

EDITORIALS HIGHLIGHTS

15-08-2026

1. INDIA HELPS CHINA EVADE TARIFFS: U.S. REPORT (THE HINDU PAGE NO 1)

1. GS III (Economy) & GS II (International Relations)
2. Topics: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests; Indian Economy (trade).
3. Concepts: Tariff evasion, transshipment, tariff arbitrage, US-China trade war impact on India, global supply chains.

India helps China evade tariffs: U.S. report

White House report identifies over 40 countries through which Chinese traders route goods to U.S.

It has named ‘Pune-Gujarat-Chennai’ belt as one of the areas ‘enabling’ China to evade U.S. tariffs

In these countries, illegal transshipment risk is embedded within legitimate trade flows, it says

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
WASHINGTON

India is once again in U.S. crosshairs, this time for allegedly allowing China to evade U.S. tariffs by routing its exports through the country. The latest allegations are part of a new White House report called ‘The Great Transshipment Scam’.

In particular, the U.S. has named “the Pune-Gujarat-Chennai belt” as one of the areas “enabling” China to evade tariffs to the detriment of supply chains in the U.S.

This comes at a time when the U.S. has already imposed a 10% tariff on India for not doing enough to stop the import of goods made with forced labour, and is in the process of enacting legislation that would see tariffs of up to 100% imposed on India for

its import of Russian oil.

An ongoing investigation by the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) related to excess capacity could see further tariffs on top of all this.

The U.S. had in 2018 levied tariffs ranging from 7.5% to 100% on goods from China under Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974 for unfair trade and tech practices. On July 24, 2026, it added a further 12.5% tariff for forced-labour compliance gaps.

‘Different origin’

“After their imposition, Chinese exporters increasingly routed goods through third countries,” the White House report noted. “Products that previously moved directly from China to the U.S. were shipped through jurisdictions where limited assembly, finishing, repackaging, re-

Tariff maze

The White House report comes at a time when the U.S. has imposed a 10% tariff on India over forced-labour concerns



- The report alleges India is among 40 countries helping China evade U.S. tariffs
- India is among the top-tier ‘enablers’ named, along with Mexico, Canada, Japan, South Korea, and the European Union
- The report has not yet specified any punitive actions the U.S. could take based on these findings
- The report goes on to explain that tariff arbitrage lies at the heart of this transshipment arrangement
- The tariff difference in arbitrage simultaneously becomes a loss of revenue for the U.S. government and a profit for the exporter, it adds
- It says assembly factories are designed for tariff evasion and tariff avoidance rather than true manufacturing

labelling, or documentation changes could create the appearance of a different national origin.”

The report has identified more than 40 countries associated with “elevated illegal transshipment risk”, with India among the top “enablers” of China’s evasion of tariffs. “The Pune-Gujarat-Chennai production belt absorbs pumps and compressors... affecting industrial supply chains in Cincinnati, Day-

ton, and Columbus,” it said.

“The [40-odd] countries that comprise China’s Shadow Transshipment Network include many of America’s largest trading partners,” the report said.

“China’s biggest enablers range from Mexico and Canada on U.S. land borders to the European Union, India, Japan, and South Korea.”

The report classifies the 40-odd countries into

three tiers based on how big a transgressor the U.S. feels they are.

The top tier comprises “countries and trading blocs that account for large absolute volumes of China-linked goods while maintaining diversified industrial bases and major U.S.-bound export platforms”.

The report added that in these economies, illegal transshipment risk is embedded within broad legitimate trade flows. This Tier

Citing an analysis, the report says Mexico, India and Vietnam produced an estimated \$28 billion in lost tariff revenue

1 includes Canada, the European Union, India, Israel, Japan, Mexico, South Korea, and Taiwan.

Working of the ‘scam’

The report goes on to explain that tariff arbitrage lies at the heart of this transshipment arrangement. When a Chinese product that faces a high U.S. tariff is routed through a country with a lower tariff rate, that difference simultaneously becomes a loss of revenue for the U.S. government and a profit for the exporter.

