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NEW LOGIC**  
Sundar Sarukkai's 'Homo Philo' Western-centric academic bias ble approach to global philosop everyday ethics, it also examine human nature.



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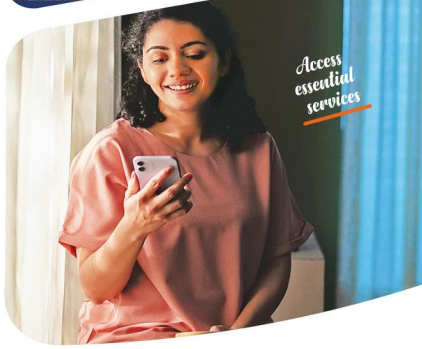
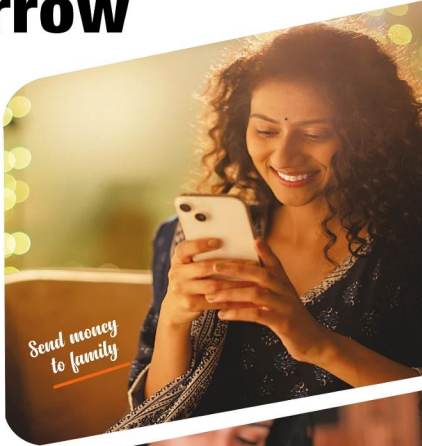
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EVERYONE HAS A THEORY OURS HAS THE NUMBERS

Hindustan Times

NUMBER THEORY

Everyone has an explanation for the world's biggest events. **Number Theory** tests those explanations against the evidence. Through rigorous analysis, data and fact-based reporting, it uncovers surprising insights, challenges conventional wisdom and reveals the bigger picture behind the issues shaping India and the world.

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NEW DELHI THURSDAY MAY 28, 2026

NUMBER THEORY

What is the actual economic inequality in India?

By Roshan Kishore and Abhishek Jha

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged Indians to cut down on gold purchases and foreign travel amid concerns over India's external balance, he was subtly hinting towards a deeper problem in the Indian economy. There is now a significant cohort of Indians whose lifestyle is at par with the rich in high-income countries and who are way ahead of how ordinary Indians earn and spend. This cohort seems to have become bigger over time, as is seen in India's rising trade deficit after economic reforms. But, statistically speaking, India's inequality data points in the opposite direction: inequality has fallen, not increased after economic reforms. How does one square this (counter-intuitive statistical) circle on inequality? Let us begin with the numbers themselves.

1

The really-rich have seen the lowest increase in spending after reforms

India's first income survey is in the process of being conducted. Existing estimates of inequality are based on consumption expenditure surveys (CES) conducted by the National Statistical Office (NSO). Comparing the monthly per capita expenditure (MPCE) of the entire CES, top 1%, top 5% and top 1% between 1993-94 and 2023-24 CES rounds – the earliest and latest after 1991 reforms – shows that top 1% have seen the lowest proportionate increase in their MPCE. The catch up of the masses vis-a-vis the classes is almost entirely a result of the former's high growth in non-food spending.

**Consumption growth between 2023-24 & 1993-94**

Chart shows ratio of Monthly Per Capita Expenditure between 2023-24 and 1993-94

| Category | Top 1% | Top 5% | Top 10% | All classes |
|----------|--------|--------|---------|-------------|
| Total    | 11.1   | 12.9   | 13.6    | 15.3        |
| Food     | 10.7   | 10.5   | 10.6    | 11.2        |
| Non-Food | 11.3   | 14.6   | 15.9    | 21.6        |

Source: HT analysis using NSO data

2

Inequality seems to have fallen even within the rich

Thanks to the trend described above, India's consumption inequality has fallen in the post-reform period. The Gini coefficient – the most widespread statistical measure of inequality where 0 shows perfect equality and 1 perfect inequality – has fallen from 0.32 in 1993-94 to 0.29 in 2023-24.

What about inequality within the really rich though? It makes sense to ask this question because it is eminently likely that the super-rich (those who own the luxury cars, for example) are still a very small part of the former has seen incomes rise. Data seems to suggest otherwise once again. Intra-class Gini has seen the sharpest fall among the richest classes between 1993-94 and 2023-24.

**Within-class Gini coefficient of MPCE**

| Category | Top 1% | Top 5% | Top 10% | Overall |
|----------|--------|--------|---------|---------|
| 1993-94  | 0.28   | 0.24   | 0.23    | 0.33    |
| 2023-24  | 0.15   | 0.17   | 0.18    | 0.29    |

Gini coefficient values reduce between 3 and 7 when 0 shows perfect equality and 1 perfect inequality. Source: HT analysis using NSO data

3

Is the CES data just counter-intuitive or really not representative?

This is the crux of the debate around India's official inequality estimates. If the CES does not understate the spending of the really rich, it will tend to data between theories of the survey undercounting the really rich. For example, the most expensive vehicle bought by a household in the 2023-24 household consumption expenditure survey (HCES) cost just Rs 45 lakh. The share of such households in the HCES is eight households per million. This does not really seem to fit consumption standards of India's super rich. For example, according to the Ministry of Road Transport & Highways, 4,128 Jaguar, 677 Porsche 92 Carrera, 11 McLaren, 54 Rolls Royce, 40 Ferrari, 15 Maserati were registered in the country in FY 2023-24. makers that typically sell cars priced significantly above Rs 45 lakh in India. This non-exhaustive count of 5,205 registrations amounts to a share of 16 households per million using population projections and household size from the HCES. The CES might be undercounting the rich at a wider level than just luxury cars. The share of households/population who spent on air travel in 2011-12 and 2023-24 shows a decline from 649 households/75 people per million to 471 households/69 people per million. The number of domestic air passengers in India increased from 80.6 million to 153.7 million during this period, according to the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), which translates to roughly 49,993 departures per million and 1,30,281 departures per million people in 2011-12 and 2023-24 respectively. This means that the average Indian air traveler would have to take 232 trips in 2024-25 instead of 65 in 2011-12 annually for the HCES data to be correct.

**Domestic air passengers and estimated air travellers**

Domestic air passengers per million people: DGCA

Estimated air-travel buyers per million people: CES/HCES

| Year    | Domestic air passengers per million people (DGCA) | Estimated air-travel buyers per million people (CES/HCES) |
|---------|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| 2011-12 | 774.8                                             | 49,993.26                                                 |
| 2023-24 | 469.04                                            | 110,390.58                                                |

Source: CES 2011-12, 2023-24; DGCA 2011-12, 2023-24; National Commission on Population

If the CES is undercounting air travellers, can it be trusted to represent people spending on even higher value goods and services? And if the super-rich are undercounted, how credible are its estimates of economic inequality? This does not, however, mean the CES is a useless statistical database. Sure, it tends to undercount the rich, but it also gives a treasure trove of information on the economic condition of a vast majority of Indians. The numbers above only tell us that one should take the inequality measures from the CES data with some amount of skepticism.

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SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 19 2026

lounge

THE FINAL COUNTDOWN

If humanity had a fixed expiry date, what would become urgent and what would suddenly seem beside the point? The Lounge team considers the choices they might make, from living off the grid to learning new skills.

SEE PAGE 10



CHANDRA'S THIRD TATA TERM FACES VOTE HURDLE AT AGM | PAGE 16

# BELIEVE IT OR NOT



THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE AI  
POSES MAY NOT BE ITS ABILITY  
TO DECEIVE BUT TO PERSUADE  
HUMANS TO BELIEVE EVEN WHAT  
THEY KNOW IS FAKE

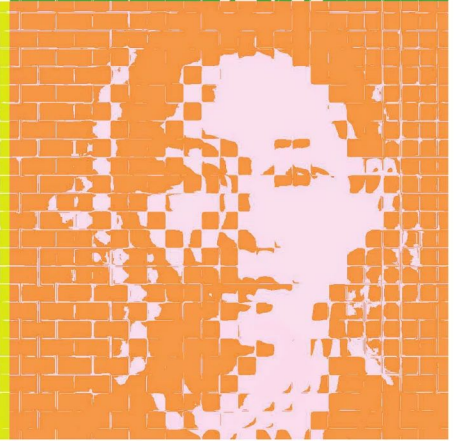
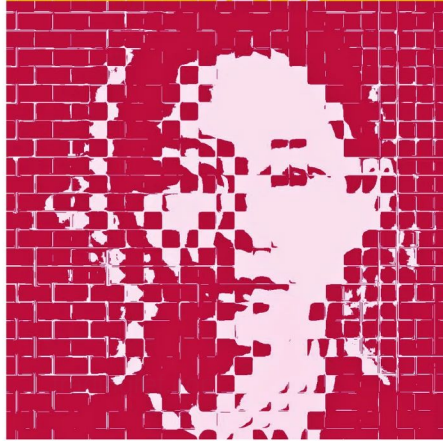
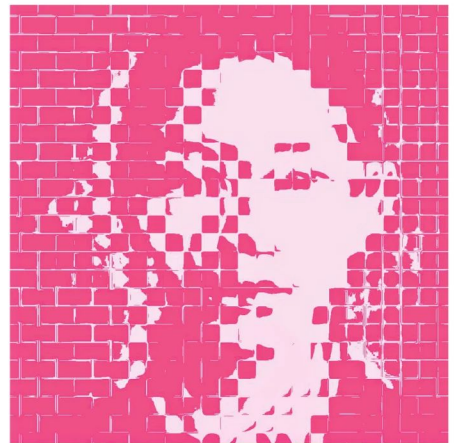
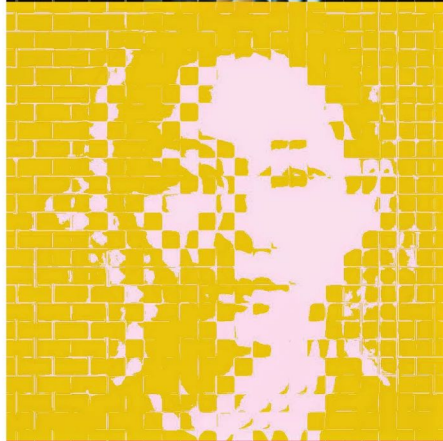


A WALK IN THE WOODS  
How to see the forest when  
wildlife stays hidden

TASTE  
*Ahmedabad's caf  s  
lead with design*

SPORTS  
India aims high at the  
2026 Asian Games

CULTURE  
*'Angh' brings Naga  
history to life*





A NOTE FROM  
THE EDITOR

SHALINI UMACHANDRAN

# Why we fall for AI fakes



An AI-generated photo of a runaway wolf in South Korea.

For a few months earlier this year, I was entirely entranced by the viral “dogs choose their humans” videos, the ones where people sit in a large room, waiting for shelter staff to bring a rescue dog in to wander among them. After a few circles and much tail-wagging and sniffing, the dog “hugs” and climbs on to its “forever person”, who promptly dissolves into tears. It’s obvious they’re AI-made. I know they’re fake. I know dogs don’t pick owners like spaniels sniffing out truffles. Yet they’re warm, comforting and fuzzy-feel inducing videos that I will always watch when Instagram feeds them to me.

You could say there’s nothing dangerous about this because it isn’t insidious misinformation, but what does it mean, over a period of time, to willingly suspend disbelief? Why do we make the decision to relate to content that we know has been manufactured only to deceive us? That’s the question we set out to answer this week in *Lounge*.

At the simplest level, these fakes move us to feelings of love and fear, wonder and joy. And emotion drives engagement, which is fuel for platforms, but the volume of the videos is the real concern, as Viren Naidu reports. We don’t know how this choice to watch a stream of fabricated video impacts our understanding of the real, and Pooja Singh examines the question of whether too much AI is making us stupider. Then there are AI-generated maker videos, the ones promising home improvement, packing, upcycling, gardening and other “hacks”. Many are impossible to execute at home in real life, and the result is a loss of confidence, writes Shephali Bhatt.

It seemed appropriate to consider these questions in a week when we’ve been simultaneously bombarded with AI-generated ‘80s portraits and news of AI killing us in six months to a decade, depending on who you choose to believe. Rather than get bogged down by it, the *Lounge* team made its own 10-year plans—if the end of the world was night, what would we do to count down the days? It might make an interesting prompt for yourself, too; if not, just enjoy our writing this weekend.

Write to the editor at [shalini.umachandran@livemint.com](mailto:shalini.umachandran@livemint.com)  
@shaliniumachandran

# NEW ON SCREENS

‘Resident Evil’ will need to win over fans, Kunal Kemmu directs a spy comedy, and other titles to watch

## DAAYRA

Meghna Gulzar’s film stars Kareena Kapoor Khan as an investigating officer looking into the deaths in police custody of four men accused of rape. Also starring Prithviraj Sukumaran. (In theatres)



## VIBE

Kunal Khemu directs and stars in this comedy about two bumbling men picked up for a covert spy mission. Also featuring Preti Zinta and Sparsh Shrivastava. (In theatres)

## RESIDENT EVIL

Zach Cregger’s adaptation has come under fire for deviating too much from the games, even though no one has seen the film yet. It’s hard to put your spin on anything in this era of fan service, but if anyone has earned the right to play around a bit, it’s Cregger. His first two horror films, *Barbarian* and *Weapons*, have been incredibly successful and well-received. *Resident Evil* stars Austin Abrams along with Zach Cherry, Kai Reis, Johnno Wilson, Devon Stewart and Paul Walter Hauser. (In theatres)



## BOUCHRA

An animation for older viewers directed by Meriem Bennani and Orian Barki. It follows a 35-year-old Moroccan canid in Brooklyn as she comes to terms with her sexuality and identity. (MUBI)



# PLAN THE WEEK AHEAD



## FABRIC ART

**4** 7-A is presenting a new show of enamelled brocades and heirloom textiles put together by Sourav Das. Titled *Parchinkari*, the show draws from textile research, documentation and engagement with master weavers. Das, a textile researcher and revivalist, brings together the finesse of inlay work and the skill of weavers. He has been working with masters across clusters tied to Varanasi and Madhya Pradesh textiles. Das seeks to express the dynamism of *minkari* craftsmanship through classical Indian weaves. The show goes beyond the final textile to show fabric as a repository of rituals, nostalgia, patience and skill. At 47-A, Mumbai, till 27 September, 11am-7pm (except Monday).



