EDITORIAL HIGHLIGHTS

11-11-2026

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THE HINDU PAGE: 08

Transparency is essential to institutional credibility



Clement Arockiasamy

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The proposed amendments to the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010, have triggered strong reactions from civil society organisations, Opposition parties and Christian institutions. The concerns are not without substance. What it seeks is tighter regulation of foreign-funded organisations, including provisions concerning assets created or acquired through foreign contributions. The Government maintains that the objective is greater transparency, accountability and prevention of misuse of foreign funds, while critics fear possible restrictions on legitimate civil society activity and minority institutions being disproportionately affected. With the Bill referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee for further scrutiny, there is an opportunity for a reasoned debate.

Foreign contribution cannot become a pretext for suppressing legitimate charitable, educational, health care or social-service activity. At the same time, the receipt and utilisation of foreign funds cannot be placed beyond scrutiny.

Transparency is not an assault on minority rights; it is a condition of public trust. This raises a question for minority institutions opposing the proposed amendments: are they prepared to put their own houses in order? This is not about greater state interference, but about voluntary transparency and accountability to those they claim to serve.

Consider the Catholic Church in Tamil Nadu. The dioceses have established numerous social-service structures and societies dedicated to the poor, vulnerable and marginalised. Their contribution to social development is substantial, but how many ordinary faithful have meaningful access to even the basic financial picture of these institutions? How many can readily see annual income-and-expenditure statements, audited accounts, major sources of funding and the broad utilisation of resources? The more fundamental question is this: should institutions that speak forcefully about accountability to the state, not voluntarily practise an equally high, if not higher, standard of accountability to their faithful, beneficiaries and stakeholders?

Institutional power, financial accountability

The question becomes even more pertinent when one considers the enormous educational and social footprint of popular religious orders such as the Society of Jesus and the Salesians of Don Bosco, as well as the many premier institutions run by dioceses, including medical colleges, and numerous congregations of women religious. Their contribution to education and public life is undeniable. Yet, influence carries responsibility.

Across the educational sector, there have long been allegations and public concerns regarding admission-related donations, capitation and other payments in institutions offering sought-after courses. Such allegations must not be treated as established facts against particular institutions without evidence. But where institutions receive substantial fees, donations, grants or other contributions, a legitimate question remains, a demand for transparency is not an accusation of wrongdoing. On the contrary, the most effective answer to allegations of financial mismanagement or diversion is transparent, independently audited and accessible accounting.

The same principle should apply to religious and social-service organisations. If institutions appeal to the faithful and the public for donations in the name of the poor, education, health care and social development, their stakeholders should reasonably expect a clear picture of how those resources are utilised. Transparency need not mean exposing confidential individual transactions or compromising institutional autonomy. It can simply mean publishing audited annual accounts, broad income-and-expenditure statements, major funding sources and the purposes for which resources are deployed. Such voluntary disclosure would strengthen the moral authority of organisations that are now demanding greater accountability from the state.

The unfinished question of Dalit Christians

The issue becomes particularly compelling in the context of the Church's advocacy for Dalit Christians. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) has raised concerns over the FCRA Amendment Bill with the Union Government. Its memorandum has also raised the continuing denial of Scheduled Caste (SC) status to Christians of SC origin and sought an early resolution of the matter pending before the Supreme Court. The CBCI has undertaken initiatives on the issue and its policy documents have acknowledged the persistence of caste discrimination within Indian society and, importantly, within the Church.

For decades, Dalit Christians have awaited a resolution of their claim to SC status. The Church possesses considerable institutional influence, extensive organisational reach and substantial financial resources. Has that influence and capacity been mobilised with the same sustained intensity for the constitutional rights of its most marginalised faithful as it is now being mobilised when the regulatory framework governing its institutions is threatened?

There is an inherent irony here. The Church rightly argues that caste does not disappear when a Dalit becomes a Christian. If that is so, and if caste-based exclusion continues beyond conversion, then the constitutional marginalisation of Dalit Christians should occupy a central place in the Church's public advocacy. It is difficult, therefore, to avoid asking what institutional accountability means if the voices of the most disadvantaged members of the institution remain comparatively weak.

Accountable autonomy

The answer should lie neither in unchecked state power nor in unchecked institutional autonomy, but in accountable autonomy. Minority institutions have made an invaluable contribution to India's educational, healthcare and social landscape, and their right to function freely must be protected.