“Such tariff arbitrage creates the financial en-

gine behind the Great Transshipment Scam,” the report added. “The savings are more than sufficient to finance the capital equipment, logistics infrastructure, light assembly plants, repackaging operations, and ‘screwdriver factories’ needed to support the scam across Southeast Asia, Mexico, India, and Eastern Europe.”

It added that such assembly factories are designed for tariff evasion and tariff avoidance rather than true manufacturing.

“The Office of Trade and Economic Analysis (OTEA) estimates that approximately \$67 billion in U.S.-bound goods were transshipped from China through the top hubs – Mexico, India, and Vietnam – in 2025, producing an estimated \$28 billion in lost tariff revenue,” the report said.

2. ISLAND ADMINISTRATION LOOKING AT DATA CENTRE PROJECT ON NICOBAR

(THE HINDU PAGE NO 5)

1. GS III (Environment / Economy) & GS II (Social Justice)
2. Topics: Conservation, environmental impact assessment; Infrastructure; Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections.
3. Concepts: Great Nicobar Island mega infrastructure project, data centres, environmental clearance, tribal rights, sustainable development.

Island administration looking at data centre project on Nicobar

Abhinav Lakshman
NEW DELHI

The Andaman and Nicobar administration has floated an expression of interest (EoI) inviting feasibility proposals for the establishment of a private-sector-led “Green AI/ Data Centre Vertical” in the islands.

The move comes amid opposition from local tribal communities to a proposed ₹91,000-crore mega infrastructure project on the Great Nicobar Island (GNI).

As per the EoI, the potential areas identified for the project are the Hutbay Sea Area and Netaji Nagar Sea Area on Little Andaman, and the Campbell Bay, Anderson Bay, Vijay Nagar Bay, and Gandhi Nagar Bay Sea areas on the Great Nicobar Island.

The August 10 EoI comes even as the administration is holding meetings with local tribal communities on the GNI over finalis-



The Campbell Bay in Great Nicobar island is one of the potential areas identified for the data centre project. AFP

ing the draft master plan of the project, which includes a transshipment port and airport. The draft plan was first released to the public earlier this year.

The sea areas identified for the data centre project are along bays that have been marked for development of one of two wildlife corridors (Gandhi Nagar Bay), agriculture, biodiversity tourism, and fish and poultry (Anderson Bay), coastal and business tou-

risms activities (Vijay Nagar Bay), and residential pockets, institutional and administrative buildings (Campbell Bay) under the draft master plan.

Locals unaware

Officials in the administration involved in preparing the draft master plan told *The Hindu* that they are not aware of any discussions about accommodating such a data centre project as part of the GNI

development. Members of the Tribal Council of Great and Little Nicobar who met with the Nicobar administration on Thursday to discuss the draft master plan further said they had been given no information about a data centre project. “We only met them for 15 minutes, and they asked us how much buffer area we needed near Rajiv Nagar and New Chingenh settlements. We told them that we need to survey the areas and see, even as the officials said provisions are being made for 30 metre to 100 metre buffer areas around these settlements,” a council member said.

In the EoI, the island administration has noted that the feasibility proposals may include solutions for “renewable energy-powered data centre operations” that use “freshwater-free” cooling solutions such as “seawater-based or other innovative cooling systems”.

3. INDIA AT 80, A DEMOCRACY IN SEARCH OF RENEWAL

(THE HINDU PAGE NO 6)

- 1. GS II (Polity & Governance) & GS I (Indian Society)
- 2. Topics: Indian Constitution—historical underpinnings, evolution; Structure, organization and functioning of the Judiciary.
- 3. Concepts: Constitutional morality, judicial independence, democratic renewal, civil liberties, political accountability.

India at 80, a democracy in search of renewal

The nation has entered its 80th year of Independence. This is an occasion when all Indians, rising above their differences, will join together in paying homage to their freedom fighters, whose endless exertions and sacrifices delivered the people from the British colonial rule. This is when a subject nation rose to freedom to embark upon its 'tryst with destiny' and found its soul in the promised freedom and dignity of a people, long oppressed.