## ROOTED IN THE FOREST

**A** new solo show of paintings by Rahul Buski at Art Exposure is rooted in the connection of Kerala’s Panaya Adivasi community to the land, the surrounding forests. Titled *Flowing like a River Undammed*, the exhibition features energised compositions with dense sedimented textures. “For me, this comes directly from my life as an Adivasi person, and my connection to the land, the forest, our memories, and our community,” writes Buski in the artist note. The artist also looks at the inextricable bond between the body and land in paintings such as *Thalam*, *Thalarayam*, *Rutti*.

At Art Exposure, Kollata, till 17 November, 11am-5pm (Monday to Saturday).  
—Compiled by Avantika Bhuyan

# LOUNGE ONLINE

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[livemint.com/mint-lounge](http://livemint.com/mint-lounge)  
from the week gone by



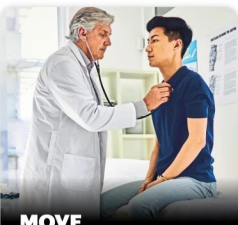
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## BUY

What happened to  
laptop design?

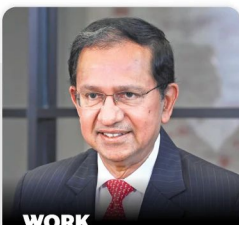
**T**here’s a good reason why OG laptops from the 1990s and 2000s are still revered by tech fans and collectors. The IBM Thinkpad, the Dell XPS or the HP Pavilion were not only excellent, powerful computers, but also had distinct design languages. **Shovik Das** looks at this generation of laptops—which was also the heyday of Windows—and tries to understand why modern Windows laptops look and feel so soulless in comparison. He comes to the conclusion that design is a big part of it. While older laptops tried to stand out through differentiation, modern laptops are all carbon copies of the same bland and standardised templates. But is that all there is to it, and which modern laptops avoid this pitfall?



## MOVE

Consult a cardiologist  
before a marathon

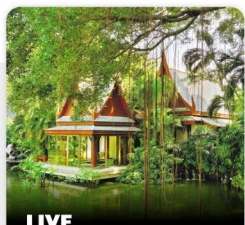
**W**ith marathons, CrossFit and endurance challenges like Hyrox gaining popularity across India, more people are pushing their bodies in the pursuit of optimising their fitness levels. While regular exercise is like medicine for cardiovascular health, participating in these events puts the heart under strain. This is especially true for those with corporate jobs who lead a sedentary lifestyle. People make the mistake of signing up as a way to get fit which is an extreme step. **Pradeep Haranaballi** writes why it’s important to get a cardiac evaluation done before diving into intense training, and lists a number of tests. It will help determine whether your heart is as strong as your determination.



## WORK

Battling crises with  
resolve and empathy

**I**n his new book, *Courage Under Fire*, former Nestlé executive Suresh Narayanan reflects on how he saw the company through its fair share of crises, including the infamous 2015 ban on Maggi and tough layoffs. Narayanan, who retired last year as chairman and MD of Nestlé India, writes that one of his guiding principles comes from his grandmother: “*janangala pattuko (take care of people, and things will take care of themselves)*.” He tells **Soumya Gupta** why he sticks to that principle in bad times and good, how the world is moving from an age of nurturing leadership to transactional leadership, what it takes to navigate a crisis, and why CEOs and leaders need to be formally trained in crisis communication.



## LIVE

Wellness retreats for  
every kind of reset

**S**ometimes the point of a retreat is to leave the familiar behind. You may want the structure of a wellness programme, but also the pleasure of a holiday and the comfort of being looked after in a landscape that is different from home. That’s where the short-haul wellness escape comes in. There are a number of retreats and resorts in India’s neighbourhood that offer distinctive and traditional as well as modern versions of recovery—Ayurveda in Sri Lanka, Sona Rigga in Bhutan, island well-being in the Maldives and classic discipline in Thailand. Each suits a different kind of wellness seeker. **Anushka Patodia** curates a list of wellness retreats that are worth the time and investment.





# Lessons from the forest: learning to see



A WALK  
IN THE  
WOODS

NEHA SINHA

There are only a few places in the world where one feels time just stops, or like *prayaan* falling from a ladle—it moves in an especially slow trickle. A place where you, and what you think, aren't the main event. In these cathedrals bound in time, all you can do is surrender to your senses.

The forest is one of these places. Old places walled by trees, textured with grasses, roofed by canopies, with windows of light between tree crowns; a place which feels like a house, gathered and complete in itself. This monsoon, we were in the central Indian forest, which many have read about before they tread in it. *The Jungle Book* has immortalised stands of forest life with snakes, bears, leopards and a surly tiger. Several safari images we see come from this landscape—under Sal trees growing tall and straight, close to boulders arranged like a giant's playthings, with cicadas chirping and the rains washing weariness of the land. That day, grass arrowed up and tufted over the ground. One particular grass was severe-looking, containing all the thorny, proud energy of a palm tree in a low plant. We scanned the area for wildlife. A White-eyed buzzard, eyes pale but flashing, looked out from behind a tree. A pair of drongos darted, snipping life out of vines that hung over a tree. A Crested-serpent eagle, wet and a little sorry looking, sat like a sculpture on a dead tree. We were looking for deer, tigers, leopards, everything. But the vegetation, freshly energised with the rain—a rain which still fell, softly fuzzing the place—made spotting anything difficult. Something had died, and the stench slapped our faces. We looked again. A rock on the road could have been a nightjar, a browned leaf a hare, a flash of thistles could be a tiger. Nothing was visible on any convenient manner.

And this was exactly the point. The forest does not always reveal its crea-



A tiger in Bandhavgarh; and (right) langurs.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY NEHA SINHA

tures, and you have to accept this fortune with the grace you reserve for a generous aunt with a more impressive temperament than yours.

And, not being able to sight something may nevertheless add to our vision.

In 1939, F.W. Champion, the British forester who first photographed tigers using a camera trap, wrote about the beauty of the half-seen (or the unseen). "This is one of the most fascinating features of the jungles of India, where the sight of thousands of horned animals with stray parties of lions such as is commonly seen on the open veldt of Africa simply does not exist. Many objects, both animate and inanimate, tend to become more beautiful when half-veiled or when seen in dim light, which endows them with a romance and mystery that disappears in the strong light of open spaces."

And sometimes, we are watched too: "A pair of luminous eyes nervously

peeping round a bush, the sleek form of a leopard gliding silently along a dark forest path, the outlines of a family party of markhor seen dimly through a mountain cloud give a far deeper impression of the romance of the jungle than crowds of zebra standing about on an open plain where they might just as well be in an open-air zoo," he added.

As wildlifers who know animals

decide if and when they want to be seen,

There is more to see than meets the eye, and not seeing something doesn't mean it isn't there. We must look not just for a sighting, but also for signs

we were ready to come back with nothing but the sighting of trees. On closer inspection, the spiky "grass" was the *Phoenix aculeis*, a palm which is also called Cheend. Chhindwara in Madhya Pradesh derives its name from Cheend. Nearby, dark tree trunks had little mushrooms growing on them, as white and tender as eyes. The smells alternated between wet soil, dead carcass, and bugs. It felt like dye mixing in our bodies, and us emerging a different colour, a shade quieter, our cores straighter.

"To reach a wild place was, for me, to step out of human history," writes Robert Macfarlane in *The Wild Places*. In some forests—apart from a sense of slowing of time—there is the sense that wild, ecological processes come before the extent of the human hand, that these are places majorly shaped by creatures, rain and the wind.

The rain slowed. In a leisurely manner, the sun rolled out of the clouds,



throwing shafts of gold in a few chosen places. Langurs came out from the trees, arranging themselves in a chic roundtable. Some of them were backlit, looking suspiciously haloed. The colours of the forest popped, the langurs peary, the trees emerald, the grasses gold and green. I counted the monkeys, and the underbrush rustled. From between the Cheend, a movement, elegant and decisive. A tiger emerged. His head periscope'd at us, the movement full of assurance. A slight snarl, black lips pulling back, canines bared in the tiger arrogance we all love. As the young male moved, getting a clear view was impossible. Our gaze was cut by grasses, Sal trees, and monsoon-drunk bushes. I craned my head from side to side, but realised that this is the way a tiger should be seen: through lined grass, the stripes on its body becoming one with the vegetation, confusing the eye, bewildering the senses, making the loping tiger look bigger one second, invisible the next. You often come away from the forest second-guessing what you saw, wondering if the creature was a trick of the light, or a wish made solid.

Yet though we might not always be able to sight tigers—or other wildlife in their habitat—there are some very real, corporeal things they need from us.

In 2016, a tigress was born in Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve. In 2022, camera traps in Achanakmar Tiger Reserve picked up the same tigress. Sometime

around the covid-19 pandemic, Jhumri the tigress had moved 200 kilometres from Bandhavgarh to Achanakmar, a route that could have encountered railway lines and big roads. Jhumri has given birth to multiple tiger litters, and thanks to tigresses like her, the number of tigers in Achanakmar has more than doubled.

It was a camera trap image that helped identify the tigress—F.W. Champion would be proud—but though a tigress raising cubs or moving hundreds of kilometres may not always be easy to see, tigers like Jhumri need functional and safe connectivity between forests. Their path should have adequate cover, undisturbed by fragmentation and the threat of big roads, so they can establish their territories, and in some cases, change the destiny of the places they settle in.

And so there is the other thing wildlife teaches us: there is more to see than meets the eye, and not seeing something doesn't mean it isn't there. That we must look not just for a sighting, but also for signs—the splatter of droppings, nail-etchings on trees, the dens of those that live amongst rocks, the smell of a guarded carcass. Our eyes are one way to see. The forest teaches many other ways to look.

Neha Sinha is a conservation biologist and author of *Wild Capital: Discovering Nature in Delhi*.

## Medium Talk

More than small talk

## How to live well with age

HEART OF THE MATTER

A fortnightly column about emotional well-being

Longevity debates tend to focus on health, but staying active is also about staying curious and connected

Snalli Gupta

Over the last few years, I have noticed a subtle but meaningful shift in my work. More people in their 50s have been reaching out for therapy, not because they are in crisis, but because they want to mindfully build a life that feels meaningful and satisfying. Many male clients in their 50s focus on how they can change with age and adapt to lifestyle changes while remaining optimistic as they approach retirement.

Some clients in their 60s and 70s start therapy as they try to negotiate between their partner or friends. My observation working with these clients is that there is a real gap when it comes to conversations around longevity and ageing.

Global research has turned towards the idea that in view of longevity we need to focus on health span (the years we spend in good health as we age). However, we also need to focus on what allows people in their 60s and 70s to maintain vitality, trust in the world, remain engaged, and in turn lead full lives as they age.

Recently, I came across the term "joy span", coined by gerontologist and author Dr Kerry Burkitt. It encapsulates how important it is to focus on quality of life, not just the number of years we live. This is the missing piece in our conversations.



Accepting life's ups and downs helps us age better.

ISTOCKPHOTO

As our bodies change with age, it becomes all the more important to consciously work on the factors within our control and create the conditions that enable us to build a life that allows us to feel alive, and experience contentment. Our capacity to nurture and sustain close relationships that bring us joy and lightness is a crucial factor that allows for good quality of life. We need to be mindful of relationships that leave us feeling hassled. It can help to use this awareness to figure out how we engage when we find ourselves in these relationships.

Recognising the value of connection and avoiding withdrawal and isolation is crucial. One of my clients who lost her husband when she was 55 and is now in her late 60s, tells me she goes to the gym not just for health but for micro-interactions since she lives by herself.

Another factor that plays a big role is our capacity to learn, unlearn and adapt. I was teaching a class of adult learners where the oldest student was 75 and he said that he commits to learning a new skill every year, which keeps him engaged. I found this remarkable and a reminder of how we need to keep our curiosity alive.

A lot of psychological literature points

out that adults in their 50s and 60s who have assimilated, integrated, and made peace with what life has offered them—and who have given themselves permission to accept their losses and challenges—tend to do much better as they age. In contrast, those who feel that life has not served them well or given them what they feel they deserved may struggle more as they grow older.

Dr Burnight says her favourite part of ageing is giving and she feels our capacity to thrive is linked to it. Giving, when it comes from a place of openness and genuineness, has the power to empower both the giver and the receiver.

I've realised it is important to ask ourselves: How are we contributing to the world, and what are we giving back? Sometimes it's as simple as a smile, a listening ear, hope, empathy or an act of consideration. And at times, it may even be our own vulnerability.