But institutional freedom carries institutional responsibility. The credibility of their opposition to excessive FCRA regulation will ultimately depend not merely on what they demand from the government, but on what they are willing to disclose to the people who sustain and depend upon their institutions.

Perhaps the most important test of an institution is not how loudly it protests when its own autonomy is threatened, but how openly it answers questions from the poor, the faithful, the beneficiaries, parents, students and the communities it serves. Minority rights and institutional accountability are not opposing principles; they are complementary ones. The state must not use transparency as a pretext to weaken legitimate minority institutions. But minority institutions, in turn, cannot demand transparency from the state while treating transparency to their own stakeholders as optional.

Before asking the state to put its house in order, minority institutions should be willing to open their own doors and demonstrate that their houses are in order.

Minority institutions opposing the FCRA amendments must demonstrate transparency and accountability themselves

GS 2: POLITY
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Caste and class

Exclusion of creamy layer is essential, but must be done consistently

If public resources are to dismantle both caste hierarchy and class inequality, OBC reservation should resist the notion that caste disadvantage makes economic differences among OBC families irrelevant. The 'creamy layer' rules are responsible for identifying those OBC members who have advanced sufficiently to no longer require affirmative action. However, the government has implemented them inconsistently. The Supreme Court in March corrected one inconsistency, that the government cannot hold the salary alone of an OBC candidate's parent as evidence of social advancement. In *Indra Sawhney* (1992), the Court upheld the government's 27% reservation for OBC candidates in central government services if it also excluded economically advanced sections, i.e., the creamy layer, among OBCs. Following the equivalence requirement issued in 1993, the Department of Personnel & Training (DoPT) issued a "clarification" in 2004 that the government used, from around 2015, to deny dozens of OBC candidates who had cleared the Civil Services Examination their benefits because their parents' salaries exceeded the official threshold due to pay revisions that did not always reflect changes in occupational status. The Cabinet also approved equivalence guidelines in 2017 but a parliamentary committee criticised it over a number of issues.

In *Rohith Nathan* (2026), the Court rightly rejected the government's use of the 2004 "clarification" to arbitrarily exclude OBC candidates based on their parents' salaries alone. However, the government stalled service allocations following the 2025 examination and appealed that retrospectively applying the ruling would create administrative chaos. On November 6, the Court conceded that it had not asked the government to reopen completed selections, as it could set workers against one another while leaving government misapplication unaddressed. A proactive policy is essential now as the government must create supernumerary posts for legitimate claimants and apply the 1993 rules to pending allocations without vouchsafing these remedies for only those who can afford litigation. Access to public employment continues to be grossly unequal: per the 2024-25 DoPT Annual Report, OBC representation in central government employment was 26.3% but declined steadily towards higher positions. As the Justice G. Rohini Commission also indicated, the benefits of reservation are distributed unevenly among OBC communities. However, the report, submitted in 2023, is still not in the public domain. The coming Census includes caste enumeration but policymakers also need data on each caste's education, occupations, assets, and landholdings. Defending redistribution among caste groups while ignoring major inequalities within them, and constraining OBC reservation assuming relatively more high-income families capture the benefits without first establishing the extent and the causes are equally difficult to justify.

GS 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
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World Wars and India's sacrifice



Priyanjali Malik

writes on politics and international relations. In the interest of full disclosure, the three Bhagat brothers were her father's cousins

On the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month, most Commonwealth and other allied nations fall silent for two minutes to honour the fallen of the two World Wars. Not so much in India: wreaths are laid in cantonments, but for most, this is just another day. India has an uneasy relationship with Remembrance Day. However, the idea that the World Wars were something that happened to someone else, somewhere else, could not be further from the truth.

Indian ambivalence over the two World Wars belies its enormous contribution to fighting fascism. Undivided (British) India sent 1.5 million men to fight in World War I, 74,000 of whom never returned home. For WWII, India produced the largest volunteer army of 2.5 million soldiers, with 87,00-89,000 making the ultimate sacrifice. The princely states also sent significant troops. Whereas the Indians who fought in the Great War were mostly sent to distant lands, in WWII, about 7,00,000 of them were defending Indian territory. The war came home to India when Japan invaded the country in March 1944.