India has since traversed a long distance, navigating a turbulent course of history, managing religious, caste and regional conflicts as also economic disparities. India has suffered wars, terrorism, famines and pandemics. And, today it can justly pride itself in its scientific and technological accomplishments, its defence and nuclear capabilities, a robust economy and a leadership role in the shaping of a new world order.

The erosion of fraternity

But an objective audit of the nation's trajectory as a democracy must contend with grave challenges to the aspiration for an inclusive and benevolent society. Without a partisan apportioning of blame or underplaying national achievements, India must consider whether its politics as practised in the decades gone by has secured fraternity amongst fellow citizens. The heightened disparities and communal discord have resulted in the othering of large sections of its people.

The pervasive arrogance of power at all levels defies the constitutional and moral constraints upon its exercise. Transgression of constitutionally demarcated jurisdictions by the co-equal branches of the Indian state and the strained Centre-State relations are ominous signals for the future of India's federal polity. The pursuit of politics fixated on the acquisition of power at any cost, unconcerned with the means and ends, is a clear affront to the moral injunctions that undergird the founders' vision of a just political order. Electoral outcomes influenced by money, muscle and a pliant bureaucracy suborn the autonomy of voters and interrogate the purity of the country's electoral processes.

A political culture in which opponents are crushed into submission, conscientious dissenters are trolled to unbearable levels of humiliation, and their reputations maligned and families targeted, question the idea of politics as the highest form of public service that, as Thomas Mann famously reminded us, determines the destiny of man in our times. Clearly, substantive democracy is more than majoritarian triumphalism. It is about the vindication of justice, freedom and human dignity perched at the zenith of constitutional fundamentals.

The mixed performance of their roles by constitutional institutions has added to the nation's democratic deficit. The Supreme Court of India's role as custodian of individual freedoms



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and as sentinel on the *qui vive* has been increasingly scrutinised in recent times. Notwithstanding the richness of its profound pronouncements in Puttaswamy (2017), Romila Thapar (2018), Navtej Johar (2018) and the 'Bulldozer' justice case (2024) *et al.*, some of its recent decisions, particularly in bail matters, and delays in its adjudicatory processes have been critiqued as abnegation of the judicial function.

In some instances, it has preferred a "formal or barren legalism" (against which, years ago, Chief Justice of India H.J. Kania had cautioned us), to justify long incarceration of the accused without trial. The Court appears to have failed to enforce its edicts and indifference to media trials that impinge on the fairness of the judicial process has dented its credibility. The functioning of the collegium system in the matter of appointment of judges has contributed to the diminished moral authority of the highest court.

Parliament, as the highest forum of India's representative democracy, has long ceased to be an institution for informed deliberations about the country's future. Floating political loyalties of elected representatives of the people mock its institutional sanctity. The Election Commission of India needs to rescue its battered reputation as the chief superintendent of the country's electoral processes by dispelling widespread doubts about its functioning, even as it may rightfully claim credit for successfully conducting the world's largest electoral exercises over the years. Exceptions apart, the credentials of the Indian media as guardians of public interest are suspect. Most journalists and television anchors now combine the role of presenter, prosecutor and judge in the service of their masters' preferred agendas. That the pillars of Indian democracy have frayed over the years is an inescapable conclusion tested on the touchstone of practised politics and constitutional philosophy.

The worrying indifference of the citizenry

But the failure of India's politics to promote substantive democracy does not rest with any one party, leader or an institution. The indifference of a vast section of the citizenry to the brazen aberrations of constitutional governance has contributed to a gradual hollowing out of an otherwise promising democracy, rendered hostage to visceral animosities and ideological bankruptcy. Hannah Arendt, the philosopher, reminded us of the "banality of evil", implying the necessity of an enlightened citizenry to participate in the life of the nation in a dialectical relationship between politics and society. Amartya Sen's idea of democracy premised on "participatory living and government by discussion" eludes us. Indeed, the popular response against routinised state violence and atrocities against the weak has not been loud enough to invite the necessary structural changes in the processes of

governance. It is trite, therefore, that "the ballot box echos the living room", leaving us Indians with the shell without the substance of democracy.