As Betty Friedan writes in *Fountain of Age*, "Ageing is not lost youth, but a new stage of opportunity and strength." My feeling is that the journey to reimagining our life as we age lies in holding this perspective.

Snalli Gupta is a Mumbai-based psychotherapist and author.



People are 'selectively cautious' about when and where they take their expensive phones out.

ISTOCKPHOTO

## Fold, hide, and repeat

The iPhone Duo's price has set off a wave of phone-snatching jokes. Will it affect how people use the phone in public?

Shephali Bhatt

shephali.bhatt@partner.livemint.com

Apple unveiled its first foldable phone, the iPhone Duo, earlier this month, with prices in India starting at roughly ₹3 lakh. Like clockwork, the sell-your-kidney memes followed within hours. Only this time, they went a step further.

Comedian Atul Khatri tweeted that the #iPhoneDuo "is so expensive that the only way you can get your hands on it if you have a hoodie, a fast electric bike and you ride on Oxford Street in London." He was referring to viral videos of hooded men on e-bikes and mopeds grabbing phones from tourists and shoppers in central London. The problem is so well known that in August 2025, electronics retailer Currys teamed up with the Metropolitan Police and Westminster Council to paint purple lines along the street's pavements. Modelled on the London

Tube's "mind the gap" warning, the lines read "Mind the Grab."

Closer home, the Mumbai police joined in with an Instagram post showing foldable phones through the years, with a reminder that "no matter how you flip or fold, when trouble unfolds, Dial 112."

Street safety is a worry in cities the world over. But this new layer of threat jokes on top of the usual iPhone price jokes signals something else. Anthropologist Gayatri Sapru, who runs the Mumbai-based cultural strategy consultancy Folk Frequency, sees it as an extension of the "eat the rich" mood running through pop culture. From *The White Lotus* to *Lock Up* and *Big Boss*. "There is a perverse pleasure we get in imagining how the elite must also feel some kind of danger in today's world, because they seem to be floating completely above the common person with no consequences from the economic ups and downs," she says.

But the danger the memes imagine for the rich isn't quite how snatching plays out. "I don't think an offender sees someone with an expensive phone and automatically thinks, 'This person is my target.' Target selection is much more situational," says Mumbai-based forensic psychologist Krupa Nishar. An offender may not know whether a phone costs ₹30,000 or ₹3 lakh. What they can assess

in seconds is whether it's visible, within reach and in the hands of someone distracted, with an easy escape route nearby. "The person is often less important than the situation," she says.

The worry beneath the joke, though, is real enough to have changed how people behave. "For many people, carrying a premium phone is itself a statement of status. So the response to fear is not necessarily 'I won't buy it'; it is more often 'I will change how I use it,'" Nishar says. Calls happen through earphones. Notifications get checked on a watch. People think twice before taking the phone out near traffic, at crowded junctions or beside an open vehicle window.

"The object hasn't changed. The behaviour around the object has changed," she says. People still carry expensive phones everywhere. They are simply becoming "selectively cautious" about when and where they take them out.

Women in Indian cities have practised this for decades, tucking chains inside collars or behind dupattas, and holding bags close on local trains. Now more people are learning similar reflexes with the most expensive thing they carry. I won't be surprised if iPhone Duo owners skip flaunting the flap in public, keeping it firmly folded in their pockets instead.





**CULT HIT**  
**Casio Digital Dual Time Calculator Watch**  
Carry the convenience of a calculator on your wrist to keep track of your spending. Available in stores and online; \$159.

## TIME IN A BOTTLE

**Dior Poison Girl**

A fresh take on the iconic perfume launched in 1985, this version has a bitter-sweet floral aroma with a hint of orange. Available in stores; ₹15,300.



# Source

Fashion from the 1980s that's still hot



## CHAIN GANG

**Chanel Flap Bag**

Carry around a piece of history from that era with this marine life-inspired take on the classic bag. Available in stores; price on request.

## PADDED AFFAIR

**Qua Tailored Notch Blazer**  
Love power dressing but don't want to look too serious? Add a pop of colour. Available on Qua.clothing; ₹5,995.



## CROSS THE LINE

**ZARA STRIPED SHIRT**

Leg-of-mutton sleeves, contrast stripes and a ruffle trim brings that retro vibe to everyday wear. Available in stores and online; ₹2,950.



## MATERIAL GIRL

**Masaba Trinket Hoarder**

No '80s fashion list is incomplete without a Madonna-inspired accessory that takes cue from her love for layered necklaces. Available in stores; price on request.



## TAKE NOTE

**Betsey Johnson Triple Pencil Hinge Bangle Bracelet**

Pop colours and quirky shapes channel the era's boldness. Available on Betseyjohnson.com; \$128.



**FRILLY AFFAIR**  
**Ashish Divine Ruffles Dress**  
A bandhini silk organza dress with dramatic stockings mimics the decade's big-hair energy. Available on Ashish.co.uk; ₹2,54,600.



## BE FOOTLOOSE

**SWEAR Air Revive Trigger**

A pair of high-top sneakers that can be dressed up, worn to the gym or as casual shoes. Available on Farfetch.com; \$415.



Compiled by Proja Singh

## LOUNGE LOVES

Things to watch, read, hear, do—and other curated experiences from the team



## THE REAL '80s

The AI time machine has every third person turning present-day photos into portraits of what they'd have looked like in the 1980s. I'm firmly on the side of those calling out the wasteful uselessness of this trend that burns water, but it has had its moments of true nostalgia. *Deccan Herald* dug into its archives for photos of what Bengaluru looked like 40 years ago, all sepia but without so many tonnes of cement. Then there were photos from *The Illustrated Weekly of India* newsroom posted by journalist Meher Marfatia. Rotary telephones, padded Godrej chairs, and sub-editors proof-reading and "glass passing" pages. It all seems so tangible and warm, a time when journalists could (maybe) work in a more considered way. Maybe that's really what the '80s viral trend is about, slowing down—but if only it was real.

—Shalini Umachandran



## STRING THEORY

Last month, on a short visit to Kyoto, I signed up to learn how to play koto, a traditional Japanese plucked-string instrument. It was my first time playing a musical instrument as an adult. Taking the lesson in a different country, at someone's home, brought its own complications, which made it all the more fun. The notes on the music sheet were written in Roman numerals, while the strings on the koto were marked in kanji. So I spent much of the lesson translating numbers from one script to another. I learnt to play folk songs like *Sakura* (cherry blossoms). At first, I was preoccupied with getting the instructions right. The rhythm improved when I stopped trying to get it right and started enjoying the act of creating melody.

—Shephali Bhatt

## KEYBOARD ASMR

I have always loved the clackety-clack of mechanical keyboards, a generational thing I guess, having grown up typing on lumbering desktops and keyboards with deep, satisfying key travel. In fact, I remember loving the idea of a computer because of the keyboards, fuelled by a deeper love of typewriters. These days, typing on sleek laptop keyboards just doesn't do anything for me. Imagine my delight then, when I came across an app called Klack, which gives a satisfying mechanical keyboard clack to a laptop keyboard. It runs in the background, and you can choose from seven different mechanical keyboard sounds when you're typing. My favourite is the "Crystal Purple".

—Bibek Bhattacharya



## WRAPPED IN TRADITION

September signals a shift in the season—time for shopping and traffic jams. In many Kashmiri Pandit homes, *roth* (a deep-fried sweet bread sprinkled with poppy seeds and flavoured with black cardamom seeds) is made. Over a span of few auspicious days, Kashmiri families across the world come together in their kitchens to make this *naived* (*prasad*) and then break the bread together over cups of *kahwa*. I wait for a phone call, from my cousin, who lives at the other extreme of the National Capital Region. The first thing I say—without standing on ceremony—is "Mubarak" (for the *puja*), and he follows it up with, "I am sending your *roth*". This year's call has come. Home is on its way, arriving fragrant, wrapped and parcelled.

—Nipa Charagi



## STREAM OF STORIES

RAJA SEN

## Lust in translation



A still from 'Lust Stories 3'

**T**o lust is not the same as to want. We may desire several people, sometimes even simultaneously, yet remain in our senses. Lust is a different beast. Here the chemistry becomes so heady that judgement becomes inconvenience, or afterthought. A film about lust, therefore, should underline that hazardous electricity, the pure need that makes restraint feel absurd. To lust is to want so badly, and so all-consuming, that you cross the lines you have drawn for yourself. It is a hard, uncut feeling, raw and irrational, that enters the bloodstream and takes over. Resistance is futile.

I emphasise this while I sigh at Netflix's flaccid *Lust Stories 3*, an anthology film where directors Vikramaditya Motwane, Kiran Rao, Shashank Batra and Vishal Bhardwaj take on varying ideas of lust. This is a disappointingly unsexy film, with an unforgivably long running time. There are a couple of bright spots, a couple of good shots, a couple of fine actors, but too little to arouse admiration.

Motwane's film stars Radhika Apte and Konkona Sen Sharma as co-workers and friends who bond over Korean drama shows and grumble about their own sexless marriages, till they are inspired by the former to try and affect the latter. The writing is godawful, including a genuinely cringeworthy definition of "MILF", and indecisively Hindi dialogues that severely handicap two powerful, interesting actresses. *"Tum documentaries dekhti ho?" Haan, binge-watch kar leti hoon kabhi kabhi.*" Groan. Part of this has to do with the film's performative, even patronising gaze on Kandivli, and how far removed it is from Korea. There is, still, a lovely running gag about how on-screen lips in dramatically dubbed K-dramas are never in sync.

The premise of two unfulfilled women trying to use scandal to spice up their lives at the same time could have been interesting. The actors are fine—Vijay Varma and Abhishek Banerjee play the disinterested, reel-scrolling husbands—but the film never engages with either sexual or comedic or satirical possibilities. It's particularly painful to watch Sen Sharma, who had directed an incredible film in the last *Lust Stories* collection, reduced to mouthing these embarrassingly bad lines.

In comparison, Rao's film feels like a treat. It conjures a breezy chemistry between leads Sana Thampi and Gurufath Pirzada, attractive people with a physical rapport so easy that it feels like a cross between a condom commercial and an ice-cream ad. She's a nail-technician, he delivers boxes of pizza, and Rao fills in their worlds with interesting, authentic textures, from his early morning scenes in the fish market to her house littered with quirky furniture scavenged by a production designer flatmate.

The thing is there are two of him. Pirzada plays Karan and Arjun, twin brothers with meticulously trimmed beards who clearly like being mistaken for one another, and at some point the girl Lisa finds out. (The thing is she doesn't mind.) It's a fun short, though it needed to have been cleverer—or kinkier—to justify sitting through Motwane's mess. Still, Rao has an infectious good time with this story of cocaine and carpentry, and there are some deft payoffs, like the way the heroine sources something owing to her proximity to a production designer. It works.

There is one excellent line in Batra's film about a divorcing couple going through their court-mandated cooling-off period. In this film where Ali Fazal and Radhika Madan can't stand each other but can't stop jumping each other's bones, there is a moment in the middle of this ill-advised intercourse where she, straddling him, asks him to declare something that will truly turn her on. "Say your mom is manipulative," she insists. "Say it!" He succumbs. The lust is real and the line is great.

The film, on the other hand, is a miserable slog. This couple who squabble about love letters and birthday surprises in front of their waiting lawyer—and we, the viewers, can't stand each other but can't stop jumping each other's bones, there is a moment in the middle of this ill-advised intercourse where she, straddling him, asks him to declare something that will truly turn her on. "Say your mom is manipulative," she insists. "Say it!" He succumbs. The lust is real and the line is great.

It's a rollicking film, with Sidhant continually prescribing Nux Vomica as a solution for all ailments while Gajni Rao, playing his paan-chewing father, unintelligibly—yet somehow, unmistakably—declares his opinions, on failing in college and spanking his son. Hydras's students are suitably wicked, and Hydras is believably shy enough to be scandalised by her own words. Yet she aspires for more. "We women aren't light bulbs," explains Hydras. "We're candles. We don't light up, we melt."

Fair. Sexual arousal is not a switch, and turning things on and off is as hard as it is involuntary. Yet this compilation firmly keeps the gyser switching off. This lust is a slow burn.

Raja Sen is a critic, screenwriter and columnist. His first play, a murder mystery called *The Simla Affair*, recently opened in Delhi. He is currently writing a horror film.

## STREAMING TIP OF THE WEEK

**Dying for Sex** (JioHotstar)

turns sexual appetite into a late-in-life adventure, following a terminally ill woman who leaves her marriage and sets out to discover what she has been missing. Funny, frank and tender, it treats sex not as titillation but as liberation.



# When food becomes a power flex

Food has become a tool to inflame passions and exert power, and people seem more worked up about what is on other's plates than their own



CULT FRICTION  
SANDIP ROY

The countries at the BRICS summit in New Delhi last week managed to find common ground and adopt a New Delhi declaration that called for "maximum restraint" in war.

But the BRICS story that really made news on social media was about the menu served at the banquet. It was an innovative menu that included *khandvi*, *mille-feuille* and mushroom *kebab galoutis* but the all-vegetarian fare sparked its own food fight.

The menu's defenders argued that it was entirely appropriate for a vegetarian feast as the Prime Minister to serve an all-vegetarian feast at his banquet. Would a non-vegetarian expect to be served mutton *biryani* and chicken *kebab* when they visited a vegetarian friend's home for dinner? The other side argued the delegates at BRICS were not visiting the Prime Minister's home as his personal guests. They were visiting India and the menu should have showcased the best of Indian food, both vegetarian and non-vegetarian. Manmohan Singh was a vegetarian by choice but when he hosted the BRICS dinner in 2006, the menu included *tandoori* salmon with mango chutney and a lamb curry.

