a country where the Supreme Court opens on a Saturday to grant bail to Arnab Goswami. Where the son of former minister Ajay Mishra Teni—accused of mowing down farmers—gets bail. Where a rape accused is released because maybe the girl was careless. Where convicted rapist and murderer Ram Rahim keeps getting parole after parole. But Gulfisha Fatima, Khalid Saifi, Sharjeel Imam and Umar Khalid? They are condemned to remain behind bars.

Is this justice? Maybe not today, but some day, history will ask this question of India's judicial system. And on that day, Lady Justice will hang her head in shame. ■

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Opening the doors to the political realm

*Applications have begun pouring in for the **Dr. Manmohan Singh Fellowship Programme**, recently launched by the All India Professionals' Congress. In a country where there is little to no institutional support for newcomers to enter politics, initiatives like this carry considerable promise.* **Herjinder** *spoke with* **Praveen Chakravarty**, *chairman of the All India Professionals' Congress, about the vision behind the fellowship and the potential it holds for Indian politics in general and for the Congress party, in particular. Excerpts from the conversation:*

How did the idea for the Manmohan Singh Fellowship come about?

Dr. Manmohan Singh was my mentor. I worked closely with him for over a decade. In 2018, Rahul Gandhi invited me to join the Congress, despite my lack of political background or lineage. With two decades in the private sector, I never imagined I would hold a significant role in a national political party like the Congress.

It made me reflect on how Dr. Singh himself entered politics—through merit and expertise. That led to the idea: why not create a platform in his name, one that allows professionals to enter politics through a lateral route?

To begin with, I needed the family's permission to use Dr. Singh's name. I reached out to his wife and two daughters. They were very supportive and graciously gave their consent, believing it to be a meaningful and timely initiative.

Was the Congress party already prepared for this initiative, or did you have to convince them?

I took the idea to them and laid out the entire structure and vision of the programme. The Congress is often referred to as an 'umbrella party'—a space that welcomes a wide spectrum of people and perspectives. I explained that this fellowship would reflect that spirit, by opening the doors of politics to individuals from diverse walks of life. The party was fully supportive.

Are you looking to attract professionals from specific sectors, or is it open to all?

This isn't an entry-level programme for fresh graduates. We're looking for seasoned professionals—whether from the private sector, public service, sports or other fields—who've spent 10 to 15 years in their careers and are now making a conscious decision to transition into public life. This isn't a short-term internship—it's a long-term commitment to politics and public service.

There are no rigid educational qualifications. What matters is your intent: if you want to serve the country through politics, and you believe in the values of social justice, secularism and inclusive politics, you're welcome—regardless of your professional background.

Will selection be based purely on merit, or will social diversity also play a role?

When we announced the fellowship, the panel reflected our commitment to diversity—K. Raju, an IAS officer and chairperson of our Dalit wing; Pawan Khera, a professional from the north, while I'm from the south. The list of mentors includes people from varied regions, communities, professions. The Congress party has always stood for inclusivity and this fellowship will uphold that legacy. We're looking for capable individuals, but we also want to ensure that the diversity of Indian society is genuinely represented.

Most political parties don't have an institutional set-up for new entrants. Are you aiming to build one?

Yes, that's precisely the idea. My own experience showed me how difficult it can be to enter politics. Dr. Manmohan Singh often told me: people like us, who come from professional backgrounds, face many hurdles because there's no system in place.

I was fortunate. Rahul Gandhi gave me an opportunity. Not everyone has that kind of access. That's why I felt there must be a formal, institutional structure that doesn't rely on personal connections or chance, but functions systematically.

Do you have a way to measure the success of the Fellows?

Yes. Their success will be reflected in the success of the party. Their mentors will provide detailed feedback. The senior members they work with will contribute evaluations. The programme aims to establish a new culture within political training—one that emphasises accountability and responsibility. It's not about being a protégé of a particular leader; it's about commitment, performance and contribution to public service.

How will the Fellows grow through this programme?

In the first year, they will undergo structured training and be attached to senior leaders to gain hands-on experience. For example, someone working with me will be involved in the activities of the Professionals' Congress. If attached to K. Raju, they could work on ground-level political engagement in Jharkhand. Someone working with Pawan Khera would understand the party's communications strategy.

Will they be mentored by senior party leaders?

Absolutely. That's an essential part of the programme. They will learn directly from experienced leaders by working alongside them on real political challenges.

There are different types of pressure groups and factions in every political party. Will these Fellows eventually become part of one faction or the other?

No. That is exactly why I want us to create a different kind of culture. If we succeed, if we can show that working outside factional lines leads to better outcomes, then hopefully, others in the party will be inspired to follow suit.

Transitioning from a professional or corporate career to a political one can be difficult. What challenges do you face personally?

The biggest challenge is cultural. I was a managing director with major banks for over two decades. The work culture there is very different. In the private sector, people move as a team, aligned towards one goal. That doesn't always happen in politics.

Earlier, I used to think—if I'm doing good work, why are some people still opposing it? I didn't understand. But now I do. Politics works differently.

Can you give an example of how the culture in politics is different from that in the corporate world?

Sure. Suppose three people are hoping to get a party ticket for a Lok Sabha or vidhan sabha seat. Only one gets it. You'd think the other two would support the chosen candidate for the sake of the party—but often, they end up working to ensure that the candidate loses. In politics, someone can give a big speech, create a buzz and then move on. In corporate life, that doesn't work. You can't just make a presentation and leave—you're expected to deliver results. The entire system is result-oriented. Politics doesn't always demand that.



Do you believe that future political leaders will emerge through a process similar to the one you've just begun?

No, I wouldn't say they will emerge from the same process. I'm not saying that professionalism is superior—not at all—but I do believe that there's some merit in this approach. Professionals should have a space in future leadership, and that's why I see this as a parallel process, not a replacement.

Professionals have entered politics before—Manmohan Singh, for example. Even Rajesh Pilot.

Yes, Manmohan Singh is a very good example—that's one reason why this fellowship is named after him. But he's just one prominent case. There are others, but they're exceptions, not the rule. We're trying to create a more structured path for professionals who are serious about public life.

There are other fellowships such as the Nehru Fellowship by Inclusive Minds, or Ashoka University's Young India Fellowship which includes politics and community work. How is yours different from those?

In many of those programmes, young students go through a year of training, receive a stipend and leave with a certificate. That's good, but ours is not for students looking for exposure. It's for mature individuals. A serious programme for serious professionals who are genuinely committed to public service. ■

Entrepreneurship is a different ballgame

Aakar Patel on India's business predicament and the secret of China's ability to stand up to the United States

Commerce ministries around the world are, according to Donald Trump, lining up to plead their case with the United States. Is India among them? Apparently not.

A headline last weekend quoted commerce minister Piyush Goyal saying: "We don't negotiate at gunpoint." I agree, this is the right way; sovereign nations should insist they are treated as equals, not as vassals.

China has retaliated firmly, in a way that only Canada has so far, but in the absence of clarity from the Americans on what their endgame is, waiting is also an appropriate response.

However, there was something else Goyal said—only somewhat related to this—that got him into trouble. He said Indian new businesses were focused on trade—though '*dukandari*' was the word he used—rather than innovation.