The argument that the Indian soldiers who fought under British command were defending freedom for the British while their country's aspirations for the same freedoms remained suppressed under colonial rule is legitimate. Yet independent India's ambivalence over WWII goes deeper. The fact that the adversary in this case included an Asian power claiming Asian solidarity has sometimes obscured the fact that imperial Japan was pushing into India in a brutal campaign of expansion.

And then there is the complicated history of the Indian National Army (INA), led by Subhas Chandra Bose.

The INA, which was initially formed under Captain Mohan Singh in 1942, comprised mainly 40,000 Indian Prisoners of War (PoWs) who were captured and tortured by Japan when Singapore fell in 1942. It was re-formed by Bose when he joined the Japanese in Singapore in July 1943. Bose expanded the INA, or the Azad Hind Fauj, setting up a government in exile. However, nothing about the provisional government of free India could disguise the fact that several of the men who joined the INA did so under duress. Bose teaming up with the Japanese pitted Indian against Indian.

Fallen heroes

On April 6, 1942, the war came to India with Japanese aircraft bombing ships entering the Vizag harbour and the port. In December of that year, Kolkata was bombed over four days, with the Japanese targeting the city's infrastructure. The following December, Japanese aircraft bombed Kolkata's Kidderpore dock, killing hundreds of people and causing significant damage. From January 1942, the Japanese Army swept through Southeast Asia, overrunning Myanmar and occupying Burma. The fighting in the Burma campaign, which involved over 7,00,000 Indians, was brutal, not just because of Japanese tactics, but also because of the forbidding jungle terrain. In March 1944, the Japanese Army attempted a land invasion of India from Myanmar. The Japanese calculated that once they entered, the locals could be encouraged to revolt against the British. However, Indians decided against trading British rule for the Japanese.

India was defended by Indians in some of the fiercest fighting of the war. Indians (from undivided India) made up 87% of the multinational fighting force troops in the Burma campaign. A disciplined fighting force was forged in the heat of this combat; and this force has defended India after 1947.

The first Indian to be awarded a Victoria Cross (VC) in WWII was Second-Lt (later Lt-Gen) Premindra Singh Bhagat for 'most conspicuous gallantry on active service' clearing mines in East Africa in early 1942. In late 1943, his eldest brother, Nripendra Bhagat, was taken PoW by the Japanese while fighting in Burma. While in prison, he was made to broadcast a propaganda piece, almost certainly under torture. He was handed over to the INA, rising quite high in the 'provisional government'. He subsequently disagreed with Bose and was imprisoned by him in Burma. He escaped and was captured by Indian soldiers, who handed him over to the middle brother, Brijindra, who was with the 5th Indian Division in Burma. All three were fierce nationalists and one story cannot be told without mentioning the others.

Soon after Prem Bhagat was awarded the VC, he went to see Mahatma Gandhi. How could he work for his country, he asked Gandhi. The answer was simple: stay in the army. India would need men like him to defend her. History is complicated. However, we owe it to ourselves to be honest with our past, just as we owe it to our armed forces to honour the sacrifices of those who went before them.

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GS 2: POLITY

INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 08

Court dismantles unconstitutional buffer zone between detention & arrest



FAIZAN MUSTAFA

EVERY ARREST deprives liberty and, therefore, must be a last resort in a liberal democracy. Even words may amount to arrest if they are calculated to bring to a person's notice that he is under compulsion and he, thereafter, submits to such compulsion. Indeed, the word "arrest" is a legal term of art.

At a time when there is a widespread conversation about institutional decay, with some expressing concerns that the Supreme Court has become an executive-minded court, a two-judge bench led by Justice Ujjal Bhuyan — Justice A S Chandurkar was the other judge — has given a bold judgment that drastically restricts the power of the police to detain people before their formal arrest. In *Prabir Purkayastha* (2024), too, a violation of Article 22(1) for not supplying grounds of arrest was the basis of his release. In last week's verdict, the right to production before a magistrate within 24 hours under Article 22(2) was in question. Unfortunately, the 44th constitutional amendment (1978), which was aimed at humanising preventive detention in Article 22(4), has not been notified even after 48 years. This shows successive governments' lack of commitment to due process. Interestingly, Article 22(1) and (2) in essence incorporated guarantees — right to counsel of choice and production before a magistrate within 24 hours — that were already part of the colonial government's Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898.