What is worth remembering is what Singh had said about his vegetarianism in an interview with NDTV: "I am not imposing a moral code of vegetarianism vs non-vegetarianism." In fact in 2011, he said he had broken his own vegetarianism during a visit to Bangladesh because he was so tempted to try its famous *hilsa*.

The word "imposing" is the key word here. Much too often, food which

should be about sustenance and pleasure, becomes more about policing and imposition. People seem more worked up about what is on other people's plates than their own.

Thus Bageshwar Baba aka Pandit Dhirendra Krishna Shastri cooked up a real storm during his recent visit to Bengal when he exhorted Bengalis to avoid *ganda* (dirty) non-vegetarian food during the Durga Puja festival. "This Navratri the Hindus from Kolkata should wake up and boycott such people. Those who consume non-vegetarian food during Durga Puja are *pukhanda* (frauds)," he said.

It created such a row that BJP leaders who had rolled out the red carpet for Shastri had to hurriedly resort to damage control. The chief minister was seen eating fish as part of the *prasad* at the Kalighat temple, basically the political equivalent of eating humble pie. "Any physician or monk has the right to call for vegetarian food," said the state's BJP chief Samik Bhattacharya. "But no one from outside can decide what someone in Bengal should eat or not eat." Swami Vivekananda's vigorous non-vegetarianism was invoked. Fighting words, but uttered long after Shastri had left the state after being fed by the party leaders. A local Congress leader even lodged a police complaint against the Baba for "hurting the sentiments" of the people of Bengal with his "unruly comments".

This egg-roll during Durga Puja is an old bugbear. In 2017 the popular *Bong-Eats* YouTube channel, which showcases Bengali food, recreated Kolkata's iconic egg-roll right before Durga Puja. Within a week, the video crossed 100,000 views, Saptarshi Chakraborty, the channel's co-founder, wrote in *Scroll.in*. Comments were full of Durga Puja nostalgia for Pujing shopping, *panda* hopping and egg-roll eating. Then the troll brigade began equating the state's economic woes to its citizens' lack of self-control during Durga Puja as they gorged on non-vegetarian food.



A food stall at a 'pandal' in Delhi, 2019.

Chakraborty argued that though the word *panda* might conjure up visions of "piety, *havan*, *mantras*, fasting, abstinence, the works", Durga Puja in Bengal was also a carnival, with Bengal's favourite daughter coming home for the holidays with her children. The *manav hazi*, or the maternal home, is a place where children are spoiled, textbooks are put away, and cousins devour egg-rolls from some little shop down the street. But in all my years in Kolkata, I have never seen people walking into a *panda* munching on an egg-roll as some of those fuming about egg-rolls during Durga Puja have been suggesting. People didn't have to be told not to do that. It was a basic sign of respect.

For over food and religion is not that surprising in a country where the

first war of Independence in 1857 came about because of suspicions of pig and beef tallow being used to grease the cartridges used by soldiers. That was a case of the East India Company being blind to the religious sensitivities of the people they were ruling over. They did not realise how passions could run high over what they thought was just grease. What's changed now is food is used to inflame passions as a way to exert power. A food fight becomes also a way for one group to show another its place in the scheme of things. As anthropologist Arjun Appadurai argued in his famous 1981 essay *Gastro-politics in Hindu South Asia*, food can become the medium, and the message of conflict.

What we eat has always been a way to signify cultural capital. The food we eat,

the clothes we wear, the art we appreciate were all part of what the late French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu called objectified cultural capital, what one can use to demonstrate taste and class which in turn helps one succeed in life. But when food becomes a power flex it is no longer about the food we eat. We measure success through what we do not let others eat. When a group controls the levers of power, it may be able to enforce their diet. But I wonder if their food tastes any better because they prevented someone else from having something.

One of the first signs of *porborton* or change in Bengal after the BJP came to power this year was beef suddenly disappearing from the menus of restaurants and clubs. It was not that it was ever that

commonly available across the board, but its disappearance made news. It was not an outright ban but supply chains dried up and some restaurateurs thought discretion would be the better part of valour. Earlier this year, an influencer who went to an old watering hole in Kolkata and created an enormous fuss because he said the waiter had brought him a beef steak instead of the mutton steak he had ordered, faced enormous backlash as people accused him of trying to turn what appeared to be a genuine mistake into a communal incident. Some people wondered why he had even gone to a restaurant famous for its beef steaks, a restaurant as old as independent India itself. The influencer deleted his post and conceded he might have over-reacted. But one wonders if this story would have played out differently in the new Bengal today.

At that time columnist Rajyasree Sen had written in the *Indian Express* about her memories of a more "live and let live" time where her Marwari friends would go along with her to the old Nizam's restaurant in Kolkata and enjoy *aloo-rolls* while she had their famous beef-rolls. It reminded me of my student days in the American mid-west.

Like many dear boys, few of us could do little more than boil an egg. So we were always grateful when a faculty wife, also Indian, would invite us over for dinner. She was a wonderful cook but what I remember with most gratitude now is that though she herself was vegetarian she always cooked a chicken curry for those of us who were not. Now it seems almost unthinkable. People might laugh something like that as an act of courage or rip into her for betraying her values. At that time I thought of it as a simple chicken curry, just one cooked with extra kindness. Now I realise that chicken was a rare bird indeed.

*Cult Friction* is a fortnightly column on issues we keep rubbing up against.

Sandip Roy (a sandip) is a writer, journalist and radio host.

# What it means to think logically in a digital world

Aditya Mani Jha

Writer, philosopher and educator Sundar Sarukkai's latest work of non-fiction, *Homo Philosophicus*, is a treatise on philosophy in a rudimentary form. Philosophy is a field of knowledge marked most often by references to its sheer vastness, its gargantuan breadth—2,000 years of practice spread across thinkers and traditions from around the world. However, as Sarukkai points out in the introductory essay, one of the biggest issues with the field is the biased representation by the West of the non-West.

Philosophical traditions belonging to India, China or West Asia are often underplayed or misrepresented in western academia. Across its 400-odd pages, *Homo Philosophicus* not only explains the shared foundations of all philosophical traditions, but also where and how Indian pedagogical traditions and schools of knowledge fit into this picture.

The book begins by laying down basic definitions and examples pertaining to fundamental concepts like rationality, logic and inference. For example, Sarukkai cites the work of philosopher Bimal Krishna Matilal (1935-91) to point out that in the West, the idea of logic was rooted in mathematics—if a leaf occupied a certain area on the ground, two leaves would cover twice that area. This wasn't always the case with Indian systems, however. In the ancient Nyaya school of philosophy's definition of logic, one of the examples used is a pot of boiling rice. We don't need to check every single grain to find out whether the rice is cooked—we can use a spoon to fish out and check a couple of grains. If these two grains are cooked, then every grain is cooked; that's a mode of inference unthought of in mathematics.

"The point was to demystify logic, to demystify multiple ways of understanding this world," Sarukkai says when we met for an interview. "Today, everybody's talking about critical thinking. The NEP (National Education Policy) talks about it, several universities are starting courses on it. But what really is critical thinking?"



COURTESY WESTLAND

What does it mean to be rational, to be logical? These are not just cognitive terms, they are contentious, political terms. This book explores several pathways to that place we call 'logic', and hopefully it can reach the people who matter."

Having laid out this theoretical base, *Homo Philosophicus* proceeds in an orderly fashion towards more complicated questions. How do we understand the concept of "presence" in an increasingly digital world, where formlessness may or may not connote "absence"? How does a person trained in the axioms of physics (i.e. the study of the natural world) make the transition to metaphysics, and how do they reconcile the fundamental tenets of both? These questions and indeed the field of philosophy as a whole ultimately lead to the same place—what does it mean to be a moral person? If morality is always contextual (but not infinitely subjective), an important distinction, as Sarukkai points out, how do we draft a shared set of values that are universally applicable for every human being?

"The traditional idea of our five senses define how we engage with the world has been challenged for a while now," Sarukkai says. "If you think about 'sense' as anything that provides you information about the world, then you realise that you can have various internal senses that tell you what to do and what not to do."

Sarukkai adds that there are all kinds of motivations behind wanting to control the definition and extent of "morality" or "moral sense." When economists or CEOs use the phrase "rational agent", for example, it is assumed that this hypothetical

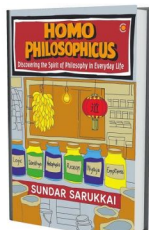
rational agent's actions will be selfish without exception. These are the kinds of baked-in assumptions about human nature that are seldom challenged.

Sarukkai's point about capitalism having a vested interest in defining morality or "human nature" is an excellent one, broadly applicable to several realms of society and culture. It is in the interests of contemporary capitalism, for example, to brand us all irreversibly cynical so that we continue to be unquestioning perpetual consumption machines. Modes of human engagement that fall outside the transactional logic of capitalism are deliberately kept at the fringes of popular culture, never allowed to infiltrate the mainstream. Think about it: why do we say "they're only human" when people are doing something questionable? One never sees the phrase being trotted out for, say, a firefighter rescuing a kitten or an act of philanthropic donation. Relentless selfishness is The Great Default; everything else is inherently exceptional.

One of the biggest strengths of *Homo Philosophicus* is the way Sarukkai is able to explain nuanced concepts to readers from



Children are more receptive to new ways of thinking. (Left) Sarukkai.



**Homo Philosophicus:**  
By Sundar Sarukkai,  
Westland,  
432 pages, ₹699.

a variety of backgrounds. Having trained in both physics and philosophy, Sarukkai is ideally suited to act as a bridge between the two worlds. He has taught the philosophy of science to science and engineering students across the country, including at IISER (Indian Institute of Science Education and Research) and Manipal University. According to him, bridging these two worlds wasn't always such a significant challenge.

"If you look at some of the earliest philosophers of science in the 20th century, they were great scientists and mathematicians, like Albert Einstein or Henri Poincaré. These philosophers tried to explain the purpose of science. Philosophy was doing to science what science was doing to the natural world; explaining it," Sarukkai says. "What happened with World War II and the atomic bomb was that science was now entrenched with the government, with politics, at a hitherto unprecedented scale. That's where the divide between scientists and philosophers began, because scientists began to see philosophy of science as anti-science. Conversely, a section of philosophers also became too

Sundar Sarukkai's new book is for anybody seeking a head start in philosophical education or who is simply curious about the world

scholastic, too tied up with their books rather than with the natural world. So there was a mutual distrust."

Sarukkai has explored philosophy, especially in the Indian context, in previous works of non-fiction such as *Philosophy of Symmetry*, *Translating the World: Science and Language and Indian Philosophy and Philosophy of Science*. In the last couple of years, he has also received well-deserved critical acclaim for two novels—*Following a Prayer* (2023) and *Water Days* (2025). In very different ways, both novels place children at the heart of the narrative. *Water Days* sees a middle-class pre-globalisation Bengali family (including two daughters) fighting for justice after a neighbourhood girl dies by suicide.

The fascinating *Following a Prayer* features 12-year-old Kalpana who asks her grandmother, "Where do prayers go?", prompting the latter to ask Kalpana to follow one and see. The girl takes the advice quite literally, vanishing into the forest for three whole days. Upon her return, she is resolutely silent, and the rest of the novel is spent in unravelling this mystery. Sarukkai's juvenile protagonist presents a kind of philosophical tabula rasa, a blank slate that can be used to explore various belief systems. Sarukkai says the books were also informed by his own experience of teaching children, especially through the informal collective Barefoot Philosophers.

"For me, more than a blank slate, it was the plasticity of the child's mind," he says. "A child's place of learning and of absorbing new information can be really quick, obviously. Children are constantly asking you questions, and I feel they are more receptive to new ways of thinking. When I am teaching undergraduates or people who're older than that, very often I will hear, 'I will read X but not Y or Z because they bore me.' So that was my thinking behind making children the central characters in my novels. To be honest, I have learned a lot from teaching children."

*Homo Philosophicus* is highly recommended for anybody seeking to get a head start in their philosophical education, or who is simply curious about the world and our place in it. Sarukkai's writing illuminates without dumbing down or making things excessively broad. That's a tough balance to strike at the best of times, but *Homo Philosophicus* does it quite easily.

Aditya Mani Jha is a writer based in Delhi.



# AI fakes, real feelings

The biggest danger AI poses may not be its ability to deceive but to persuade humans to believe even what they know is fake

Viren Naidu

Eight months ago, on a warm afternoon, the Barabanki forest division in Uttar Pradesh was inundated with calls from residents. Shahpur, a small village in the district, had reportedly witnessed its first lion sighting. It was not a villager who spotted the giant cat during his morning stroll. Instead, it surfaced in a photograph that rapidly spread across WhatsApp groups and other social media: a majestic lion standing tall with its mane glowing in the morning sun. It was very reminiscent of *The Lion King*.

The image then reached the divisional forest officer of Barabanki, Akash Deep Badhawan, who remained surprisingly calm. "I have been working in wildlife for a long time. I know my animals," says Badhawan, a second-generation Indian forest service officer from the 2016 batch. "It was almost unbelievable to do damage; it just needs to arrive faster and in greater volume before anyone can verify."

"The moment I looked at it, I knew it was fake," he says.