He compared the situation here to that in China, where start-ups were working in robotics, advanced manufacturing and artificial intelligence. Goyal received pushback from entrepreneurs, who pointed out that many fledgling firms in India were doing exactly the sort of work he said they 'should' be doing.

The history of business in India will show that the mercantile communities were primarily traders and bankers until the 20th century. The Birlas forayed into manufacturing in 1919, Tata Steel came up in 1907.

A business history of trading rather than manufacture—and its extension to things such as delivery apps—was likely what Goyal was referring to. Again, I agree with his broad point. The question, though, is: what would it take for India's start-ups to look more like China's? It is right to put that question to businesses. It is equally right to ask it of the government.

How did China get to where it is? An analysis from last year framed the reality thus: 'China is now the world's sole manufacturing superpower. Its production exceeds that of the nine next largest manufacturers combined.' A lot of this is down to what the *government* did, through industrial policy and statecraft.

Photos: **Getty Images**





(Top) **China's production exceeds that of the nine next largest manufacturers combined;** (above) **can Indian start-ups like Ola Electric compete with China?**

China established relations with mineral-rich nations in Africa and Latin America and set up ports and railway lines in many of these nations. Its public sector companies, owned by the government, built its own commercial ships and airplanes so it would not be dependent on anyone else.

China managed to convince all its neighbours, including those it had fought wars with and those it has ongoing disputes with, to not let these issues get in the way of trading. China's largest trading partner is not the United States or even the European Union but the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), many of whom China has serious disputes with.

Against the US's military alliances such as NATO (the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation), AUKUS (Australia, United Kingdom, United States), Quad and so on, China set up a developmental alliance strategy through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). While engaging with western criticism of the BRI, we should also examine what nations participating in it say and think of China.



Commerce minister Piyush Goyal

The Chinese government's interventions are precisely the reason why the country is where it is and why its entrepreneurs have been able to shine

Now consider that the whole world has been worrying about climate change for decades, but the Chinese government built an industrial strategy to not just tackle the problem but also take advantage of it.

Having concluded that its automobile sector could not compete against the experience of Japanese and German firms and the patents they held in internal combustion engines, China decided to focus on electric cars. It produced 0.5 million new energy vehicles in 2016, 1 million in 2018 and 10 million in 2024. It exported 5.8 million of those 10 million cars—almost 60 per cent—last year.

Solar panels tell a similar story. Here too, China's government looked into the future and saw opportunity. Today, it produces more than 80 per cent of the solar cells used around the world and two-thirds of the planet's EV (electric vehicle) batteries.

The world's biggest supply chains—from mining to refining to manufacturing and assembly—run through China. It is dominant to the point of being a monopoly in entire sectors, particularly those that will be more important in future.

It is true that Chinese entrepreneurs have done remarkable things, as we have seen most recently with DeepSeek. It is also true that their success in areas considered America's domain—such as social media and retail—can be seen in the popularity of TikTok, Shein and Temu in America.

It is the Chinese government that organised the strategy and industrial policy that produced these wins. This is the opposite of what is generally understood to be liberalisation, where the State largely does not intervene in the economy. But the Chinese government's interventions are precisely the reason why the country is where it is and why its entrepreneurs have been able to shine.

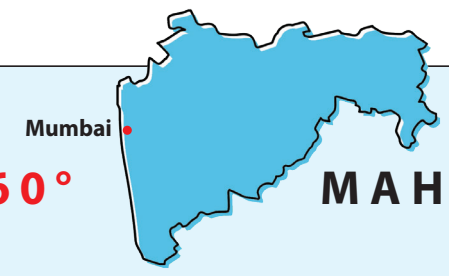
This is the reason US stock and bond markets react violently to the impact of tariffs on only one nation in this war that Trump has started—and that nation is China.

China has the confidence to stand up to the US because it knows that what it has built through strategic planning and hard work is difficult to replicate. Just as it knows that the world will continue to depend on it irrespective of the 'decoupling' fantasies of the people currently governing America. ■

Views are personal

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STATES 360° MAHARASHTRA



Supreme Court sets the record straight on Urdu



Navin Kumar

The signboard on a new building at Patur (Akola district) displayed 'Municipal Council, Patur' in Marathi on top and in Urdu below. Patur municipal council area had a population of just 21,000 in the 2011 census, more than half of whom were Muslims. Yet, unhappy at the use of Urdu, a former council member Varshatai Sanjay Bagade first approached the district collector, stating that only Marathi should be used in the state for official purposes. The collector ruled in her favour but the council appealed to the divisional commissioner who turned down the collector's ruling.

That was in 2020. Since then, an "aggrieved" Varshatai Sanjay Bagade twice approached the Bombay High Court and twice the Supreme Court to get the Urdu display dropped from the signboard. The Supreme Court finally brought down the curtain on this bizarre case on 15 April 2025. A bench of Justices Sudhangshu Dhulia and K. Vinod Chandran held that the display of an additional language did not violate any law and there was no prohibition on the use of Urdu. The purpose of any language, including Urdu, was 'effective communication', and 'there should not be any objection if Urdu is used in addition to the official language i.e. Marathi, at least on the signboard of the Municipal Council', the bench held.

In the judgement, Justice Dhulia, who is due to retire in August, said it was important to dwell at some length on the language issue because the petitioner, a former member of the municipal council, had taken great pains to move the High Court and Supreme Court twice each; and also because many others too may subscribe to the petitioner's argument.

'Urdu is a language born in this land, which developed and flourished in India, attained greater refinement and became the language of choice for several acclaimed poets,' the judgement went on to record.

'It would not be incorrect to say that one cannot have a day-to-day conversation in Hindi without using Urdu words or words derived from Urdu (pointing out that the word vakalatnama used in Indian courts is an Urdu word). The word 'Hindi' itself comes from the Persian word 'Hindvi',' the order noted.

According to linguists and literary scholars, Urdu and Hindi are not two languages, but one language. The judgement quotes noted Urdu scholar Gyan Chand Jain, who wrote in 1974, 'It is absolutely clear that Urdu and Hindi are not two separate languages. To call them two languages is to belie all principles of linguistics and to deceive oneself and others… even though Urdu literature and Hindi literature are different and independent literatures, Urdu and Hindi are not two different languages… enumerating Urdu and Hindi as two languages, in the Indian Constitution, is political expediency, not a linguistic reality.'

The judgement moved poet and author Javed Akhtar to post, 'In 1798 an Islamic scholar Shah Ubdul Qadir translated Quran for the first time in Urdu. Almost all the muftis and qazis of that time gave fatwas against him for daring to translate the holy book in such s heathen language like Urdu. After many years, Jinnah, who could not speak Urdu to even save his life, declared Urdu to be the language of Muslims. What actually surprises me is that there are still so many people who seem to believe Jinnah.'

"Enumerating Urdu and Hindi as two languages, in the Indian Constitution, is political expediency, not a linguistic reality"

Caste is fine, just not in films

Anant Mahadevan's Hindi film *Phule*, a biopic on reformer couple Jyotiba and Savitribai Phule, was due for release on Jyotiba Phule's 197th birth anniversary on 11 April. Despite a 'U' certificate granted by the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC), the release was held back following protests by Brahmins in Maharashtra.