Because politics mirrors the state of society, and its values and failings, the task of national renewal must begin by looking inwards to apply the correctives. A social and political order that allows the brutalisation of a person in custody without meaningful recourse, which contents itself with illusory and wholly inadequate welfare schemes for crores of indigent persons and is not outraged enough at the unspeakable atrocities against children, youth, women and the marginalised, invites a decisive self indictment. We know that "when society rewards greed, politics becomes transactional. When it condones deception and lies, leaders tend to follow".

Ennobling politics is not about manipulative conversations in which patriotism and truth are perceived as mutually exclusive. Politics that insists on a history made to order, negates the historical continuum and carries within the seeds of its rejection. Responsive democracy can thrive only in an inclusive society guided by a moral compass transcending the seductions of realpolitik. Elevating politics suffused with purpose presupposes a social milieu in which conscience prevails over power and where idealism is not dismissed as a utopian impossibility. The obvious needs reiteration, lest it is forgotten.

The choice before Indians

It is, therefore, for We, The People, to ensure that a larger political morality rooted in ethical fundamentals prevails over narrow identities in a renaissance of political culture that defers to justice, social, economic and political, as the ultimate command of the Constitution. Wisened by history and empowered by reason, it is for Indians, as inheritors of a free nation, to ensure that a democracy envisioned to enrich lives does not waste itself through acquiescence in injustice of any kind.

The debt of gratitude owed to India's freedom fighters summons Indians at this transformative moment to make choices that will place them on the right side of history – on the side of freedom and justice for all.

In conclusion, this writer repeats what he had written when India turned 75. "It is time to conquer our fears, reclaim our freedom and anchor our politics in honour that values principle over power". And as Frantz Fanon had reminded us, it is for each generation to "discover its mission, fulfil or betray it". The outcome of the recent students' protest at Jantar Mantar carries a hopeful message that democracy and dignity, despite the challenges, are secure in the idealism of the youth, inspired by a purifying sense of justice.

Indians must confront the country's democratic failings and reclaim hope

The views expressed are personal

4. FINANCIAL DEMOCRACY, THE JAN DHAN TRANSFORMATION (THE HINDU PAGE NO 6)

1. GS III (Economy) & GS II (Governance)
2. Topics: Inclusive growth and issues arising from it; Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections; e-governance.
3. Concepts: Financial inclusion, Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY), JAM Trinity, Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), digital public infrastructure.

Financial democracy, the Jan Dhan transformation

Does ideology matter in governance? Yes, it does. A case in point is the Jan Dhan Yojana, which marks 12 years this Independence Day and has served the cause of Antyodaya, a concept propounded by both Mahatma Gandhi and Deendayal Upadhyaya. Simply put, it means that the most deprived should be considered the most deserving when it comes to the distribution of the fruits of development.

Independence Day is usually understood in political terms. India became a sovereign republic, established democratic institutions and introduced universal suffrage. But political independence alone does not guarantee economic liberty. For millions of Indians, even decades after 1947, the formal financial system remained distant. A bank account, formal credit, insurance or a reliable channel to receive government support could not be taken for granted. Add to this the menace of pilferage, and the systemic failure is complete. No wonder a former Prime Minister had to admit that when a rupee was sent from Delhi, only 15 paise reached the recipient.

The vision

On August 15, 2014, from the ramparts of the Red Fort, the newly elected Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, made financial inclusion part of his Independence Day address.

Among several major announcements made during the address, he announced the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY). The idea sounded simple: every household in India should have access to a bank account, a RuPay debit card and insurance cover. At Vigyan Bhawan on August 28, during the launch of the PMJDY implementation, Mr. Modi quoted Chanakya: *Sukhasya moolam dharmah* – the root of happiness is dharma; *Dharmasya moolam artha* – the root of dharma is artha; and *Arthasya*



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Twelve years of Jan Dhan have led to financial inclusion and independence

moolam rajyam – the root of *artha* is the state. The argument was that economic means are fundamental to human well-being and, therefore, creating access to those means is also a responsibility of the state.