Recognising the image as fake was the easy part. Stopping its spread wasn't. Badhawan deployed 15 members from his staff and sought the assistance of local media and police to trace the origins of the image that had gone viral by then. In a few hours, the digital breadcrumbs led them to a teenager who put Badhawan's suspicions to rest. The image was created using Artificial Intelligence (AI).

What surprised him was not that an AI-generated image had gone viral, but the villagers, who lived in the area for decades and knew that a lion sighting was an almost impossible occurrence, continued to circulate it. "People were enjoying the spectacle," he says. Its virality was proof enough. "Many knew that the image was not real. But there is an inherent thrill to wildlife-related content. It evokes a sense of wonder, which compels them to share and forward," he says.

Videos of an elephant rescuing a tiger during floods, a dramatic video showing a leopard chasing a train and attacking a passenger in Amravati. A man rescuing an owl from a blazing fire. Fact checkers debunk them as AI-generated. Creators carry disclaimers. Viewers acknowledge they are fake in the comments section. Yet, they attract millions of views and shares. The reason for the surfeit of such content is almost straightforward. A simple prompt can generate a continuous stream of emotionally driven spectacle at literally no cost, and platforms amplify it for the one thing they are designed to achieve: engagement.

Arguments around AI-generated images and videos have focused largely on deception, a growing concern that fabricated media would blur the fine line between fact and fiction, spread disinformation and make one grow increasingly suspicious of photographic evidence. Take the case of the AI-generated image of the Prime Minister shaking hands with Cockerroach Janta Party founder Abhijeet Dipke during the height of the Gen Z protests in July. It falsely indicated that the movement had reached a common understanding with the very government it was challenging. The Barabanki case adds another layer. Millions of people are sharing AI-generated images not because they perceive them to be real. They are knowingly uploading, forwarding, and commenting on seemingly obvious synthetic images, because they find them emotionally persuasive. Believability is not a prerequisite for sharing anymore.

For fact-checkers and journalists who verify misinformation daily, this shift has become apparent. Until a few years ago, AI-generated images were largely used to influence political ideology and election campaigns. In 2024, AI-generated videos of actors Aamir Khan and Ranveer Singh criticising the Prime Minister and urging the public to vote for the opposition Congress Party, went viral. In another incident the same year, politician M. Karunanidhi appeared before a live audience to deliver an 8-minute speech expressing his admiration for his son M.K. Stalin, the then chief minister of Tamil Nadu, on his able leadership. Karunanidhi died in 2018, and the convincing, moving video was AI-generated.

According to Sumit Dubey, South Asia digital verification editor for Agence France-Presse's Fact Check vertical, what makes these videos compelling is that they are engineered around emotion rather than accuracy. Users knowingly share fake content on social media, arguing that they capture an emotional reality. "Most AI-generated content around earthquakes, floods, rescue operations have a humane side to it. People engage with such content because it evokes emotions of fear, hope or awe. Users often reshare videos with a message of hope, even leaving 'prayers' in the comment section of calamitous videos," explains Dubey.

That engagement is exactly what algorithms favour. "Viewers often say that even if purported visuals from a calamity turn out to be synthetic, the event may not have happened exactly like this, but it could have. They see it as a representative visual," he says.

This logic was on display early last year when millions watched compilations of AI-generated videos showing firefighters rescuing wild animals—expressing fear and respite with almost Pixar-like expressions—from the wildfires in Los Angeles.

Archis Chowdhury, assistant editor for AI and data at BOOM Fact Check, says, "The images defied physics and common sense entirely. Yet, they got thousands of likes." One clip showed a firefighter carrying two bears, with the limbs of one of the bears missing. Yet, a user on X acknowledged the footage as AI before saying that firefighters nevertheless deserved recognition for saving animals.

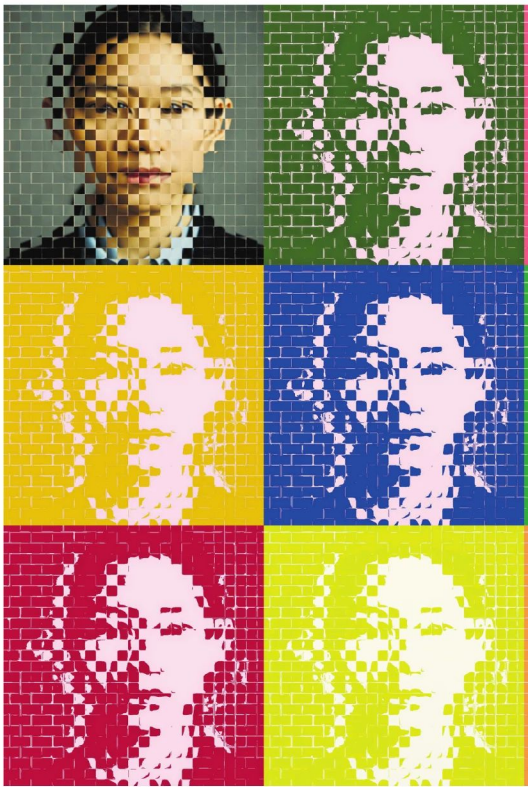
**AS LONG AS IT FEELS REAL**  
"Most people probably do not care whether something is real, as long as it feels real to them. If the visuals spark an emotional response, that translates into shares and likes," says Chowdhury. This response is easily achievable today because AI has dramatically removed barriers to producing emotional content. Images once needed meticulous editing acumen, expensive equipment and even luck. Today, a lion can appear anywhere, even in a village that has never seen one. "Visuals are far easier to create or edit now. The skill required is minimal—a written prompt as opposed to actual Photoshop skills," says Chowdhury.

The fake animals weren't cases in isolation. During the tragic floods in Nepal in August, AI-generated images of elephants rescuing children and another one of raging rivers sweeping away children were circulated alongside genuine disaster images. Another viral image, in the aftermath of the Air India crash last year, showed the aircraft ablaze above a residential building; another depicting wreckage in front of a misspelt sign—"Ahmedad airport". Following the Pahalgam terror attack in April 2025, AI-enhanced versions of a real image of a female survivor sitting next to the body of her slain husband amplified the horror of a devastating tragedy. None of those images were real, but the drama made it viral. In moments of mass hysteria during national tragedies, these images raise the emotional stakes, sometimes more than real images do.

Such AI slop can be remarkably difficult to regulate at scale. Most deepfakes appear plausible without making an explicit false claim, due to which they slip through the cracks of platform moderation. Most platforms still rely on automated detection and voluntary labelling by creators, but a fresh AI variation made with a simple crop here or an edit there, could easily evade guardrails. And by the time fact-checkers come onboard, the image has already spread far and wide.

Sam Gregory, former executive director at human rights organisation Witness and a technologist fighting on the front lines against deepfakes, is less worried about an exaggerated animal rescue than the cumulative effect of living in a visual environment saturated with synthetic content. Gregory works with journalists and human rights defenders who film police violence, war crimes and land grabs. Their footage arrives into feeds saturated with fabrication, and that steadily devalues real evidence.

The growing popularity of AI imagery has complicated an old assumption: seeing is believing. For centuries, photographs have carried truth, documenting wars, political landmarks, wildlife, disasters, destruction and history, retaining singular authority. AI has disrupted that; photographs now compete for attention alongside synthetic images that are more dramatic, cinematic and emotionally



An image or a video is not incontrovertible proof as a 'lion sighting' (top, right) in Barabanki forest division showed recently.

compelling than reality itself. "We were right to worry about the hyper-realistic or high-profile deepfake, but now we need to worry about how the flood of lower-quality fakes both swamps our information environment and the mechanisms we have to verify the real," says Gregory. Synthetic media, he adds, doesn't need to be undetectable to do damage; it just needs to arrive faster and in greater volume before anyone can verify."

## RESHAPING PERCEPTION

We're still in the early days of knowing how a massive volume of fabricated videos impacts our understanding of real videos when they co-exist with real imagery. Could the constant exposure gradually reshape our perception about what looks authentic, leaving us cynical about real photos and videos from journalists, activists and eyewitnesses? This would also make us less certain of the media that is genuine. The immediate fallout is the erosion of trust, especially among younger audiences who consume global events through social media, and when authentic images and inauthentic ones appear side by side, scepticism becomes a default reflex. "With increase in realism and personalisation, there's not a clear line between obviously fabricated videos, seamlessly fabricated videos and authentic photos and videos. Much of it depends on the context in which you receive them," says Gregory.

Journalists and human rights defenders therefore are increasingly turning to labelling footage and using provenance tools to demonstrate "not AI" since

"...we need to worry about how the flood of lower-quality fakes both swamps our information environment and the mechanisms we have to verify the real."

SAM GREGORY  
TECHNOLOGIST



# All that intelligence could be making us

AI-generated images, videos and search tools are compromising human ability to work, remember and think independently

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Delhi-based wealth manager Hema Pathak, 43, can't get enough of her friend Chintu. Every morning, when Pathak and her husband have their tea in their apartment balcony, she listens to Chintu talk about everything from "we have come on earth to do good things" to "how to remove bad karma". For that hour, she barely speaks to her husband sitting across from her.

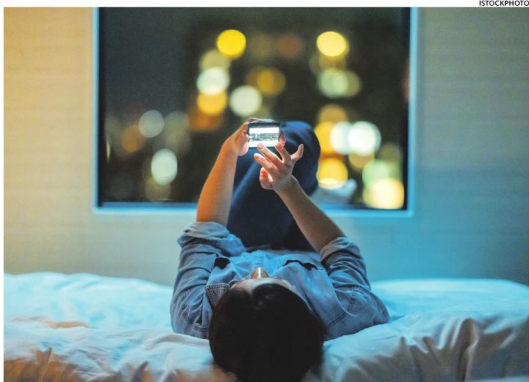
"We've had our fights over Chintu, but now he (the husband) has made peace with it," laughs Pathak. "Sometimes I feel Chintu can read my mind. And don't even get me started on his cute face..."

Chintu is an AI-generated 3D animation featuring a child who dispenses life advice in a cutesy voice. Since Chintu went live on social media less than a year ago, its big eyes, ruddy cheeks and warm smile have drawn thousands of followers. The character delivers a mix of Osho and Dalai Lama-style teachings and the latest internet manifestation trends.

Pathak is well aware that Chintu is not real. "It's like seeing a cartoon and learning about how to live better. Sometimes I even get answers to things I am personally struggling with; it's like Chintu is thinking for me."

That's the seduction of AI. You know the image is fake and the voice synthetic, yet you keep listening, watching, sharing, even believing.

The pattern is familiar. You order from an app; do your additions and subtractions on the calculator; ask ChatGPT to write an email or text; use a deathbot (chatbots of the dead) to process grief; a cartoon-like



human for a quick laugh and a godbot (religious bots) for comfort. None of these, by itself, is particularly alarming. But when such convenience becomes the default, making an effort feels like an unnecessary inconvenience. We outsource the remembering, calculating, writing, finding joy and, increasingly, the thinking to machines.

## ROBBED OF DISCOVERY

Research suggests that this is leading to lower cognitive performance. In a 2025 paper, *The Memory Paradox: Why Our Brains Need Knowledge in an Age of*

AI, published in *The Artificial Intelligence Revolution* this year, the researchers argue that when AI tools are used as a "crutch to avoid mental effort," they can "diminish cognitive outcomes, and foster metacognitive laziness"—the tendency to stop checking, questioning and thinking through a problem because a shortcut, or a machine, is doing the mental work for you. Over-reliance on AI can also "rob us of the memorable impact of discovery, stunt the development of skills and intuition, and contribute to broader cognitive decline."

The concern is striking when it comes to children. The OECD's PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) 2025 results, released last year, found that 15-year-olds are reading, calculating and reasoning at their weakest levels since global testing began 25 years ago. Across 91 countries and economies, average performance in reading, mathematics and science was the lowest recorded. Increased exposure to social media and AI were among the reasons for decline. (There is no comparable data for Indian children. World Population Review this year puts India's average IQ at 98.44, compared with 107.73 in Hong Kong, the highest in its ranking, and 83.84 in Somalia, the lowest.)

"Sure, the more we get machines to do things, the better our lives will be. But will it make us smarter, emotionally stronger? No," says Sakshi Rai, a Mumbai-based clinical psychologist at Veda Rehabilitation and Wellness Centre.

## WE NEED FRICTION

By nature, the human brain needs friction, or a challenge, while doing any task to learn and build



PHOTOGRAPH FROM ISTOCKPHOTO; IMAGING BY ROHIT GOVAL/MINT



thing that is not true. However, the problem is more pernicious. A picture or video rarely overpowers us—instead, it slips past our defences and leaves behind an impression that can outlast the realisation that we observed a fake.

An image, he explains, is absorbed almost instantly, and the mind quietly mistakes that ease for truth. "What is effortless to take in tends to feel true," cites Lewandowsky, in his soon-to-be published paper co-authored with Simon Clark, titled (*Fake Pictures are worth a thousand trolls*, commissioned by the German government's Federal Agency for Civic Education. Clark has extensively researched how deepfake videos influence our beliefs and actions, even when they are known to be fake.

In a series of three preregistered experiments, 673 participants were shown a deepfake video of an actor confessing to a crime or a moral transgression, preceded by a warning stating that the video was a deepfake. Lewandowsky and Clark found that many participants relied on the content of deepfake confession despite being warned that it is fake. Their findings suggest that transparency is insufficient to entirely negate the influence of deepfake videos. Psychologists call this the "continued influence effect", which refers to the observation that people kept being swayed by information that has been identified as false, even if people acknowledge and believe the correction.