The film, complained Anand Dave, president of the Brahmin Mahasangh, is designed to promote 'casteism'. Even the censor board has reportedly requested the filmmakers to drop a few dialogues, voice overs and words like Mahar, Mang, Peshwai and Manu's system. Brahmin boys throwing cow dung balls at Savitribai in the film is fine but the scene in which a Dalit man walks with brooms tied to his back is not.

Mahadevan, a Brahmin himself, cannot believe what is happening; this is not the first film made on the couple who inspired B.R. Ambedkar. It was Savitribai who is said to have coined the word Dalit to replace the erstwhile usage the Shudra. Mahadevan is bewildered because Brahmins in or outside Maharashtra had not objected to any of the earlier films on the couple. He sees it as the expression of a different, more intolerant and more strident generation. Times have changed.

As far back as in 1954, Marathi litterateur Prahlad Keshav Atre made a Marathi film on Mahatma Phule, which received the National Award (Silver Medal) for the Best Marathi Feature Film. B.R. Ambedkar wrote the screenplay. A biopic in Kannada was released in 2018. A series called *Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule* was aired on *DD National*.

The film *Satyashodhak* directed by Nilesh Raosaheb Jamalkar was released just last year in January 2024. There were no protests by Brahmins.

Two explanations have been offered for the recent protests. With Dalits' renewed assertion of their rights and place in society, with demand for a caste census gaining ground and protests against Dalit atrocities and discrimination, there is a new edge to discourses on caste. The pushback from Brahmin organisations could be an expression of their anxiety or insecurity is one explanation. The other explanation is that Brahmins find the present political climate and culture more conducive for their belligerent stand.

Raju Parulekar, political analyst, author and Marathi TV personality, believes the pushback to be a kind of state-sponsored terrorism against the history of Bahujans. Social reforms initiated by Jyotiba and Savitribai Phule, he says, benefitted Brahmin women and widows alike. Brahmin women, he feels, actually benefitted the most from the work of the couple and Fatima Sheikh. Brahmin male mentality, however, is narrow, casteist and steeped in arrogance.

Writer Darab Farooqui and a few others have named censor board chairman Prasoon Joshi and others who supported the demand for changes in the film. They include Vidya Balan, Vivek Agnihotri, Vaman Kedre, Mihir Bhutia, Ramesh Patange, Gautami Tadimalla, Vani Tripathi Tiku, Jeevitha Rajasekhar and Naresh Chandra Lal. Almost all of them, they point out, are Brahmins.

Rahul Gandhi reacted to the protests and alleged that BJP and RSS wanted to erase Dalit-Bahujan history at every step. Writer and academic Kancha Ilaiah asked, "How can CBFC ask to remove caste-related references from the film when Mahatma Phule's struggle was against caste and the inhuman practices of the Brahmin communities of the time?" Shiv Sena (UBT) mouthpiece *Saamana* in an editorial titled 'Phule vs Fadnavis', questioned the chief minister's silence.

Fadnavis had freely commented on films like *Kashmir Files, Kerala Story, Tashkent Files* and *Chhava,* and exhorted people to watch them. Why is he quiet now? Is it not his job to rein in the Brahmin busybodies issuing threats against the film, it asked.

"How can CBFC ask to remove caste-related references from the film when Mahatma Phule's struggle was against caste and the inhuman practices of Brahmins of the time?"



The CBFC has also demanded cuts in the Marathi film *Chal Halla Bol*, a biopic on Namdeo Dhasal (1949–2014), Dalit poet, writer, activist and founder of the Dalit Panther movement. The board demanded that the film drop Dhasal's poem '*Rakta Petlela Aganit Suryano Ko'* (Innumerable Suns Burning in Blood). Mahesh Bansode, the producer, says he is not ready to drop it and points out that it was this poem that earned Dhasal the Padma Shri in 1999. He also points out that the film was primarily crowdfunded and was screened at 252 film festivals in India and abroad, winning 32 awards. The demand to drop the poem makes no sense, he says adding that today's youth need to be told Dhasal's story and that is what the film aims to do.

There is also simmering resentment over reports that a board official had apparently asked, "Who is Namdeo Dhasal?", exhibiting his ignorance that Dhasal was not just a Padma Shri awardee but also recipient of awards from the Sahitya Akademi. He had received the Maharashtra State Award for Literature four times. A google search would have saved the official the blushes.

Incensed over the deemed insult, a group in Pune organised a poetry recital and called the event 'Namdev, Tujhe Baap' (Namdev, Your Father).



Maha betrayal by Mahayuti?

In the latest twist in the Mukhya Mantri Majhi Ladki Bahin Yojana launched before the assembly election last year, the Maharashtra government has slashed the monthly payout from Rs 1,500 to Rs 500 for 8 lakh women who are also receiving Rs 1,000 per month under the Namo Shetkari Mahasanman Nidhi scheme. The reduction is part of the ongoing scrutiny to ensure the scheme is limited to those who meet the eligibility criteria and do not receive a cash transfer of more than Rs 1,500 a month from the government.

The cash transfer was offered to all women aged between 18 and 65, who were domiciled in the state and had an annual family income of less than Rs 2.5 lakh. Families with a government employee or a four-wheeler vehicle were not eligible.

The government had received about 2.63 crore applications for the scheme and after verification, this figure dropped by 11 lakh to 2.52 crore by February 2025 with 2.46 crore beneficiaries receiving the payout in February and March, according to media reports.

No screening was done before the election and the question is why. With digital transactions and the Aadhaar database, it would have taken the government no time to find the unique beneficiaries. ■

Governors must know their place

Sanjay Hegde

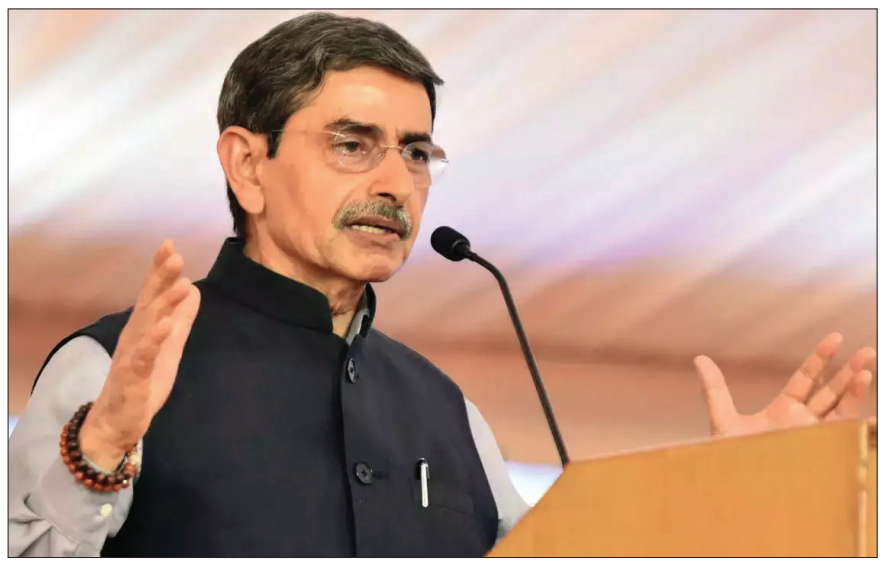
In a much needed and clear-headed judgement, the Supreme Court has reminded Governors across India of a basic fact: they are not political gatekeepers. They are constitutional functionaries. And when they forget this, the Court will step in—as it did in *State of Tamil Nadu v. Governor of Tamil Nadu*.