Justice Bhuyan is showing, time and again, that every appointment to the apex court is extremely important. Judges sitting even in smaller benches not only greatly contribute to our constitutional jurisprudence but can help reinforce the people's trust in the judiciary.

Criminal law is the most direct expression of the relationship between a state and its citizens. Criminal sanction is the most coercive method of regulating an individual's behaviour that a state can deploy. Criminal law's promise as an instrument of safety is matched only by its power to destroy. Today, we are making excessive use of criminal law by not only adding new crimes but also mindlessly enhancing the punishments. No precise number of criminal offences is available, but central laws alone provide for as many as 7,305 criminal offences. Criminal law is entry number 1 of the Concurrent List: State criminal statutes provide for thousands of additional crimes. The progressive view among criminologists is that criminal justice policy is largely irrelevant in reducing the incidence of crime. Incarceration rates are higher in countries whose capacities to regulate the macroeconomy and contain inequality are weak. The "culture of control" is also a product of market and economic dynamics. Incarceration impinges on the autonomy of the individual.

As per the National Crime Records Bureau, in 2024, we recorded 58,85,867 cognisable crimes, with 35,44,608 under the IPC/BNS and 23,41,259 under special and local laws. In most crimes, there are several suspects and accused who are arrested. About 72.6 per cent of prisoners are undertrials — they have not been convicted of any crime.

Article 22 is unequivocal in the provision that every arrested person must be produced before a magistrate within 24 hours. In reality, though, the police often detain suspects for hours prior to formally entering their arrest in the record.

> At a time when civil liberties are being curtailed with bail provisions being made far more stringent, Justice Bhuyan has yet again reminded us of the apex court's jurisprudence and how fundamental rights are to be interpreted

At a time when civil liberties are being curtailed with bail provisions being made far more stringent, Justice Bhuyan has yet again reminded us of the apex court's jurisprudence and how fundamental rights are to be interpreted.

In *Sakal Papers* (1961), the Constitution Bench had already held that "[The] Constitution must be interpreted in a broad way and not in a narrow and pedantic sense... while considering the nature and content of those rights the Court must not be too astute to interpret the language of the Constitution in so literal a sense as to whittle them down."

Similarly, in *M Nagaraj* (2006), the Court had said that people's rights are not a gift from the state. Part III of the Constitution does not confer fundamental rights; rather, it confirms their existence.

With such an understanding of civil liberties, it was not difficult for Justice Bhuyan to hold that the 24-hour period starts the moment a person is detained and the police get the power to restrict their liberties. Justice Bhuyan rightly observed that Article 22(2) uses the expressions "arrested" and "detained" in conjunction. So, arrest and detention cannot be artificially separated. The two words are synonymous. He overruled the judgments of the Orissa, Madras and Kerala High Courts that tried to distinguish between the two terms. Justice Bhuyan held that "the Constitution does not recognise any detention dehors arrest". He went on to observe that "any attempt to draw an artificial distinction between 'arrest' and 'detention' would dilute or negate the fundamental protection guaranteed by the Constitution under clause (2) of Article 22. Such an endeavour should be avoided."

In unequivocal terms, Justice Bhuyan held that Article 22 neither mandates any time for inquiry nor investigation nor medical examination nor anything else. Article 22 permits exclusion only of the time in reaching the court of the magistrate. No buffer zone can be created where the liberty of an individual is curtailed for investigating purposes prior to formal arrest. Such a buffer zone is unconstitutional.

Justice Bhuyan based his observations on Justice V R Krishna Iyer's judgment in *Niranjan Singh* (1980), which acknowledged that explanations like "the police have taken a man into informal custody but not arrested him or have detained him for interrogation but not taken him into formal custody" are "unfair evasions of the straightforwardness of the law".

While Article 22(2) does not explicitly provide for production before a judicial magistrate, Justice Bhuyan did have an opportunity in this case to interpret the word "magistrate" as a judicial magistrate and not an executive magistrate. Section 15 of BNSS, 2023 authorises state governments to appoint any police officer not below the rank of Superintendent of Police as Special Executive Magistrate (SEM). A person arrested by the police should not ideally be produced before a fellow police officer. Is not the separation of powers a basic feature of our Constitution? Recently, student activists and CJP leaders in Delhi were produced before the SEM, who was a police officer and whose remand order is questionable on several counts.