The bank account was not simply another government benefit; rather, it was an entry point into the formal economy. The PMJDY, therefore, deserves to be viewed through the lens of Independence Day and the Prime Minister's thought leadership. India's first independence was about freeing the country from colonial rule. The second challenge was to build a state in which freedom could actually be exercised by ordinary citizens. If a citizen cannot access formal finance, receive money directly, save securely or establish a connection with the institutions through which economic opportunity flows, political freedom remains incomplete in a very practical sense.

The PMJDY attempted to address one part of that gap.

The numbers tell a story

The architecture also reflected the idea of *Antyodaya*: the last person in the queue should not remain outside the system. A zero-balance account meant that having little money was no longer, in principle, a reason to remain outside the banking system. A RuPay card and an overdraft facility were intended to make the account something that could actually be used.

Financial inclusion is not merely about opening accounts; it is about becoming part of a system of savings, payments, credit, insurance and economic opportunity. Twelve years later, the scale of that first step is difficult to ignore. By July 2026, the PMJDY had crossed 58 crore accounts, with deposits running into ₹3 lakh crore. More than half of the accounts are held by women, while roughly three-fourths are in rural and semi-urban areas.

But Jan Dhan's real significance lies beyond the account numbers. It became the first layer of the larger JAM trinity architecture: Jan Dhan, Aadhaar and Mobile. Once citizens had bank accounts connected to digital identity and mobile infrastructure, the government had a much more direct channel through which benefits could reach them. This transformed the possibilities of Direct Benefit Transfer. The same infrastructure eventually became part of India's broader digital public infrastructure, alongside systems such as UPI. A bank account opened under Jan Dhan became part of an increasingly digital financial ecosystem. A woman who entered the formal banking system through a Jan Dhan account in 2014 and a merchant accepting a UPI payment in France or the other countries it can be used in, in 2026, may appear to belong to two different stories. In reality, they are connected by the same financial infrastructure built over the past decade.

An account, an identity

More importantly, a bank account also became a solid symbol of identity – something that faceless people from marginalised sections could rarely have. It served as a form of "recognition with respect" offered by the system. Financial democracy through Jan Dhan made those on the periphery visible, counted and, importantly, proudly identified.

Sixty-seven years after Independence, in 2014, the Prime Minister used the country's most symbolic political stage to speak about financial, digital literacy and inclusivity. Jan Dhan followed by UPI has now become a story of our everyday lives.

The "*Mera khaata, bhagya vidhata* (My account, the destiny maker)" tagline for Jan Dhan remains true as it shapes the destiny of Viksit Bharat 2047 by financial inclusivity and opportunities ahead.

5. THE THREAT TO FOOD PRICES: WEATHER AND RENEWED WAR

(INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE NO 3)

1. GS III (Economy / Agriculture) & GS II (International Relations)
2. Topics: Issues of buffer stocks and food security; Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries.
3. Concepts: Global food security, supply chain disruptions, geopolitical choke points (Kerch Strait, Black Sea), impact of extreme weather on agriculture.

• ECONOMICS

The threat to food prices: Weather and renewed war

While the Strait of Hormuz has drawn the world's attention, the Kerch Strait, affected by the Russia Ukraine war, is emerging as the new point of worry



HARISH DAMODARAN

BOTH WEATHER and war — this time around Europe and Russia-Ukraine than West Asia — are starting to exert upward pressure on international food prices.

On Tuesday, a massive drone strike by Ukraine destroyed two of Russia's biggest grain export terminals in the Black Sea port of Novorossiysk. The serious damage has forced suspension of operations from the two terminals that together have an export capacity of 15.6 million tonnes (mt) per year, according to a Reuters report.

Russia Ukraine war heating up

Since mid-July, Ukraine has also stepped up attacks on grain vessels, maritime infrastructure and ports on the Sea of Azov and the vital Kerch Strait that connects it to the Black Sea. These have significantly restricted movement of Russian agricultural produce through ports such as Rostov-on-Don, Taganrog, Taman, Kavkaz, and now Novorossiysk.

Russia has, likewise, targeted Ukrainian port facilities and vessel operations around the Greater Odesa region.