At the centre of the case was Tamil Nadu governor R.N. Ravi, whose tenure has been marked by political friction, constitutional brinkmanship and a blatant disregard for democratic norms. That's not a partisan statement—it's what the record shows.

A pattern of obstruction

R.N. Ravi has made a habit of undermining the elected government in Tamil Nadu. He has refused to read full speeches prepared by the state government in the assembly. He has publicly dismissed the Dravidian model—a policy vision endorsed by Tamil Nadu's voters—as 'anti-national'. And more troublingly, he sat on bills for months, even years, without explanation.

One such bill was aimed at regulating online gambling—something Ravi himself claimed to support. Yet when it came back to him after being re-passed by the legislature, he escalated the matter to the President instead of giving his assent. It was a move that served no purpose other than delaying the bill.



Tamil Nadu governor R.N. Ravi

The principle of 'reasonable time' is baked into the Constitution. Delaying governance is not a constitutional right; it's a dereliction of duty

Let's call it what it was: a political manoeuvre in constitutional clothing.

The Supreme Court steps in

The Supreme Court was unambiguous. Governors are not allowed to drag their feet to stall the will of elected governments. The Constitution allows them to return a bill once for reconsideration or to reserve it for the President. That's it. What it does not allow is indefinite delay—a silent veto by inaction.

Critics of the judgement claim the apex court overreached, especially by insisting on timelines. But this isn't judicial invention. The principle of 'reasonable time' is baked into the Constitution. A governor cannot take years to do something that should take weeks. Delaying governance is not a constitutional right; it's a dereliction of duty.

Others claim this weakens the President's powers. That's the wrong frame. The court's ruling actually brings the states and Centre into better constitutional alignment. When Parliament re-passes a bill, the President must assent. The same now applies to states; Governors who don't like the ruling party have no special veto powers.

And those upset about the use of Article 142? They miss the point. When a constitutional office-bearer refuses to do their job, the court has a duty to step in. Article 142 is not judicial overreach—it's a constitutional safety net.

A signal to other governors

R.N. Ravi may have been the focus of this case, but the judgment sends a message well beyond Tamil Nadu. Governors in Kerala, Punjab and elsewhere should take heed: partisan posturing has no place in a constitutional office.

The Supreme Court has reaffirmed a crucial principle—India's democracy is powered by its legislatures, not its governors. When unelected officials stand in the way of elected governments, they betray the very spirit of federalism.

The bottom line

This isn't about one Governor or one party. It's about restoring balance to a system that has tilted too far in favour of political appointees wearing constitutional robes. The Supreme Court has drawn the line. Ravi crossed it. The Court pushed back. And democracy is better for it. ■

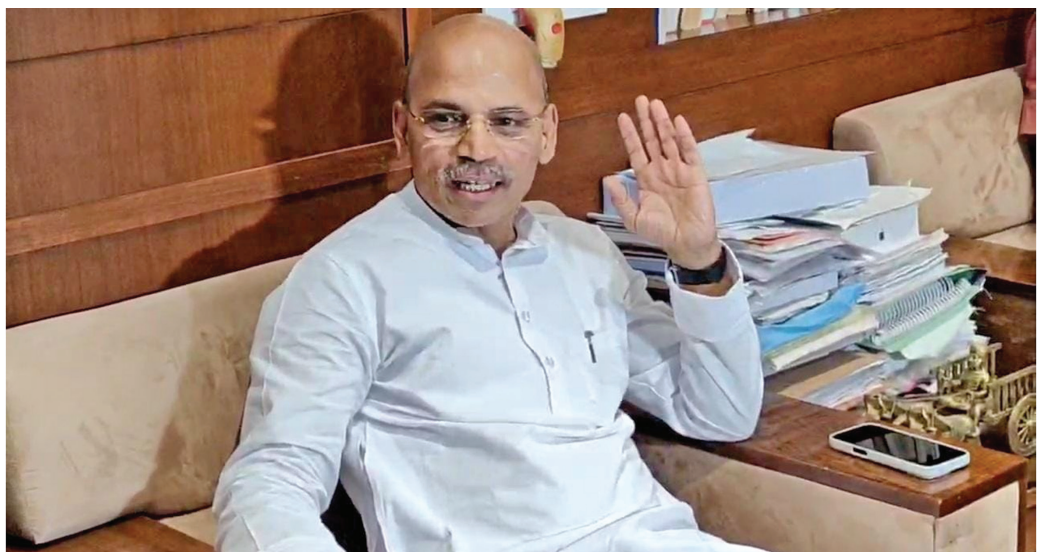
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Karnataka govt steps upto protect senior citizen rights

Minister calls for cancelling wills, property transfers if children abandon parents in government hospitals

After observing a disturbing trend of children abandoning their parents in government hospitals after ensuring that these parents transfer the properties in their name, Karnataka government has stepped into protect these senior citizens by way invoking provisions of the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007, and cancel property transfers and cancelling wills.

Minister of Medical Education & Skill Development, Entrepreneurship and Livelihood Department, Dr Sharan Prakash Patil during one of his review meetings with various heads of government district hospitals, came across that over 150 senior citizens were deserted in just one hospital at the Belagavi Institute of Medical Sciences (BIMS) and around 100 similar cases



recorded in other medical institutions across the state

Dubbing this trend as a "shocking and inhumane", Dr Patil directed hospital authorities to take support of revenue department officials to cancel property transfer and wills in such cases to ensure that children take care of their parents.

He underlined that under the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007, parents have the legal right to cancel property transfers if their children fail to take care of them. Section 23 of the Act states that if a child takes property from a parent and later abandons them, the property can be returned to the parent by law.

"This move aims to put an end to this heartbreaking reality and hold those responsible accountable," he said in his statement.

Patil also instructed the Director of Medical Education, Dr BL Sujatha Rathod, to direct all institute heads to file complaints with the assistant commissioners.

Many abandoned parents stated that their children deserted them in hospitals, knowing they would receive food, clothing and shelter.

"While some cite economic hardships, most cases involve elderly individuals being left behind after transferring their properties to their children," the statement noted.

To support these seniors, the BIMS has arranged shelter facilities in retirement homes for at least 70 affected individuals, while others continue to reside in hospitals. The minister emphasized the need for hospitals to take an active role in reporting these cases so that appropriate legal measures can be taken.

Legal action

He pointed out that under the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007, children and relatives are legally obligated to provide financial and medical care for their elderly parents. If they fail in these duties, the law allows senior citizens to revoke property transfers made in favor of their children.

As per Section 23 of the Act, if a child abandons or neglects their parents after inheriting property, the transfer can be legally reversed, restoring ownership to the elderly individuals. Patil reiterated that many people remain unaware of this provision, and the government is committed to ensuring justice for affected senior citizens.