The writer is vice-chancellor, Chanakya National Law University, Patna. Views are personal

GS 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 09

At Abu Dhabi, new diplomatic push on Ukraine. Stakes are high for India and world



RAJA MANDALA

BY C RAJA MOHAN



ILLUSTRATION: C R SASIKUMAR

AS REPRESENTATIVES of the US, Russia, Ukraine and Europe gather in Abu Dhabi this week to renew the stalled peace talks, Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Monday to reaffirm India's strong commitment to supporting the peace process. The same evening, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar spoke to his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov about the Ukraine conflict and ongoing diplomatic initiatives. Delhi has good reason to engage with the prolonged crisis in Europe amid Washington's renewed diplomatic push. For, peace in Ukraine and Europe could help ease India's current economic and geopolitical challenges.

Many in Delhi assumed that Donald Trump's setback in last week's midterm elections, which will give the Democrats control of both houses of Congress in January, would slow him down. It has not. Trump has dug in his heels at home, appointing immigration hardliner Stephen Miller as his chief of staff, while pressing ahead with diplomatic initiatives abroad.

This week's trilateral talks between the US, Ukraine and Russia are their first since February. Secretary of State Marco Rubio is in Paris seeking support from G7 foreign ministers for the initiative. Expectations of a breakthrough remain modest, but the intensity of the American effort is unmistakable. Trump's envoys, Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, have prepared the ground through several rounds of consultations with Kyiv and Moscow.

An important element of the renewed initiative is the idea of embedding peace in Ukraine within a broader European security architecture. When negotiations reach a deadlock, diplomacy can either break the problem into smaller parts or widen the framework to create room for compromise. Washington has chosen the latter.

Trump hopes that addressing Russia's larger security concerns will make Vladimir Putin more amenable to an immediate ceasefire and a sustainable settlement with Ukraine. The challenge for Washington is to accommodate Moscow's concerns without sacrificing the legitimate security interests of Ukraine and Europe.

Kushner has outlined five objectives for a broader European security framework: Permanent security consultations, reliable crisis communications, greater military transparency, reciprocal measures to reduce the risks of escalation, and arrangements for long-term stability. He has also affirmed that countries must remain free to make their own security choices. Rubio says there has been progress in discussions on Europe's future security arrangements, but no final agreement. Whether Abu Dhabi can produce a broad set of principles acceptable to all sides remains uncertain.

Europe, meanwhile, is struggling to come to terms with an American initiative that could produce a settlement negotiated over its head. Washington has stepped up consultations with European capitals. Senior officials from the EU, France, Germany and Britain will be present in Abu Dhabi, but not at the trilateral negotiating table. Moscow has resisted their direct participation.

> The hardest question remains Ukraine's security after the fighting stops. Kyiv wants guarantees strong enough to deter another Russian attack. Moscow opposes Western military deployments in Ukraine and wants limits on its armed forces

Europe's foreign policy chief, Kaja Kallas, argues that Europe already has a security architecture; the problem is Russia's refusal to respect it. Moscow insists that the West has violated the principles of European security agreed at the end of the Cold War.

There is also a fundamental disagreement over sequencing. Kyiv and its European partners want a ceasefire before negotiations on the wider security order. Washington believes simultaneous progress on both fronts could create room for progress all round.

Europe is also divided internally. Poland's Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski has warned against Western Europe negotiating with Russia over the heads of Eastern Europeans. Italy's Giorgia Meloni has criticised Europe's fragmented diplomatic formats and called for a single European envoy. Europe wants a place at the negotiating table, but has yet to agree on who should speak for it and with what mandate.

The hardest question, though, remains Ukraine's security after the fighting stops. Kyiv wants guarantees strong enough to deter another Russian attack. Moscow opposes Western military deployments in Ukraine and wants limits on its armed forces. Reconciling these positions will not be easy.

Washington is also exploring economic incentives to make peace more attractive. Trump is betting that Russian energy, European markets, Ukrainian transit routes and American capital can create a shared interest in ending the war.