This shipping hub on the Black Sea coast — comprising three deep-water ports of Odesa, Chornomorsk and Pivdennyi (formerly Yuzhny) — handles some 90% of Ukraine's agricultural exports.

The intensification of hostilities between Russia and Ukraine over the last month comes on top of excessive heat and dry weather in the European Union (EU).

The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) has projected EU's wheat production to fall by 7.5% from 145.1 mt in 2025-26 to 134.2 mt in this marketing year, while its output of corn (maize) is expected to dip from 56.8 mt to 50.2 mt (a nearly two-decade low), barley from 56.4 mt to 52.3



• **Supply squeeze**
Ukraine's attacks in the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait have restricted movement of Russian agricultural produce. Russia has done the same with attacks around the Greater Odesa region.

mt, oats from 8.9 mt to 8 mt and rye from 7.7 mt to 7.2 mt.

All this is beginning to affect food prices. The United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) benchmark food price index touched a three-and-a-half year high in July.

The latest Ukrainian hit on Novorossiysk — followed by Russia's on Ukraine's largest Danube port of Izmail in southwestern Odesa, bordering Romania across the river — have driven up prices of corn and wheat at the Chicago Board of Trade exchange by 4-5% since Tuesday.

Export prices of wheat from the US are currently ruling at \$321 per tonne, as against \$235 a year ago, while similarly climbing for grain from EU (\$239 to \$262), Canada (\$259 to \$292), Australia (\$255 to \$291) and Argentina (\$234 to \$239).

Europe's severe summer

Two things are happening. First, the reduction in crop yields due to record-breaking temperatures from late spring through the summer months are likely to push greater grain imports by the EU.

But the simultaneous escalation in the Russia-Ukraine conflict has, secondly, also

Bread basket

Russia and Ukraine had a combined 27.4% share of global wheat exports in 2025-26.

Together, they also accounted for 15.8%, 12.5% and 61.5% of the shipments of barley, corn and sunflower oil respectively.



A satellite image shows smoke in a port in Russia's Novorossiysk on Wednesday. VANTOR VIA AP

meant logistical disruptions to Black Sea shipping. Low river water levels caused by drought, limiting the possibilities for alternative routes such as via the Danube and even affecting inland transportation to ports, haven't helped either.

For an idea of what the recent escalations have entailed, Ukraine recorded 57 attacks on vessels and 67 on port facilities in July. By contrast, the whole of 2025 saw ships being attacked just 14 times.

As per USDA data, Russia and Ukraine had a combined 27.4% share of global wheat exports in 2025-26, while accounting for 15.8%, 12.5% and 61.5% of the shipments of barley, corn and sunflower oil respectively.

While there is no shortage of production of grain or sunflower seed in either country, the crisis is about shipping out the produce, as the intensified cross-border missile and drone strikes leads to increased shipowner and crew reluctance, soaring insurance premiums and reduced vessel calls at ports.

Ukraine's Agriculture Ministry has already cut its forecast of the country's farm produce exports for 2026-27 from 64.4 mt to 29.6 mt, with wheat shipment estimates alone downgraded from 17.6 mt to 8.3 mt.

Russia can consider alternative routes that include ports on the Baltic, Caspian and Far East seas or overland rail links. At the end of the day though, more than 80% of its grain exports go through the Sea of Azov and Black Sea.

The current surge in Russia-Ukraine hostilities has huge implications. The FAO food price index had peaked in March 2022 when the war had just begun. Prices remained elevated till early 2023, by which time grain shipments had resumed through safe maritime corridors in the Black Sea established under a UN-backed initiative.

With Russia and Ukraine launching a fresh wave of strikes on vessels and ports along one of the world's most strategic shipping lane for agricultural produce, it could potentially add to the problems from the continued blockade of the Strait of Hormuz — not to speak of heatwaves in Europe and El Niño.

In short, while the Strait of Hormuz has drawn the world's and India's attention through much of this year, the other major trade chokepoint — the Black Sea, Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait — may matter no less in the coming days.