With approximately 5.7 million senior citizens in the state, the state government had allocated Rs 10.47 crore for the welfare of the elderly in the 2024-25 fiscal year, enabling various community-friendly programs. As many as 63 old age homes have been established statewide through self-help organizations to support weak and destitute elderly individuals and about 1,575 elderly individuals are residing in these facilities. Besides this the state government is in process to open an additional 19 old age homes,

"Anna Suvidha" scheme to be extended to senior citizens above 75 years of age from this year

With the launch of the Karnataka Anna Suvidha Scheme 2025, the Karnataka government had created a historic initiative in the state of supplying ration - rice distribution - under Anna Bhagya at their doorstep.

Last year, when this innovative scheme was launched in the State was meant only for the beneficiaries who are 90 years of age and above and from this year on wards this scheme will be extended to senior citizes above 75 years too.

Chief Minister, Siddaramaiah made this announcement during his budget speech presented on March 7, 2025.

According to him over two lakh beneficiaries have been identified under this scheme. "This service will be extended to include households with only senior citizens above 75 years of age in the present year. 3.30 lakh beneficiaries will benefit from this initiative," he explained.

He stated that individuals who wanted to receive their rations at home would have to apply for the scheme.

Karnataka Anna Suvidha Scheme

The primary objective of the Karnataka Anna Suvidha Scheme is to provide ease and comfort to the elder citizens of the state. The scheme was launched by the government for the delivery of monthly Ration at the doorsteps of the elder citizens. To ensure that people 90 years of age and older do not go without rice because they are unable to get affordable prices stores. The government has currently suggested delivering rice right to their doorsteps. The program may, if necessary, be expanded to include additional beneficiaries, such as people with physical disabilities. This scheme is a very wise and kind initiative launched by the government of Karnataka. It will help the citizens a lot.

Key highlights of the Karnataka Anna Suvidha Scheme

- Application mode - offline
- Eligibility Criteria
- The applicant should be a resident of Karnataka
- The applicant must be holding a government Ration Card
- The applicant must be of 75 years of age or above

Benefits of the Karnataka Anna Suvidha Scheme

- The Karnataka Anna Suvidha Scheme was launched by the Karnataka government to help its citizens who are having financial difficulties.
- This program was started by the government to make life easier for the state's elderly and impoverished residents.
- Any state resident with a ration card can fill out the application and benefit from the Scheme.
- The selected candidates will receive their rations at their residences from the state authorities.
- With the help of this program, the applicants can receive a ration at home and save a substantial amount of time.
- A valid Karnataka state-issued ration card is required for applicants to be eligible for benefits under the Karnataka Anna Suvidha Scheme.

The government introduced a program to provide monthly Senior citizens' rations delivered right to their doors, to guarantee that individuals who are 75 years of age or older do not go without rice due to a lack of access to reasonably priced stores.

Right now, the government is proposing to deliver rice to their doorsteps. The Karnataka government has launched this scheme, which is a very kind and intelligent initiative. It will greatly benefit the citizens.

Required Documents for Anna Suvidha

- Aadhar card
- pan card
- Ration card
- Age proof
- Income proof
- Residence proof
- Date of Announcement

FAQs

What is the Karnataka Anna Suvidha Scheme?

An innovative scheme in the State is for the beneficiaries who are 90 years of age and above. They will soon receive rice distribution under Anna Bhagya at their doorstep, according to the Minister for Food and Civil Supplies.

Who is eligible for this scheme?

The applicant should be a resident of Karnataka. The applicant must be holding a government Ration Card. An applicant must be of 90 years of age or above

When and who launched this scheme?

The budget for 2024–2025 was presented by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on February 16.



Karnataka formulated senior citizen policy way back in 2003 to ensure better quality life

The Government of Karnataka led by the Congress party had formulated state policy for Senior citizens in 2003 with the motto of ensuring better quality of life.

Objective of the State Policy:

1. To ensure safety of Senior Citizen.
2. To protect the Senior Citizens by providing economic security, Health Care and by protecting them against exploitation and ill treatment.
3. To formulate programme for Senior Citizens in rural areas to ensure that they also get the benefits that their counter parts in Urban Areas enjoy.
4. To create opportunities for Senior Citizens to lead a productive, perusal and satisfactory life.
5. These policy intents to have an objective of creating a society which includes people of all ages.
6. The state recognizes the fact that senior citizens were also resource full person's resourceful persons and are contributing members of the society.
7. This policy has realized importance of allocating budget for the welfare of senior citizens who belong to economically weaker sections.

The State Policy with an objective of providing Health Care Services, Social Security, Housing and shelter and protection of property and life are some of the aspects are complained under this policy to be monitor implements for the State Policy.

A Task Force has been constituted under the Chairmen ship of the Chief Minister of the State.

Indira Gandhi National Old age Pension

Senior Citizens aged between 60 to 65 years are being paid Rs.600/- as old age pension every month and for senior citizen aged between above 65 are paid Rs.1000/- This scheme is being implemented by the Social Security and Pension Department.

Senior Citizen ID Cards

Senior citizens in the age 60+ were provided Identity Card through "Seva Sindhu" Portal.

Concession to Senior Citizens in Bus pass

The Senior Citizens who have obtained identity cards, voter ID, driving license are eligible to avail 25% concession in KSRTC/BMTC Busses. Under Shakti scheme, one of the five guarntees, elderly women can travel across state freely.

Maintenance of Parents & Senior Citizens Act 2007:

Department is implementing Government of India Maintenance of Parents & Senior Citizens Act 2007 from 2008 and rules have been framed.



Maintenance Tribunals have been constituted under the chairmanship of Assistance Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner of the Districts concerned.

Maintenance of Parents and Senior Citizens Act-2007 (central Act – 2007 Rule-56) provided for Establishing Appellate Tribunals under the Act for appealing against the verdict of the Board under sub rule (1) of rule 15 of the Act. Accordingly the Government of Karnataka has established appellate tribunals in each District as per sub rule (2) Deputy Commissioner of the respective Districts are the heads of the tribunals.

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The siege of US universities

The Trump administration has declared war on dissent, demanding that universities toe the line or face drastic fund cuts, writes Ashok Swain

The US higher education system is under siege. Independent thinking in the 'land of the free…' has become a rude joke. What began as public criticism of universities over perceived ideological leanings has expanded into a broader effort to influence institutional policies and practices. The Trump administration's actions signal a shift from rhetorical opposition to universities to more structured and far-reaching measures—through legal frameworks, funding mechanisms and administrative scrutiny.

One of the most high-profile developments involves Harvard University, which is now facing an immediate freeze of over $2.2 billion in federal grants and $60 million in contracts. This action followed Harvard's rejection of a sweeping list of demands issued by the Trump administration. These demands are said to be part of a campaign to stop anti-semitism. However, they also involve major changes to how universities are run. They include requiring all departments to represent different political opinions; shutting down diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) programmes; reporting students who are seen as against American values; and, letting government-approved outsiders review university departments. Harvard president Alan Garber publicly refused the Trump administration's terms, stating that the university "will not surrender its independence or relinquish its constitutional rights."

Columbia University, also under federal pressure, had $400 million in federal funding pulled out before ultimately agreeing to comply with several of the administration's demands. These include policy changes that critics argue risk undermining academic freedom and students' rights. The Columbia case appears to have set a precedent that the federal government is now seeking to extend to other institutions.