Russian gas once bound Europe and Moscow together. The 2022 invasion broke that relationship, prompting Europe to reduce Russian energy imports and impose sanctions. India, as a major importer of Russian oil, was caught in the crossfire between Moscow and the West.

Today, American and Russian officials are reportedly discussing the revival of gas supplies to Germany through the Nord Stream pipelines, potentially involving American investors. Trump's calculation appears to be that commercial interdependence could help sustain a political settlement.

If the Abu Dhabi talks make progress, Trump could take the negotiations to the highest level. He has indicated an opportunity to meet Putin on the margins of the APEC summit in China later this month. There is also talk of a meeting involving Trump, Putin and Xi Jinping.

Trump has embarked on a difficult diplomatic balancing act in Ukraine, reinforced by his pursuit of accommodation among the great powers. Its success is far from assured, but the stakes for India are considerable.

Peace in Ukraine could bring three benefits. First, it would ease pressures on energy and food security. Second, even a limited relaxation of tensions between Russia and the West would expand India's diplomatic space to strengthen relations with both Moscow and Washington. Third, it would give fresh momentum to India's growing economic and strategic partnership with Europe.

Together, these developments could create a more favourable international environment for India's economic transformation. Delhi has every reason to support the peace process and contribute wherever it can.

The writer is contributing editor on international affairs for The Indian Express. *His new book,* India Pivots to Europe: In Search of a New Eurasian Balance, *is published this month*

GS 3: ECONOMY

INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 09

World Bank's poverty estimate does not pass the thali test



PULAPRE BALAKRISHNAN AND AMAN RAJ

THE WORLD Bank recently released estimates of poverty in India, pegging "extreme poverty" at 2.6 per cent. If true, that would be good news, as it would imply that high levels of economic deprivation are now a thing of the past. We argue that such a conclusion would be premature.

The WB's poverty estimate is a headcount ratio — the ratio of the number of poor to the population. It estimates the number of poor by applying a poverty line to data reported in the NSS's Household Consumption Expenditure Survey for 2023-24 (HCES). The poverty line translated into goods represents the minimum acceptable level of consumption, below which an individual is deemed poor. The report does not mention the set of goods and their prices that the World Bank used to construct its poverty line for India. The Survey is a rich source of consumption across the population and reveals granular information on the standard of living, which can be used to assess a headcount poverty estimate, as we demonstrate.

In 2025, we proposed a simple measure of the standard of living in India ('The Thali Index', *IE*, July 1, 2025). Termed the "thali index", it measures the number of thalis an individual can afford to buy based on the monthly per capita expenditure on food reported in the HCES. Why did we choose this metric? The thali is a metaphor for a complete meal, combining protein, carbohydrates and minerals. It is a unit of food consumption that Indians culturally relate to and is both nutritious and satisfying. To measure the standard of living of Indians based on the thali index, we would need to apply a price to the consumption expenditure reported. We have adopted Rs 30 as the price of a thali, being the cost of a home-cooked vegetarian thali as estimated by CRISIL for the year 2023-24. We chose a home-cooked vegetarian thali as it is the cheapest. Applying the thali index to the data on consumption across expenditure groups, we found that up to 50 per cent of rural Indians and 20 per cent of urban Indians cannot afford two thali meals a day. Imputing the value of the subsidised food, which the WB report refers to as a factor affecting poverty, lowers this percentage to 40 per cent and 10 per cent, respectively. This implies that approximately 30 per cent of the Indian population cannot afford two square meals a day, making it difficult to stomach an estimate of less than 3 per cent for poverty in India.

Note that the Bank's estimate and ours come from the same source, namely, the HCES. The difference is that the Bank uses a poverty line to measure income poverty while we are going by the directly observable data on the food consumption level. If two thali meals per day are considered the minimum acceptable food consumption, our findings imply levels of extreme poverty higher than the Bank's estimate. The implication of our finding is that it must rethink the poverty line that it uses for India. The point is that even if the income at its currently used poverty line is more than sufficient to enable two thalis a day per person, there are several items of expenditure that must be met by a household to earn a livelihood, maintain good health and educate their young. We can think of rent, medicines and school fees. It is likely that these expenses are met first, so as to ensure survival, reducing food to the status of a residual item of consumption. If we accept the criterion of a minimum level of food consumption for an individual to be counted as non-poor, then the chosen poverty line must reflect this feature. If 30 per cent of the population does not have access to two square meals a day, surely we cannot hold that less than 3 percent of the population is poor. Our argument has been made with respect to the World Bank's measure of income poverty but carries over to the Multidimensional Poverty Index of the UNDP to the extent that it relies on the Bank's poverty line.