6. THE NATIONALISM THAT EVOKES PRIDE, THE NATION WE ARE

(INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE NO 10)

1. GS I (Post-independence consolidation) & GS II (Polity)
2. Topics: Post-independence consolidation and reorganization within the country; Important aspects of governance.
3. Concepts: Idea of nationalism, constitutional reality vs. rhetoric, political communication, institution building.

The nationalism that evokes pride, the nation we are

INDEPENDENCE DAY discourses, speeches and poetry oscillate between, to borrow Freudian terms, the pleasure principle and the reality principle. The pleasure principle is the affirmation of India's grandeur. It offers, like all nationalisms, a vicarious sense of pride, achievement and hope. No political project, especially a nation, can thrive without a sense of pride, the mechanism by which we produce identification with a people or a cause. It is difficult for a politician to be successful without evoking pride, self-belief, and even a sense of romance. Anger and a sense of injustice only get you so far in politics. But almost as a counter-reaction, there is the temptation to counter the pleasure principle with the reality principle: What is the actual state of the nation?

The Hindi poet Raghuvir Sahay was the master of this. In his poem 'Adhinayak', he captures the three standard counters used by the reality principle: Authoritarianism, material deprivation and the maintenance of illusion. He poignantly asked: Who is the Adhinayak who makes us sing these praises? Harcharan, the ordinary impoverished citizen, is conditioned to sing the national anthem, without either true freedom or prosperity. The conditioning is to keep up appearances, to go through the liturgical motions of nationalism, keeping the illusion alive for the rulers that all is well. We are asked to sing its songs but are not allowed to speak in our own voices.

Nissim Ezekiel, in 'The Patriot', used exaggerated Indian English to mock the superficial nationalism during the Emergency.

The remarkable thing is that every single theme he touched on in 1977 still applies almost verbatim. The first is the gap between the professed fidelity to tradition and actual conduct: The profession of non-violence and paeans to Gandhi do not abate the violence. But how much of the adherence to tradition is performative? "Ancient Indian Wisdom is 100% correct/ I should say even 200% correct/ But modern generation is neglecting — / Too much going for fashion and foreign thing." There is a reference to unrest: "Other day I'm reading newspaper/ (Every day I'm reading Times of India/ To improve my English Language/ How one goonda fellow/ Threw stone at Indirabehn/ Must be student unrest fellow, I am thinking." The discerning citizen reads the goonda as student unrest.

The conversion of a student-unrest fellow into a goonda is the alchemy of the authoritarianism and coercion of Emergency, gestured at in the next lines: "Lend me the ears — / Everything is coming/ Regeneration, Remuneration, Contraception." There is the genuine concern of the Patriot: "What you think of prospects of world peace? Pakistan behaving like this/ China behaving like that/ It is making me really sad/ I am telling you/ Really, most harassing me." There is a mocking pun on abstinence being mistaken for complete virtue: "I'm the total teetotaler/ completely total." And then there is the poignant: "One day Ram Rajya is surely coming." This very Indian formulation manages to combine complete certainty



PRATAP BHANU MEHTA

India is great because now we have to learn to speak of ourselves as great, and the more bombast with which we speak, the more evidence we have of our greatness

(surely) with radical uncertainty (one day).

If the pleasure principle demands assurance, the reality principle has to confront the radical uncertainty. Looking at Independence Day speeches, it is quite remarkable how much uncertainty dominates them till Lal Bahadur Shastri's tenure. Jawaharlal Nehru's Independence Day speech in 1960 almost gives up on the pleasure principle in favour of the reality principle. It is all the more remarkable because this is before the war with China in 1962. Nehru reminds his audience that only two courses are open to India's destiny: "Either to hold our heads high and march forward or downfall if we are weak. There can be no middling status for us." This is meant to be a call for action. But then he immediately goes on to say, "However, this is not in my hands. You have made me Prime Minister for a few days so I am here. There are innumerable defects in me."