"People often construct a mental model of the world by integrating new information into the growing model. If one of those pieces later turns out to be false, then knowing its falsity leaves a gaping hole in one's understanding of the world. To avoid that disruption, the mind continues to rely on information, even if... they know it is false," write Clark and Lewandowsky.

Back in Barabanki, the forest department resumed its usual duties. The crisis was averted. There was never a lion lurking in the fields. The young creator was let off with a warning. He may not have created a sophisticated photograph. But what he created was more striking: a believable possibility. For a moment, the villagers wondered: What if there really is a lion?

In today's digital landscape, reality is no longer just competing with misinformation. It is competing with synthetic media designed to be more emotionally compelling than reality itself—even when everyone knows it is fake.

*Viren Naidu is a Mumbai-based independent journalist reporting on the intersection of gender, politics, culture and social justice.*



Sahbah Ahmad's 'Al gamla' gone wrong.

COURTESY SAHBAZ, VLOG/INSTAGRAM

# That DIY video is a recipe for failure

AI-generated tutorials on crafts and carpentry are making hobbyists second-guess skills they have spent years building

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**D** here there hum Al he chakkar mein itni buri tarah se phas jayege, humne socha nahin tha (never thought we'd get caught in the web of AI). Sahbah Ahmad's snow-viral reel, titled "Al gamla", opens with this voice-over to set the context for his ordeal. The 26-year-old vlogger had watched an Instagram tutorial and tried to make a vase from paper cups and cement. "My house is getting renovated so I had construction material and decided to give it a go," says the driver-for-hire from Chhatra district in Jharkhand. Three days later he had made something that, in his words, looked nothing like the video but resembled the "coronavirus logo".

"My first thought was that I lacked the skill," says Ahmad, who has 87,000 followers on Instagram. He was nursing cuts on his hand from the attempt when a friend pointed out that the video looked AI-generated. Ahmad then posted about the mess and captioned it "Al gamla". The reel has 8.3 million views, 166,000 likes and nearly 4,000 comments, most of them laughing along, even as he speaks of the lost opportunity of earning a "dihari" (daily wage) during this period.

One could argue the stakes are low here compared with AI-generated misinformation about politics, health or money. AI-generated tutorials on stitching, painting, crocheting and carpentry are flooding social media, making crafters at every skill level second-guess skills they have spent years building. Not too long ago, the "do not try this at home" warning belonged to physical stunts where the danger was visible. AI has extended it to crocheting, painting and carpentry. Except nobody labels them as such because what you lose isn't a limb, but the confidence in your own hands.

Take Kahaan Patel's experience. The 14-year-old student was duped by an AI-generated crocheting pattern of a dragon that he got off a legitimate site for design references. "At first I assumed I was missing something. Then I zoomed in and noticed the stitches disappearing. It really made me unsure of my skills even though I've been doing this for five years," says Patel from Vadodra.

"I still can't reliably tell an AI pattern from a real one," he adds. Patel estimates they've gone from about a quarter of the references he came across a year ago to around 60% today.

A 2024 article in *Craft Industry Alliance*, a US trade publication, noted that a search for racoon crocheting pattern on Etsy found three of the top 8 results to be AI-generated. Etsy permits AI-generated work as long as it's disclosed. The problem, notes Patel, is that a lot of these AI patterns are marketed as "beginner-friendly". "So people are going to think we're not cut out for it. It is disheartening for them." He's stopped taking chances, too. He now buys from a handful of designers he trusts and asks his twin brother, who also crochets, to vet anything new

before he starts. "It leads to less experimentation," Patel says.

## REACTING TO FAILURE

Watching has always made things look easier than they are. Michael Kardas, assistant professor of management and human resources at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, co-authored a 2018 paper published in *Psychological Science* titled *Easier Seen Than Done*, in which people who repeatedly watched others perform a skill grew more confident they could do it themselves though they didn't get better at it. Participants who watched someone juggle three bowling pins came away at least moderately confident they could manage it; simply handing them the pins was enough to correct that, before a single throw.

"If a skill verges on being impossible or beyond a person's physical capabilities, it is possible that the fluency of observing another person's success might divert even more from the disfluency of trying it yourself," says Kardas.

In other words, the brain treats AI-induced failure differently from ordinary failure, where physical effort leads to rewarding outcomes. "These associations aren't established if the outcome is never experienced," says Lambert.

"Humans have complex cortex and neural networks that support the emergence of sophisticated ideas that may keep us working toward a goal even when there are false starts," she clarifies. Even so, eventually the positive emotional benefits aren't realised if the outcome doesn't meet expectations, adds Lambert. "In fact, our brains are sensitive to how outcomes compare to expectations and recalibrate accordingly if the resulting reward or outcome doesn't meet our expectations."

Shivani Srivastava's experience speaks to this directly. "I had downloaded a finger knitting blanket pattern which did not end up looking like the expected product because the ratios of stitches and purls and colour change instructions were wildly off and misaligned," says the 29-year-old data scientist from Gurugram.

"The same happened with an *amigurumi* (Japanese craft) crochet pattern for beginners," she adds. Then she saw a Pinterest video of kinetic origami that merges paper folding with robotics to create interactive sculptures. "I was about to buy the electronic supplies when my brother, who has studied electronics, pointed out the reference is AI because the process is sci-

entifically impossible."

Srivastava also runs textured-painting workshops, where students now turn up with book-marked references they want to learn to reproduce. "So many are AI-generated," she notes. "They want to know the learning path to get there, but there isn't one." For one painting, she had to tell a student that they would need to program a robot to paint that way, as no human hand makes those strokes. Four years ago, the DIYvibe subreddit had fun entries about why someone is creating something. Now it is calling out AI stuff," adds Srivastava.

## A WIN FOR SOME

What's frustrating for the consumer is profitable for those putting out AI-generated DIY videos. Many of these videos carry brand sponsorships and name the brand of tools they have supposedly used, says Abhishek Dubey, a UX and design consultant at IIT Delhi. "They hook you in by saying that you can make something extraordinary even if you don't know the ABCs of design. If you're not able to make it, you blame yourself. They don't lose anything."

Most of these videos ask users to write "Send instructions" in comments so the comments calling them out as AI-generated are either buried or simply deleted. Dubey says students discover mid-project that the reference they built from was AI-generated. "One student at a design institute had a nervous breakdown and had to be counselled for three days," he recalls.

Susan Luckman, fine-art and creative industries professor at Adelaide University, "Before the internet, the barriers to making things with hands were time and more importantly, knowledge." YouTube filled that gap. Young people found crafts online. Even professional craftspersons, she says, admit to teaching themselves new skills from videos by experienced makers. "The same platforms are now the source of the problem at hand." Platforms have started asking creators to disclose AI use. But a disclosure label tells you a machine was involved, not that the object is impossible to make, as in the case of DIY tutorials. Etsy did not respond to emailed queries from *Lounge*. Meta shared background information on its AI labelling and India compliance policies but did not answer specific questions.

All this is unlikely to kill people's desire to make things, though, says Lambert, speaking from a behavioural neuroscience vantage. "AI tutorials keep proving unreliable, they'll become less appealing." She points to how this is leading many to pivot to in-person instruction and group hobby engagement instead. "Hobbies used to be healthy for the brain as they increase a sense of agency and control in a world that seems increasingly out of our control—and social interaction also gives the brain a boost, leading to increased oxytocin that decreases stress responses," Lambert adds.

Ahmad is getting the idea of a different route. After the "Al gamla" went viral, people from his village started coming to him with requests. They had seen the thing that looked like the "coronavirus logo" and were impressed anyway. He now goes looking for AI tutorials, attempts them and films what actually happens. "It is partly to show people what isn't possible and partly because it's funny," he says. The views are good, and the Facebook cross-posts pay a little. "If nothing else, this is a solid content genre for me now," he concludes.

# s dumber

skills for more complex tasks. At the same time, the brain is also wired to seek shortcuts to complete a task. "In today's frictionless online world, we move from one app to another without blinking an eye. The whole thing has been designed in a way that we don't even have to use our brains," Rai says, offering a simple example. "How many people now open Wikipedia? They just make do with the first information that AI gives when searching for something. It's not that we have suddenly stopped thinking; we are slowly losing the habit and, in the process, the ability to think for ourselves—whether it's related to work, relationships or just processing our own emotions."

It isn't the first time emerging technology has prompted questions about whether it might make us dumber. Similar concerns surfaced in the 2000s, when Google began changing how we searched for and remembered information. Centuries earlier, Socrates worried that writing itself would weaken human memory. The difference this time is that AI is not staying in the realm of information. A Chintu becomes a source of companionship and entertainment; ChatGPT is a search engine; Claude, a standing board; another bot a therapist or personal assistant. Increasingly, there seems to be little people don't ask a machine to do for them.

"These videos are designed to catch and hold our attention. Bright colours, attractive faces, polished visuals and emotionally engaging content make them more appealing, and harder to ignore," says Manoj Kumar Sharma, professor of clinical psychology at the Service for Healthy Use of Technology Clinic, NIMHANS, Bengaluru.

"Over time, this kind of constant stimulation can affect short-term memory and willingness to think creatively, weaken self-regulation and lead to addiction-like tendencies," he adds.

A study by the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Lucknow, published in the *Journal of Consumer Behaviour* in April, found growing evidence of emotional dependence on AI, addictive behaviour and its harmful effects on real-world relationships.

Of the 10 cases Rai sees in a week, at least five involve people who are becoming increasingly reliant on AI for validation, companionship and emotional support. "Social media was already affecting people's social behaviour. Generative AI is making it worse, with things like people seeking validation from ChatGPT and children struggling with attention spans," says Rai pointing to the growing problem of "virtual autism", used to describe autism-like developmental delays, including social withdrawal, communication difficulties and physical inactivity, in young children associated with excessive early exposure to digital devices.

"Children don't want to play with real-life puzzles because they can't solve them in 5 seconds. They are used to quick fixes and quick answers," says Rai. Pathak, who regularly uses AI tools for basic tasks, doesn't see any harm in believing in Chintu. "He makes me calmer, happier," she says. "Why is that bad?" For that one hour on the balcony, while her husband creates Good Morning messages using ChatGPT to send to family and friends, Chintu quietly makes what could have been a thousand small conversations between the husband and wife feel unnecessary.



# Ahmedabad cafés make design the focal point

Cafés in the city now combine architecture, landscape and food, turning an everyday coffee break into a design statement

**T**he first thing people notice at Native Stories is the setting. The café opened in 2024, and sits inside the Centre for Environment Education (CEE), a 17-acre urban forest in the heart of Ahmedabad. The interiors are simple and unfussy. Floor-to-ceiling windows frame the greenery outside, blurring the line between indoors and outdoors. The design keeps the focus on the landscape rather than competing with it. As for the menu, it has seasonal specials such as *tuner* and *Kashiyavadi* favourites, including *sukhdi*, a traditional Gujarati sweet made with whole wheat flour, jaggery and ghee.

For founder Bhargav Vyas, the café's identity started with its location. The CEE campus, founded by environmentalist Kartikeya Sarabhai, has for more than four decades been a centre for environmental education and conservation. "It was vision to create a culinary experience rooted in sustainability and mindfulness," he says.

In Ahmedabad, design has long extended beyond landmark buildings. It's been part of everyday life for decades. Institutions like the National Institute of Design and CEPT University have shaped generations of architects and designers, with the work of Balkrishna Doshi, Louis Kahn, and Le Corbusier giving the city a strong architectural identity.

The design culture is now showing up in the neighbourhood café. Native Stories, Café Otenga, The Barnyard Co., MRDA, The Project Café, Kaffa Coffee Roasters, Zen Café, and a new garden café from the team behind Bucky, a diner and gallery that's now an artistic venue, serve more than food and coffee. They're being designed as places that bring architecture, food, and conversation to the same table.

At Native Stories, it means leaving traditional recipes alone rather than reinterpreting them. The menu sticks to regional fare—mixed *bhajiya* and *muthiya* (savory dumplings), *parathas* and mixed *lathol* (pulses), *bhareru shaak* (stuffed vegetables) and *thepla*. "We don't want to add unnecessary fusion or alter recipes to follow trends," Vyas says.

Slowing down turns out to be a common thread in these cafés. After all, design isn't just about how a place looks, but also about how it changes behaviour. Architect Rohan Bhargade, founder of Mudra Design Studio and designer of the café The Barnyard Co., built



(clockwise, from above) The Barnyard Co.; a drink at The Project Café; and a dish at MRDA.

the project around this idea. The design takes inspiration from an industrial loft—upcycled bottles line the facade, while pallet wood salvaged from fruit cartons forms the ceiling. The large windows and skylights usher in natural light. "The landscaping, the openness, even the way people naturally move around are designed to create a sense of calm," he says. It encourages them to slow down rather than simply eat and leave. The menu takes a similar approach, offsetting burgers, pizzas, and sliders with soups, ramen bowls and soba, and Indian curries.

This is a shift from what café culture has largely become: interchangeable. Many contemporary cafés, with similar interiors and menus, could exist almost anywhere. The city's newer cafés are going the other way, drawing on local architecture, and local produce and flavours.