The pressure on universities also extends to their financial structures. Prominent institutions have been warned of a possible freeze on federal funding unless they adhere to specific administrative expectations. Despite their large endowments—Harvard's reportedly exceeds $53 billion—university leaders have generally been cautious in their response. They cite the long-term constraints tied to endowment funds and the necessity of financial prudence. However, this caution is being seen as a sign of institutional risk aversion and an overreliance on financial metrics in defining success.

International students are emerging as particularly vulnerable within this changing environment. For instance, an Indian PhD student at Columbia University left the US for Canada after her visa was revoked following her participation in campus protests in support of Palestine. Mohsen Mahdawi, a Palestinian student holding a US green card, was detained by immigration officials in Vermont after attending a citizenship interview. These actions are not isolated.

Other cases echo these concerns. A Turkish doctoral student at Tufts reportedly lost her visa and was detained after co-authoring an article critical of US foreign policy. At Stony Brook University, at least 11 international students have had their visas revoked, although the university has not clarified whether being "involved" in protest was a factor. Data from Inside Higher Ed suggests that over 600 international student visas have been cancelled by the Trump administration so far. These developments appear to have a chilling effect on free expression, particularly among non-citizen students.

Faculty members also report feeling heightened pressure to self-censor. There is evidence of curriculums being revised to avoid controversial subjects, and some DEI initiatives have been dismantled under increased scrutiny. Rather than encouraging academic inquiry, some universities are preemptively altering programs to minimise perceived risk from federal intervention.

Scientific research in areas such as climate change, reproductive health and racial justice is being subjected to closer ideological vetting. Proposals are increasingly evaluated not only on scholarly merit but also for their alignment with broader political narratives. There are instances where peer review processes have been bypassed or influenced, and scholars working on politically sensitive topics have reportedly been removed from projects or denied funding renewals with limited explanation.

Government-affiliated institutions that historically supported global dialogue and conflict resolution have also been impacted. The United States Institute of Peace, which Congress established to promote international conflict resolution, has faced significant staff reductions. Similarly, the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, a long-standing policy research hub, was closed through an executive order. These closures suggest a narrowing of the space available for policy scholarship and intellectual exchange.



Photo: Getty Images

Protesters in Massachusetts urge Harvard to resist the Trump administration's bullying sanctions

Faculty members also report feeling heightened pressure to self-censor. There is evidence of curriculums being revised to avoid controversial subjects

These domestic shifts are having international consequences. The US has traditionally been a global leader in academic freedom and higher education. However, foreign governments are now cautioning students about studying in the US, and some international collaborations are being delayed or suspended. As perceptions change, the US university system may lose some of its appeal as a destination for international scholars and students.

The potential implications extend well beyond individual campuses. If the United States—long admired for its academic openness—begins imposing restrictions based on political considerations, it may set a precedent that other governments around the world could follow. For countries with weaker protections for academic freedom, such a shift could serve as a justification for increased state control over universities.

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China's trade diplomacy in the time of war

As the world braces for the next whimsical tariff announcement by Trump, Sarosh Bana assesses the fallout of the bruising trade war

With his tariff showdown with most of the world, and especially China, US President Donald Trump is very knowingly letting the genie out of the bottle, inciting the Chinese dragon into a new Cold War and veering the world into a recession with his ham-handed policies. Last week, J.P. Morgan raised its forecast from 40 to 60 per cent on the global economy entering a recession by the end of the year.

Trump's unfettered trade hooliganism will also shatter the 'American dream', hurting Americans more than any other country. His punitive taxes on all imports will indubitably escalate costs for domestic businesses that will inflate prices for US consumers, and consequently edge his country into a sustained economic decline and eventual recession. If American importers decide upon absorbing the costs of the tariffs, their profitability could dwindle, leading them to downsize operations and lay off workers. And if they more likely pass on the tariff costs to consumers, consumer demand will capsize, hitting manufacturing and thereby throwing workers out of jobs.

The Tax Foundation, the world's leading nonpartisan tax policy non-profit, estimates that even before accounting for any foreign retaliation, Trump's tariffs will reduce long-run US GDP by 0.8 per cent. 'Combined, the US-imposed tariffs and the threatened and imposed retaliatory tariffs reduce US GDP by 1 per cent,' it notes. The US dollar too has been sliding against other major currencies in a clear signal that investors may be starting to shun what has long been the safest haven in global financial markets.

The President's commercial war against Beijing, moreover, buries all prospects for a G-2 partnership that had been envisioned during the early days of the first Obama administration. He had broadly hinted at his push against the Asian superpower with his anti-China rhetoric during his electoral campaign.

Chinese President Xi Jinping is a powerful leader who will do all he can to stand up to Trump's excesses. Indeed, the 2022 US National Security Strategy cites the People's Republic of China as the "only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it".

In a mutually devastative tit-for-tat between the world's two largest economies, Trump's absurd 245 per cent tariff on imports from China has roused retaliation by Beijing, which hiked tariffs on all US goods from 34 per cent to 84 per cent to 125 per cent, starting 12 April. China termed the Trump administration's actions a "joke", and said it no longer considered them worth matching. Trump has tried to soften the impact by exempting $100 billion worth of tech imports, but tensions prevail as Washington contemplates a national security probe on electronics.

China has also halted exports of six rare earths, cutting off the US and other countries from these minerals that are vital for tech, auto, aerospace, defence and manufacturing. Besides, it has ordered Chinese airlines not to take further deliveries of the Seattle-based Boeing Company's aircraft. China is Boeing's largest customer and in line to receive deliveries of 9,000 airplanes—20 per cent of Boeing's production—over the next two decades.

It is a fact though that the US suffers a massive trade deficit with China that exceeded $295.4 billion last year; its exports worth $143.5 billion to China (down 3 per cent from 2023) pale before $438.9 billion worth of imports from that country.

The US's overall trade deficit in goods and services was $918.4 billion in 2024, a 17 per cent increase from 2023, and its current-account deficit, which includes trade in goods and services, widened to $1.13 trillion, representing 3.9 per cent of current-dollar GDP.

In contrast, China's overall trade surplus surged to a record $992.2 billion in 2024, its exports climbing 5.4 per cent, which helped tide over the sluggish growth at home as it gradually recovers from a crisis in its property market and the persisting effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. Even last month in the thick of Trump's tariff war cries, China recorded a trade surplus of $102.64 billion. Its balance of trade has averaged $16.81 billion from 1981 until 2025, soaring to an all-time high of $170.52 billion in February, and a record low of $61.99 billion in February of 2020, at the onset of Covid.

However, a brutal slugfest was certainly not expected of the world's largest economy that the US clearly is, with its GDP of just under $29 trillion in 2024 still overshadowing China's 2024 GDP of $18.6 trillion even as the world's second largest economy. A calibrated approach to trade rectification would have been more acceptable, even welcomed, by the international community. It would have expected Trump to seek mutually compatible trade agreements with countries and blocs, rather than wield a sledgehammer to structure an economic order pandering to his whims.