This could be false modesty, absolving himself from blame, or merely reminding his audience that the nation will not be made from declamations from on high. But then comes the mirror to the nation. Referring to India's Independence, Nehru said "After hundreds of years, India shone once again and the world heard her voice, which had a profound impact because it was the true inner voice of the nation. India began to be respected once again. But very soon the same people of India who had shown great courage seemed to revert to their own weaknesses and began to fight among them-

selves in the name of religion or caste, language and province. The world began to wonder if it had made a mistake in judging this nation." Shastri's first speech as Prime Minister was pithy and direct, this time confronting the fact that India was facing a potentially catastrophic food crisis.

In Nehru's speeches, the confrontation with fragility, vulnerability and uncertainty is central. There is the constant refrain that there are two dispositions that can keep India down. The first is pettiness. Pettiness is not the same as self-interest. Self-interest can at least be tied to prudence; pettiness is more destructive. It is almost as if Nehru is haunted by Gandhi's remark, that "our besetting sin is not our differences, it is our littleness". The second is fear. He writes: "Telling lies and deceit are all the offspring of fear."

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speeches over the years have been varied. The Viksit Bharat framework has one virtue. It puts a timeline on Ram Rajya's arrival. Ezekiel's "one day" is 2047. But Modi is focused on satisfying the pleasure principle of nationalism. That has got trapped in its own circular logic. India is great because now we have to learn to speak of ourselves as great, and the more bombast with which we speak, the more evidence we have of our greatness. In 2014, the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan forcefully confronted India's filth. But alas for the reality principle, it seems like our national self-esteem has, since then, reached heights our municipal councils are yet to discover.

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7. BAR COUNCIL BREAKS LAW TO CRAWL, ITS CHIEF MUST GO

(INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE NO 10)

1. GS II (Polity & Governance)
2. Topics: Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies; Fundamental Rights.
3. Concepts: Bar Council of India mandate, Freedom of Speech and Expression (Article 19), right to peaceful protest, institutional overreach.

Bar Council breaks law to crawl, its chief must go

THE BAR COUNCIL of India has rolled back its illegal, arbitrary and overreaching direction to State Bar Councils to not enrol 2026 graduates of NALSAR University of Law, Hyderabad. But that cannot, and should not, be the end of the matter. It is necessary to rewind and pause on the now-withdrawn decision — to see how it combines a repressive reading of citizens' fundamental rights with an overblown understanding of the restrictions that can be imposed on them; how the BCI arrogates to itself powers that are not, by law, vested in it; how the institutional failure of the Bar to hold up its end undermines the justice delivery system. The BCI's attempt to impose blanket restrictions and administer collective punishment on an entire batch of law students came after about 450 students of NALSAR objected to Chief Justice of India Surya Kant attending their convocation as chief guest — earlier, a remark by the CJI had become the trigger for the formation of the Cockroach Janta Party, and another comment on the students' protests subsequently seemed to underline perceptions of the Court's insensitivity. On Friday, CJI Surya Kant himself snubbed the BCI: "It's a dialogue between students and me. Who are they (BCI) to unnecessarily raise an issue?" The CJI's rebuke is welcome and reassuring. But the need remains urgent for the BCI to conduct an honest reckoning.

The BCI is mandated to regulate legal education, recognise law degrees, supervise State Bar Councils, exercise disciplinary jurisdiction over advocates. Its abortive bid to curb the freedom of expression of young citizens and cramp their right to disagree with a constitutional authority by blackballing them is a blatant misuse of its powers. The Advocates Act, 1961, under which the BCI was established as an independent statutory authority, provides a finite list of grounds for disqualification from enrolment — participation in a peaceful students' campaign is certainly not one of them. In its zeal to cosy up to the judicial and/or political establishment, the BCI ignores that the constitutional guarantee of free speech includes the right to protest peacefully, and that the SC has laid down that restrictions must be tailored narrowly. The attempt to silence budding advocates is especially jarring in the aftermath of the students' protests — it shows an institution that has not learnt any lessons from the movement on the street.

The CJI's rebuke isn't enough. BCI chairman Manan Kumar Mishra has embarrassed himself and undermined the institution he leads. The attempt, on his watch, to intimidate tomorrow's bar and, indeed, the bench, to shrink the spirit of tomorrow's court, calls for a course correction that can only begin with his exit. If the Bar Council needs to do justice to its mandate, Mishra must go.