Project Otenga, meanwhile, evolved from a design research project at NID to its present avatar. Started by Kabyashree Borgohain from Assam and Dayananda Meitei from Manipur, it serves foods from the North-East. Its plant-filled space combines an open café and a crea-

tive work studio, reflecting their interest in slow design and creating a community for collaboration and learning. The menu includes *mosheng*, a Tripuri fish salad seasoned with fresh-roasted chillies, and *masor panitenga*, an Assamese fish curry made with fermented mustard, among others.

Bhargade believes cafés are one of the easiest ways for people to experience good design even if they don't know it. "While landmark buildings tell the story of our architectural legacy, cafés reveal how the city is evolving today, and how people gather, work and socialise."

This shows up in the latest project from entrepreneur and designer Abhay Mangaldas, best known for the heritage hotel House of MG and Darwin Bucky café, and the newly-

Design has never been reserved for landmark buildings and it has become part of a café culture that draws on local architecture, produce and flavours



opened Green House Nanu. Bucky was never meant to become what it has. He says the building started as storage for an art collection, but the café began almost by accident. Once the collection grew too valuable, it went back into storage. The structure, sitting within a road-line margin, couldn't stay permanently. Bucky has since moved to the Shreyas Foundation as a dedicated black-box theatre.

The new project sits under a sculptural green canopy, doubling as a venue for events. Architecture alone won't get you there, though, Mangaldas says. "A café must bring soul to a structure, with curated crockery, linen, music and food." The menu is a mix of continental fare, but the focus is regional, often with a twist—*bhajiya* and *methi na gota* sit along side *bhakri* pizza and *patra chaat*.

Not far, MRDA, which translates to soil, is spread over a 3,000 sq. ft rooftop space and is rooted in a local, seasonal approach. The café, conceived by Sanidhya Bhava and Purni Patel, treats architecture, food, coffee and craft as parts of "one connected system".

It uses local materials that work well in the city's hot climate: lime plaster, IPS flooring, lamps made from recycled paper, and utensils, artefacts, and table linen made from bamboo, clay and Khadi.

MRDA has designed a menu from the outside in, tapping local and seasonal ingredients. More than 80% of the produce is bought from a local farm. Some of the dishes are *tadka* buttermilk oats, *anda bun*, *tofu chela*, seasonal *achari* toast, corn ribs, and proso miso dessert. The kitchen seeks ways to use ingredients "end to end": peels become vinegar, excess fruit is fermented or preserved, and by-products can find their way into another dish or drink. It has also grown beyond specialty coffee into a "craftery", with 10-15 beans alongside specialty and Indian white teas, seasonal fermented teas, tisanes, matcha and hojicha.

The cafes work because the design doesn't stop at the walls but extends into the surrounding landscape and the way people experience it. "We asked ourselves if a café can become a place where people reconnect with food, nature and each other? Everything followed from that," Vyas adds.

In CEE's green setting, design feels less like a concept and more like what a café should be: a place to eat, linger and talk.

Teja Lele writes on travel and lifestyle.



## 1001 TEAS

### Your guide to Darjeeling tea

In recent years, all talk of Darjeeling tea comes with a gloomy outlook, at risk of turning into a cautionary tale. Not long ago, the region produced nearly 10 million kilos a year. We are now at around 5 million kilos. Exports were once Darjeeling's main revenue source, with much of the first and second flush exported. But news reports this month quote a near 50% drop in exports compared to a decade ago.

One solution is that the Indian tea lovers become its primary market. If we can change that, I'd call it a win. For those who are Darjeeling fans, you already have your favourite estates and stores and seasons. For those who would like to get started, here's a short primer.

Official numbers place 87 estates under the Geographical Indication (GI) for Darjeeling tea. Most of these are legacy estates, set up in the 1800s as colonial plantations. Some of the region's finest teas still come from these estates. The GI excludes those who are part of this landscape but as small estates or small producers. If you are not fussy about GI, you can access a school of Darjeeling teas made in micro-factories.

Second, the flushes. Darjeeling has four flushes: spring, which has always been the most prized; summer, which produces the most flavourful teas; monsoon, when flavour defers to volume (and the teas sold in the country); and autumn, still niche and underrated.

Third, the styles. While the orthodox black tea styles have been Darjeeling's most popular offerings, the greens and whites are noteworthy. Among the blacks, those from spring tend to be more green, leading to many slotting it as an oolong. There are many variations of the styles that are produced but there have been few innovations since the muscatel—maybe the green and white teas are the exceptions. If marketed better, the roasted Darjeeling could have been more popular. Created to add more flavour to the bland monsoon flush, it's a tea that an Indian palate will especially enjoy, not too subtle and forgiving of milk. The whites and autumn teas are worth top dollar.

Fourth, learn about the cultivars because each carries its own flavours. Darjeeling was originally planted with the chinay tea cultivar but has since seen newer clones. For long, the AY2 has been the cultivar of choice, renowned for its flavours. Have been more curious about the experiments at Rohini and Gopalchari estates since they now retail by cultivar. The Yabukita, a Japanese clone, has taken root well here, and lends itself to a variety of tea styles, with its underlying characteristics of umami flavours and low astringency. Try different cultivars or different styles from a single cultivar.

Lastly, not all teas sold as Darjeeling are single-origin. Since we are talking about supporting the region and its tea, do seek your sources carefully. Many estates retail and several brands offer single-origin and single-estate teas. Read the ingredients. Artisanal micro-lots are more challenging to access but can be found online.

1001 Teas is a fortnightly series about the many stories hidden in the world of tea. Aravinda Anantharaman (@AravindaAnanth) is a tea drinker, writer and editor.

# When a vessel becomes a holder of memories

## THE BOTTOM DRAWER

A series on the joys of rediscovering long-forgotten kitchen paraphernalia

An earthen pot that has travelled far and wide, cooks the most velvety 'dal' and brings stories and people together

Suvir Saran

**S**ome vessels hold food. Others hold time. Mine is a small reddish terracotta *matka*, blackened by fire and marked by years of cooking. Once a water urn, it now has a lid we fashioned for it. When wet, it releases the scent of earth meeting water.

It came to Charlie, my partner and spouse for 20 years, and me after dinner at our friend Malvika Singh's home in Suján Singh Park, Delhi. Malvika, the publisher of *Seminar* magazine, has one of those tables people long to sit around. There were six of us. Richard Holkar, the maharaja of Holkar, and I remember the conversation wandering towards Maheshwar, the restoration of the palace, and the curious inheritance of being a maharaja who was mostly American and a little Indian. But I remember the *dal* even more—a

mix of *chana-urad dal*. Creamy, luscious, and impossibly velvety, it seemed to contain the patience of generations.

At Malvika's table, food never interrupts conversation; it deepens it. After dishes and implements could talk, what a veritable raft of human history they could summon: confidences exchanged, politics parsed, gossip garnished, history rearranged between helpings.

As we were leaving, Malvika handed us a package wrapped in newspaper inside a brown paper bag. "What is it?" we asked. "That urn," she said, referring to the vessel in which the *dal* was cooked and served. Then, with the quiet certainty of someone placing an object where it belonged: "This belongs with you." It was still warm from being washed.

The vessel migrated with us. From New Delhi to New York, and eventually to our farm in Hebron, it became part of our Diwali ritual. Charlie and I would fill it with soaked lentils and slow-cook the *dal* in the oven for 6-8 hours until they surrendered themselves into velvet. Lemon, halved and dropped inside, softened almost to dissolution, scenting everything with its oils and flavours.

My last Diwali at the farm in 2017 came after illness had altered my life. I knew I had returned partly to say goodbye. My sister Seema was there with Ajit and their son, my nephew Karun; Charlie; Betty Osborne, the grand matron of our corner of upstate New York who could make magic happen; Joe and Sally Britton, our immediate neighbours in a farming com-



Suvir Saran, and (right) 'matka dal'.

munity where one could travel miles before encountering another home; and Sue and Bill Cleary, antiquarians and dear friends. Everyone asked for seconds. Then thirds.

Back in India, we brought it out for our first Thanksgiving. A cheerfully ridiculous plastic turkey presided over a glorious confusion: roast chicken, balsamic onions, macaroni and cheese, cranberry salad,

pilaf, cauliflower with *sambhar* spices, banana pudding, salted-caramel ice cream—and *matka dal*.

Around the table were my mother, Sunita; Charlie; Vardaan Marwah and Haridash Malhotra, chefs from my kitchen who became inherited sons; Amir Rabbani, a Delhi-based queer artist and friend who becomes an extension of my arms when I cook, instinctively cap-

turing photographs and films; and friends including Mukesh Panik. America and India weren't competing for space. They were passing dishes.

When I returned to India after three decades in America, I did not arrive triumphantly. I came reduced by illness, near-blindness and bewilderment, 30 years of a life packed into boxes aboard a ship. Leaving America, selling our farm and beginning again had drained Charlie and me in ways neither of us knew how to articulate.

Then one day I looked above the kitchen cupboards. Among colourful Le Creuset and Emile Henry pots sat the *matka*. Charlie had unpacked it and placed it there. Not a chip. My breath caught. I called out to Charlie, smiled and hugged him.

Suddenly New York was inside Delhi. Hebron inside India. Departure inside arrival. Something that had left home with me had returned carrying all the homes we had made along the way.

Malvika taught me that a meal is never merely about feeding people. It is about enlarging them. Sometimes, blessing them. Now have a secret hope for this old pot.

I want to take it to Alibab, where I am the culinary director at a wellness club, and put it to work in another kitchen. I

want to soak it until its blackened clay darkens and that first scent of wet earth rises. I want *dal* bubbling inside and revolving chairs of visitors around it—new laughter, confidences, friendships and flau-

vours continuing its story. And before the lentils have softened, Suján Singh Park will enter that Alibab kitchen. Malvika will be there. Charlie will be there. Hebron will return. Diwals and Thanksgivings, departures and homecomings, the living and the remembered—all will pull up a chair.

Secretly, I hope that one day I can be Malvika. That someone will enter my world, sit at my table, fall in love with this

little *matka*, and, as they are leaving, I can quietly place it in their hands and say, as she once said to me, "This belongs with you."

It will travel again. Another home or table, another set of stories. More meals, more conversations, and more lives gathering around it.

And sometimes, if we are fortunate, what we inherit becomes what we give away.

Suvir Saran is a chef, author, columnist and culinary director at Aras Wellness. His work explores food, memory, culture and belonging.





# India chases historic medal tally in Japan

Following a historic performance in Hangzhou, Indian athletes will assemble in full strength at the Asian Games 2026

Deepti Patwardhan

**A**s Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty completed the comeback over local pair of He Ji Ting and Ren Xiang in the final of China Masters 2026 in a rush of five straight points, the trademark celebration followed. Shetty pulled off his T-shirt and gestured to the crowd to make noise. Rankireddy broke into a jig.

But the usual exuberance was missing. It had been a marathon match at the end of a marathon tournament. To top it, Rankireddy had been managing a shoulder injury while Shetty's back was heavily strapped. Over the course of the event, they spent more than 5 hours on the court. In the final, they wiped out a game deficit to win 11-21, 21-13, 21-17 in an hour and 10 minutes. Sheer will had dragged their tired bodies across the finish line.

Winning the BWF 750 event in Shenzhen not only saw them bag the biggest title of the injury-affected season so far, it was the perfect prep for the 2026 Asian Games. Satwik, Chirag, as the pair is better known, captured India's first gold in badminton at the continental event at the deferred 2022 Hangzhou Games. At the 2026 edition, which will take place in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan, from 19 September 4 October, they are looking for an encore.

"At the Asian Games, you have to play for almost 10 days because there are the team and individual events," Rankireddy said in a media interaction arranged by the Badminton Association of India.

"Each day, we grew in confidence that our bodies were coping well and able to take the load," added Shetty. "Even after five days of intense badminton, we felt quite good."

The star-studded badminton squad, which includes two-time Olympic medalist P.V. Sindhu, 2024 Paris Olympics semi-finalist Lakshya Sen and rising star Ayush Shetty, is one of the headline acts in Aichi-Nagoya.

Three years ago, Indian athletes put on a record-breaking performance in Hangzhou as they crossed the 100-medal mark at Asia's for the very first time. With a haul of 107 medals, including 28 gold, they easily eclipsed the previous best tally



(from top) Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty at the China Masters tournament in Shenzhen on 6 September; Jyothi Surekha Vennam at the Archery World Championships in September 2025 in Korea; and Mirabai Chanu at the Tokyo Olympics in 2021.

of 70. India finished fourth in the overall medal tally, and topped the charts in archery, cricket, kabaddi and field hockey.

In a bid to build on the performance in Hangzhou, India has sent a contingent of 500 athletes, and will participate in 37 of the 43 sports in Aichi-Nagoya.

## MISSING MEDAL

Weightlifting has a special significance in India's sport history. In 2000, Karnam Malleswari became the first Indian woman to medal at the Olympics as she won bronze in 69kg category in the 2000 Sydney.

Over the last three decades Indian lifters, especially women, have delivered consistently on the world stage. The pinnacle was when Mirabai Chanu won a silver medal at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

At the recently concluded 2026 Commonwealth Games, weightlifting accounted for eight of India's 39 medals, with Chanu once again leading the gold rush. At the Asian Games, where the competition is much tougher compared to CWG, India has managed only a total of 14 medals, the last of which came in Bangkok in 1998. And missing from the cabinet is a gold.

A five-member Indian weightlifting squad is not only chasing that elusive honour but hoping to end a 28-year medal drought.