The latest poverty estimates could create complacency in economic policymaking — if extreme poverty is almost non-existent, policies are needed to remedy it. But our finding of a low level of food consumption for a significant section of Indians imparts an urgency to it. The level of food consumption is directly affected by food prices, and controlling the price of food is central to safeguarding the well-being of the population. Right now, we are experiencing a surge in food price inflation. Quite unusually, between January and September, it has risen every month, trebling over this period. This means that prices are not just continuously rising but the rise in prices is accelerating. An urgent review of the policies to control food price inflation is warranted. Food price inflation can only be controlled by managing food supply, in particular by producing more food at a steady price. This requires increasing agricultural productivity.

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GS 3: ENVIRONEMNT

INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 09



Look beyond the biggest emitters at COP31

CHIRAG DHARA
AND SHRUTEE JALAN

"WHEN A poor farmer in Nepal went to sow... seeds in the monsoon, fertilisers didn't reach her on time ... [Yet] Rifles and ammunition cross borders, clear every bottleneck, meet each deadline. We have built a world with flawless logistics for war and broken logistics for food ... [We are] hit by the climate we did not warm and by the wars we did not start." So said Nepal's Prime Minister Balendra Shah at the UN General Assembly in September, barely a month after a "Himalayan tsunami" killed nearly 1,500 people in Nepal, with over 3000 still missing.

Nepal's was one of many major climate disasters this year. India's summer monsoon was severely weakened by the Super El Niño, with vast parts of the country now reeling under drought. Through it all, the US war on Iran has broken global supply chains inflating household bills for the average consumer, even as US oil companies are reported to have made billions in wartime profits.

As we stand on the brink of overshooting 1.5°C of global warming, policymakers gather this week in Antalya, Turkey for COP31, whose goal is to implement solutions to slow warming, limit overshoot, and help countries adapt.

But who should take the lead in implementing these solutions?

The common view holds that the US and Europe bear the greatest responsibility but it misses the full picture.

To see why, imagine that all humanity had historically lived a European or American lifestyle. How much would the world have warmed already? What about the Indian or Nepalese lifestyle? In peer-reviewed research soon to appear in *Climate Policy*, we build a new framework to study this thought experiment.

By 2022, the Earth's actual warming was about 1.3°C. But, had the whole world historically lived like the average British citizen, the Earth would have already warmed about 2.5°C. And like the average American, about 3.7°C.

But our most striking findings concern small, super-affluent countries. Had humanity lived as Singaporeans do, warming would have been about 2°C; as Luxembourgers do, nearly 4°C; and as Qataris do, a staggering 5+°C. In contrast, the historical lifestyles of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) would have led to a mere 0.6°C of warming, and about 0.8°C for India.

> Had humanity lived as Singaporeans do, warming would have been about 2°C; as Luxembourgers do, nearly 4°C; and as Qataris do, a staggering 5+°C

Thus, affluent countries have avoided climate collapse only because most of the world did not live as they do. Global inequality has inadvertently subsidised climate stability.

This sharpens Shah's address in two ways. First, the injustice developing countries face is not merely that they bear the brunt of disasters they did not cause. Their low emissions have additionally helped stave off even higher levels of warming and bought the world valuable time to act. Second, responsibility for climate solutions rests not only on large affluent countries but also on small, super-affluent ones.

What does this mean for COP31? Those with the most destabilising lifestyles must lead on implementation. Countries whose universalised lifestyles would already have breached 1.5°C face an obligation to pursue net-negative emissions today. Technological and financial limits may put this out of reach even for the world's richest. But they can still contribute to the UN Loss and Damage fund, ease intellectual-property rules, transfer technologies for emissions reduction, and accelerate grant-based climate finance.

If the world can deliver arms and ammunition across borders on schedule, it has the means to move fertiliser, finance, and technology to those in need. Surely, that is the yardstick by which the outcomes of any COP must be judged.

Dhara is a sustainability scientist at Krea University. Jalan is research scholar at Indian Institute of Science. Views are personal