In a post on Truth Social, Trump said that no country, especially China, is getting a free pass when it comes to trade. 'NOBODY is getting 'off the hook' for the unfair trade balances, and non-monetary tariff barriers, that other countries have used against us, especially not China which, by far, treats us the worst!' he wrote.

UBS expects China's exports to the US to drop by two-thirds in the coming quarters, with overall Chinese exports declining 10 per cent in US dollar terms in 2025, factoring in weaker American and global economic growth. In a report on 15 April, the bank also downgraded China's GDP growth forecast to 3.4 per cent in 2025, assuming current tariff hikes will remain and that China rolls out additional stimulus.

"We anticipate some of China's other trading partners may also impose tariffs on Chinese goods in the months ahead, though likely limited to specific products and at smaller scales than the US tariffs," UBS said. While acknowledging difficulty in predicting how the US-China tariff tensions will unfold, the bank finds potential for both sides to reopen talks and possibly ease some recent tariff hikes within the next month or two.

On 14 April, legal advocacy group, The Liberty Justice Center, urged the US Court of International Trade to block President Trump's sweeping tariffs, contending that he exceeded his authority. Arguing that only Congress can set tax rates, including tariffs, the lawsuit was filed on behalf of five small US businesses that import products from tariff-targeted countries, and challenges Trump's 'Liberation Day' tariffs and earlier duties on China. "No one person should wield such power," said the Center's counsel Jeffrey Schwab, while the White House spokesman, Harrison Fields, defended the tariffs, calling them essential to US interests.

Meanwhile, President Xi has embarked on a diplomatic outreach, warning that a "trade war and tariff war will produce no winner, and protectionism will lead nowhere" as he began a trip to Vietnam, Cambodia and Malaysia in a bid to "resolutely safeguard the multilateral trading system, stable global industrial and supply chains, and open and cooperative international environment".

Xi presented China as a reliable partner, in contrast to Washington, which imposed—then suspended—tariffs of more than 40 per cent on some countries in Southeast Asia, which is an export-reliant region. The US has announced reciprocal tariff rates of 46, 49 and 24 per cent against Vietnam, Cambodia and Malaysia respectively.

In a rare gesture, Beijing also sought to galvanise New Delhi to 'stand together' with Chinese Embassy spokesperson Yu Jing saying in a post on X: 'China-India economic and trade relationship is based on complementarity and mutual benefit. Facing the US abuse of tariffs, which deprives countries, especially Global South countries, of their right to development, the two largest developing countries should stand together to overcome the difficulties.'

Her post followed a congratulatory message by the Chinese President himself on 1 April to President Droupadi Murmu, on the 75th anniversary of the establishment of China–India diplomatic relations, that India and China should work together, as two neighbouring major countries that are home to one-third of the world's population. 'A stable, predictable and friendly bilateral relationship will benefit both countries and the world,' she added.

India did not respond to this statement, though External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said the bilateral relationship was moving in a "positive direction".

Prime Minister Narendra Modi walks a tightrope between the authoritarian Trump and Xi, but India will be more disposed to capitalise on any Chinese debacles in the tariff war, considering it is already seeking conciliation with the Trump administration in pursuit of a credible free trade agreement.

Xi extended his outreach to the European Union (EU) as well. As he hosted Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez in Beijing last week, he urged the EU to embrace a "fair international trade environment and jointly resist unilateral and intimidating practices". He added, "China and Europe should fulfil their international responsibilities... and jointly resist unilateral bullying practices." The 20 per cent tariffs the EU was saddled with were suspended by the US for 90 days after the bloc's prompt retaliation. China also said it is ready to fight a trade war if the US continues to act "recklessly".

Possibly feeling he was buttonholing himself into a quandary with China, Trump hailed Xi as "a very smart man", adding, "I think he is going to want to make a deal..." ■



Photo: Getty Images

US President Donald Trump unveiling his weapon of trade destruction

India has to walk a tightrope between Xi and Trump, but it is predisposed to looking at China's losses as gains

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Time to book your condo on Mars?

The future of Viksit Bharat is surely interplanetary, writes Avay Shukla

Elon Musk has just declared that there will be 1 million humans living on Mars by 2045.

Perfect timing, you will agree—because by then Trump would have digested Greenland, Panama, the Gaza Riviera, maybe even Canada, and would, like Alexander the Great, be shedding tears because there would be no new real estate left for him to conquer on Earth.

The resort on Mars would be called—what else?—Mars-a-Lago.

One is not aware whether the Martians have been consulted on this little matter of forcible occupation of their planet, or whether they would be deported to Saturn—but we shall doubtless get to know shortly, the very next time Pete 'Eggshead', the defence secretary, leaks their classified chats on Telegram.

But this interstellar land grab raises other important questions.



Photo: Getty Images

Soft Landings. Elon Musk and his son X Æ dropped off by Marine One right on to the White House lawns, 13 April 2025

How would this 1 million horde be selected?

It has been rumoured that DOGE (a.k.a. DOUCHE) had considered setting up a Guantanamo Bay type of facility there for deporting illegal migrants. But someone pointed out that with 2.29 million potential Indian deportees, Mars could soon become a Khalistan or a Hindu Rashtra, and so the idea was dropped.

Instead, since Hamas refuses to play ball or catch-the-grenade in Gaza, the Jared Kushner idea of a new Riviera would be shifted to Mars and the world's billionaires invited to move to the unpolluted, land-mine free, unbombed environs of the 52nd state of the USA.

Trump is likely to demand the planet as compensation for America having been left out of the first wave of global colonisation in the 18th and 19th centuries

Considering the success of Trump's Gold Card offer—1,000 were sold on the first day at $1 million each, we learn—a similar model could be followed, with a $10 million price tag, perhaps.

Since only SpaceX rockets would be used, Musk would get half of the revenues, with which he could shore up Tesla's plummeting share prices and pay alimony to the additional half-dozen wives he would have acquired by then.

Going by SpaceX's current record, about 40 per cent of the space ships would blow up in space along with their occupants—but there would be no refunds since space has neither gravity, nor expiry dates.

So, who would comprise this one million? Not many Americans, I predict, because by then they would all have been reduced to penury under Trump's MABA ('Make America Broke Again') policy and would be unable to pay for the ticket.

Putin and Netanyahu may want to go, but could face arrest under the ICJ warrants when they land on Mars, so they are unlikely to apply.

Many from the South Pacific—Tonga, Vanuatu, Fiji—would be interested, since, by then, their islands would be drowning under rising sea levels. Unfortunately, they wouldn't have enough seashells to pay for the tickets.

But by far the biggest catchment area would be India, which by then would have a GDP of $35 trillion, according to our ministers, and about a thousand billionaires and a million ultra-HNIs or high net-worth individuals as a consequence of the Viksit Bharat programmes.

Since roughly 40 per cent of our GDP is siphoned off to make these billionaires and another 25 per cent taken abroad by the thousands of millionaires who adopt foreign citizenship every year, there should be no shortage of applicants from India.

Their motivation? There would be no ED, CBI, FCRA, Interpol or extradition rules on Mars; the only rule being 'what you grab is what you get'. There would also be no political parties or judges to 'voluntarily' donate money to.

I believe certain eminent absconders from Gujarat—where else?—have already sent feelers to Musk to check whether dhokla will be served on the flight. I should think so, since the airport contract on Mars will probably be awarded to the Adani group once all Indian import duties are removed on Tesla in the national interest: you see, Musk can make rockets but not dhokla.

But one problem still has to be sorted out by the new sheriff in town.

Who will Mars belong to?

There exists an international treaty on the sharing of the Antarctic for research purposes, I learn, but none for Mars. So naturally the US will lay claim to it, based on the oldest covenant of all: 'Finders keepers'.

Plus, Trump is likely to demand the planet as compensation for America having been left out of the first wave of global colonisation in the 18th and 19th centuries, when England, France, Portugal, Spain and Belgium had carved out the world amongst themselves like a Thanksgiving turkey.

Well, that particular chicken has now come home to roost—on Mars.

It's COLAnisation time again, folks!

Advance bookings for the condos, I believe, will begin on the day that Mr Drumpf is sworn in as President for the third time, with Vice President Musketeer looking on.

Looks like Gurgaon and DLF will finally get some competition. ■

AVAY SHUKLA *is a retired IAS officer and author of* Disappearing Democracy: Dismantling of a Nation



State in Focus

The Hyderabad GCC is designed as a next-generation innovation hub

Citizens Financial Group Chooses Hyderabad for First India GCC in Partnership with Cognizant

Citizens Financial Group (NYSE: CFG), a US-based premier financial institution, has chosen Hyderabad to establish its Global Capability Centre (GCC) in India, in strategic partnership with Cognizant (Nasdaq: CTSH), a leading global technology and professional services company. The Hyderabad GCC is designed as a next-generation innovation hub to support Citizens' digital transformation and technology modernisation journey. The launch event was held in Hyderabad in the presence of **Shri Duddilla Sridhar Babu**, honourable Minister for Information Technology, Electronics, Communications, Industries and Commerce and Legislative Affairs, government of Telangana.

The GCC is designed to help Citizens more quickly and effectively foster innovative solutions for its customers. It will also serve as an innovation hub, implementing cutting-edge technologies and fostering a culture of continuous learning and development. The centre is expected to scale to a headcount of 1,000 IT and data & analytics professionals by March 2026, and will play a key role in strengthening Citizens' technology capabilities across enterprise platforms, customer experience, and data-driven decisionmaking.

Hyderabad has emerged as one of the world's top destinations for GCCs, hosting over 350 GCCs across BFSI, healthcare and technology. The year 2024 marked a milestone, with the city attracting nearly one GCC every week. This momentum is visible on the ground—in the surging demand for top tech talent, rapid absorption of commercial and residential space and record-breaking investments across sectors.

Honourable Minister **Shri Duddilla Sridhar Babu** said, "Our growth is clearly visible across metrics—Hyderabad's Rajiv Gandhi International Airport recorded the highest passenger traffic growth among all Indian metro airports in 2024. Commercial space absorption soared by 56 per cent, the highest in the country, while our retail sector leased 1.8 million sq ft last year. This boom is backed by a clear vision: to not just build infrastructure, but to build the future. Hyderabad is on track to add 200 million sq. ft. of Grade A office space by 2030."

"But we are aiming even higher. We want to transform Hyderabad from a GCC hub into a Global Value Centre, a place where companies lead with innovation, build IP, and drive product development. This aligns with our larger ambition: to make Telangana the first Indian state to contribute $1 trillion to the national GDP over the next decade. Strategic partnerships like this one between Citizens Bank and Cognizant bring us a step closer to that goal."

He emphasised that Hyderabad's rise is grounded not in hype or headlines, but in thoughtful policy, visionary leadership, robust infrastructure, a focus on sustainability, and meaningful public-private partnerships.

Nageswar Cherukupalli, SVP and BU head (BFSI), Cognizant, said, "Hyderabad is already home to leading BFSI GCCs, including Goldman Sachs, Citi Group, JP Morgan Chase, Bank of America, and Wells Fargo. Citizens Financial Group now joins this distinguished list as the next top global bank to establish a GCC in the city. We are proud of our partnership with Citizens Bank and of further expanding that collaboration to help set up their GCC in Hyderabad."

"Our partnership with Cognizant on the establishment of a GCC in Hyderabad is core to our strategy to scale digital transformation, strengthen innovation capabilities, reduce reliance on vendor partners, and improve time to market for new-age banking products," said **Michael Ruttledge**, Chief Information Officer and Head of Enterprise Technology and Security at Citizens Financial Group. "With its rich talent pool, the city has emerged as a leading global destination for technology-driven businesses. It will not only enhance customer experience but also create exciting opportunities for India's tech talent to redefine the future of banking."

"The establishment of Citizens' first GCC in Hyderabad underscores our shared commitment to driving innovation and transformation in the financial services sector," said **Surya Gummadi**, President – Americas, Cognizant. "We are excited to partner with Citizens and plan to leverage Cognizant Neuro® and Flowsource™ platforms to advance modern banking with future-ready, GenAI-enabled solutions. In addition, Cognizant plans to create a Banking and Financial Services Innovation Center to help clients foster innovation, facilitate collaboration, improve operational security and compliance, data and analytics, cybersecurity and customer experience."

Cognizant's total headcount in Hyderabad stands at nearly 57,000, making it one of the city's largest technology employers. The Citizens–Cognizant partnership, supported by the government of Telangana, reinforces the state's emergence as a global hub for high-value digital capabilities.



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Bhu Bharati

New ROR Act Introduced

in Telangana by
Hon'ble Chief Minister
A. Revanth Reddy

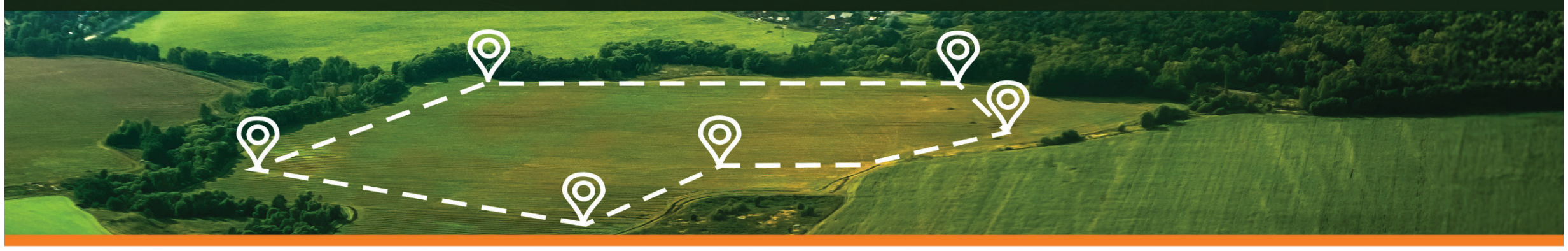




Bhu Bharati

TELANGANA RISING

- **New chapter** in Telangana's land administration.
- Citizen-friendly **Bhu Bharati Portal** in place of Dharani.
- Instant **Registrations cum Mutations.**
- Revival of **Revenue Services** at village level.
- **Appeals, Dedicated Toll Number, Help Desk** for Redressal of grievances
- Transparent and **Quality Land related services.**



PEOPLE'S GOVERNMENT: PATH TO PROGRESS AND WELFARE FOR ALL

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