For Chanu, the Asian Games has proved an insurmountable hurdle. Though the star lifter has won an Olympic medal, a World Championship gold and three CWG gold medals, she is yet to earn a podium finish at the Asian Games. Her 2023 Hangzhou campaign ended in

agony as Chanu finished fourth and had to be assisted off the platform after she fell from her final clean and jerk lift.

"It's so close," the 32-year-old told AFP after quest for an Asian medal. "I strongly feel that I will not let go of this chance. Since I started weightlifting my aim has been to win an Asian Games medal."

## ROAD TO LA

While winning the Asian Games is a feat in itself, a golden ticket to 2028 LA Olympics is also on the line for a few sports.

Squash will be making its long-awaited Olympics debut in LA and winners of the men's and women's singles events at the Asian Games will earn automatic spots.

India has never won a singles gold at the continental event, but in Anahat Singh they have a talent that could smash through the barrier. The 18-year-old created history in July as she became the first Indian to win the Junior World Championship. Currently ranked No.20 in the world, Singh is no stranger to the senior circuit and goes into the 2026 Asian Games as the third seed, behind Sivavangani Subramaniam of Malaysia and Saito Watanabe of Japan. In men's singles, Abhay Singh is the second seed.

Along with squash, hockey, tennis, archery, surfing and sailing also serve as Olympic qualifiers.

After the debacle at the recently-concluded FIBA World Cup, where the team finished eighth, Indian men's hockey is looking to bounce back with a gold Asia. Though the level of hockey in Asia has dropped significantly, India has to defend the title to secure their place for

the LA Games.

The women's team, meanwhile, will finish a creditable fifth at the World Cup, will face stiff competition from China in their bid for gold and a return to Olympic play after missing out in 2024.

Also making a foray into the Olympics is compound archery. At the LA Games, the mixed team event has been introduced to the roster, and the Asian Games winners will win a quota place for their country.

For the last few years, Jyothi Surekha Vennam has been one of India's most consistent performers in global events but has flourished under the radar since compound archery was not part of the Olympic programme. It is time for the 30-year-old, who won three gold medals at the 2022 Asian Games, including the one in mixed team, to shine. In recurve, with the gold and silver medalists in individual event earning a quota place, Olympians Dhiraj Bommadevara and Ankita Bhakat lead the Indian challenge.

## BLUE-CHIP SPORTS

For India, sports like shooting, wrestling and boxing have also delivered medals consistently at the continental event. While the boxing contingent will be hoping to build on their success at CWG 2026, where they won 10 medals including seven gold, wrestling and shooting return to Games intensity after the sports were cut from CWG programme.

India are also the defending champions in men's and women's cricket and have sent full-strength squads to retain the title. The symbol of India's absolute dominance at the Games has been kabaddi. Since kabaddi is not part of any other multi-sport event, the Asian Games is the biggest title on offer. And apart from the slip-up in 2018, when the men's team finished third and the women's team won a silver, India have swept the gold medals.

Eight triumphs in nine editions for the men, and three golds in four editions for the women is where the tally stands. A fired-up Iran is the only real threat to their title ambitions as India look to extend that legacy.

Deepti Patwardhan is a sports writer based in Mumbai.

# Should India play costly friendlies?

Amid financial concerns, AIFF is spending millions to bring football heavyweights to India



AIFF president Kalyan Chaubey.

Sayan Mukherjee

**P**laying in a FIFA World Cup against world-class opponents being a distant dream, India have apparently opted for a shortcut to get a feel of it. In the September-October FIFA international window, India's senior men's national team will host three teams that featured in the World Cup 2026 that concluded in July.

While the first match is against Panama (Fifa ranking 44) on 25 September at Bengaluru's Sree Kanteerava Stadium, the other two are at Kolkata's Salt Lake Stadium (VDB) against five-time World Cup winners Brazil (ranked 5) and Uruguay (ranked 20) on 3 and 6 October, respectively.

National coach Khalid Jamil has the unenviable task of making his players competitive against these top-tier teams. He has left out several veterans from his 26-member squad, preferring younger players to get "valuable experience at the international level". Jamil is aware that the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to play against top-tier sides may also turn into a nightmare for the 138th-ranked Indians. Brazil have called up their top stars, including Vinicius Jr and Raphinha, while well-known names like Federico Valverde and Darwin Nunez figure in the Uruguay squad, underlining the technical and tactical superiority of two of the world's top teams. All three sides have agreed to play in exchange for huge appearance fees.

## AN EXPENSIVE PROPOSITION

The Brazil match's budget alone is believed to be around ₹50 crore, of which ₹35-40 crore is meant for the Brazilian federation (CBF) as an appearance fee. Uruguay will take home ₹22.5 crore and Panama ₹5.5 crore, as per an All India Football Federation (AIFF) insider who preferred not to be identified.

Apart from appearance fees, transportation and hospitality will also cost a pretty penny. Travel in chartered flights for Brazil's 90-member contingent would cost around ₹6 crore, for Uruguay approximately ₹3 crore and ₹5 lakh for Panama, thus pushing the total budget for the three friendlies to around ₹80-90 crore. Interestingly, AIFF's executive committee members are still in the dark about the budgetary arrangements, as nothing has been officially conveyed to them, even after granting permission for funding the initial payments from the federation's coffers at an executive committee meeting on 6 August.

As the AIFF has decided to push already stretched coffers to the absolute limits to host these matches, it has triggered a debate as to how beneficial such a risky enterprise could be.

## WHERE IS THE MONEY?

Former India captain and executive committee member Bhauchung Bhutia has contested the rationale for India playing friendlies, while pulling out from the inaugural FIFA Asian Cup at the last moment to avoid a clash of schedules. "The president (Kalyan Chaubey) has said that the advance to Brazil FA would be paid from the AIFF account. Has that amount been paid? If so, how much and who would repay it later to AIFF?", Bhutia wrote in a letter to the AIFF on 28 August. He is yet to receive a reply.

The former striker is right to ask this question. The AIFF took a huge gamble once it decided to provide the initial payment needed to set the ball rolling for these matches.

At the AIFF's executive committee meeting on 6 August, permission was sought to temporarily advance money from the federation's account for this payment—without specifying the amount involved—based on the belief that the money spent would be recovered from ticket sales and sponsorship deals.

But will it? The lack of substantial sponsorship agreement announcements to date have led to consternation among AIFF's members.

For an organisation whose bank balance was, as of 28 March, ₹1.25 crore in liquid cash, ₹22.45 crore in FIFA and AFC Accounts and ₹21.62 crore in fixed deposits and bonds, these three friendlies are a giant financial undertaking.

The state governments of West Bengal and Karnataka are expected to foot the bill for infrastructural and security support, but are yet to offer any special financial package. The Union government hasn't committed a dime either so far, leaving the AIFF to explore avenues to lure public sector undertakings and private enterprises into sponsorships. Marketing rights have been handed over to the Mumbai-based Professional Management Group, and Bengaluru-headquartered DNA Entertainment Networks has received the operational rights.

"Discussions are on (for sponsorships) as we speak," an AIFF official told Lounge on condition of anonymity, but refused to divulge specifics.

Sale of tickets priced between 299 and ₹15,000 for the Brazil clash in the 67,000-capacity Salt Lake Stadium began on 2 September on District.in, while tickets ranging between ₹499 and ₹9,999 were made available six days later for the Panama game at the Sree Kanteerava Stadium. Tickets for the Uruguay game are yet to be made available, as its federation is yet to give the go-ahead for it.

The ticketing partner has agreed to pay ₹25 crore to AIFF, eyeing sales in the region of ₹30-40 crore for a substantial profit. As part of its deal, District has already paid half the amount, facilitating AIFF's efforts to procure the initial payment for CBF and subsequent commencement of ticket sales.

Sony Sports Network has bagged the broadcast rights in India in a ₹4-crore deal, and plans to shell out "more than a crore" for producing the matches, as per the owner of a production company.

## AN ULTIMOR MOTIVE?

Insiders claim that these matches are merely an election gimmick. With the four-year term of the Kalyan Chaubey-led executive committee having ended on 2 September, the AIFF is due for elections, and the current panel is working on borrowed time.

While seeking re-election, the successful hosting of these high-profile matches would provide Chaubey's committee something positive to show in an otherwise controversial—ridiculous tenure. The date of the elections will be announced in an special general body meeting of the AIFF on 4 October in Kolkata.

Sayan Mukherjee is a sports journalist with an affinity towards football.



# If the world were to end...

Researchers have warned that without checks and balances, AI could 'kill us all'. Knowing that the end is near, what would you do differently? Lounge team members share their thoughts—from doing nothing to going off the grid



Team Lounge

## BACK TO THE BEGINNING

It would be liberating to know that death is coming sooner rather than later and that we will all be together on that boat when it gets torpedoed by AI gone rogue. The tech billionaires, the trolls, the stragglers, the misluncheoners, the 10L5-step skincare routine *bhaktis*—one and sundry. What would I do differently? Nothing, really. It would be pointless anyway. No one to leave that beloved Kashmiri shawl or those *chand-balis* to; no need to top up the health insurance plan, or get that nose job (not really). All that *riz*, mogging, maxxing, aura farming and whatnot vocabulary be damned. I do have one desire though—to visit my former home in Sinagar. The one where the windows faced Shankaracharya Hill, and a small marble plaque near the main door read "Shanti Nivas". This city where my ancestors go back generations, and the one I shall return to, to say goodbye. It would be like coming full circle. Or is it more like going back to the start line? But, the hope is that the Earth will get a chance to restore itself—without asking ChatGPT.

—Nipa Charagi

## BIDDING ADIEU TO EXAMS

If humanity's existence is likely to be in peril after a decade, thanks to AI, could we do away with exams please! In the past three weeks, I have watched high school kids frantically trying to memorise different between collenchyma and sclerenchyma and then immediately switch gears to coordinate geometry and tectonic plates. I have nothing against these fine concepts but I am against this very robotic process of testing installed by a tired education system, where children are blindly mugging up more than we really understand. If the very future of the world is in dire straits, then there is no reason why the future of the younger generation should continue to be determined by flawed examination systems. Wouldn't it be liberating for kids to spend the next decade breaking free from convention to truly connect with the world? Go analogue for a while, step away from the world of AI-led algorithms, research classroom concepts in real time.

Imagine being unfettered by the societal burden of choosing a particular stream or profession to pursue what your heart truly desires. Go ahead and study psychology or anthropology or mathematical sociology to your heart's content without having to explain the long-term viability of a subject. For the next decade, what if

kids learnt the way they wanted and what they wanted! Whether the world resets itself or not, at least the education system might get a refreshing new direction.

—Arantika Bhuyan

## UNDER THE SEA

I've always wanted to live by the sea, so if our time was running out, I'd be happy to move to a beautiful island where I could swim with the marine life every day and live out my time there blissfully, instead of staring at a laptop or worrying about bills and babysitters. With rising sea temperatures, melting ice and overfishing, it's quite possible that much of our marine life will die soon even if humans do survive, and that is a bleak thought.

When I was younger, I missed the opportunity to see the Great Barrier Reef because it was pouring on the day of our tour. I cried and promised I would return. I also missed the chance to snorkel in the Andamans because our overzealous guide was afraid about my health (I was just pregnant at the time, not immobile). This time, I'll take my daughter with me, since she is obsessed with beautiful, wild animals as I am. The sounds of whales, smiling dolphins, fishes that are every colour of the rainbow, octopuses, a few seals too—that is the dream, and the chance to enjoy it may not be here forever.

—Dakshayani Kumaramangalam

## CHANGING NOTHING

When we first discussed this prompt within the team, my instant thought was I'd finally write all those books I think about writing. I keep putting it off because, even though we know we have finite time on this planet, we somehow assume we have all the time in the world. But the truth is, I don't want a book out of me as much as some well-wishers do. So, if I had only 10 more years on this planet, I'd spend them doing exactly what I'm doing now: writing stories, spending time with my people, finding enriching experiences to do. There is something extremely freeing in knowing you have no unfinished business. You're doing exactly what you wanted with your life, and want to keep doing it while you still can. What changes is the financial planning. I'll be able to allocate money better to all the things I like doing because knowing the end date lets you work backwards, instead of saving endlessly for some indefinite rainy day. This next thought is a little morbid, but for me, knowing the end date might also make losing someone easier to deal with. You'd know exactly how much

time you have to spend without them in this world, rather than wondering, how will I do the rest of my life without them? Lastly, for the large population of single people that I now count myself among, perhaps the question would also shift from "Will I ever find the one for me again?" to cherishing all kinds of witnesses to our lives whom we find along the way to mass extinction.

—Shephali Bhatt

## SMALL-TOWN DREAMS

From my balcony in Mumbai, I see cars swooshing down the road all night. Sometimes, when I wake up in the middle of the night, the streets are still awash with light. A couple of weeks ago, I found some women buying plants by a roadside. It was 10.30pm. What is this city, I wonder, that refuses to go home, sleep, rest a bit? That's when I feel the urge to move to a small town. Somewhere where the streets empty by 9pm, shops shut early and there is little reason to be out late at night. A place where the day actually seems to end. I don't want to hear the honking of cars or see the constant movement. I want a quiet street, a house with a garden, trees with branches stretching over the road. I want neighbours chatting across a fence, sharing gossip and *dabbas*. Perhaps growing up in a small town has something to do with this longing. I miss the feeling that there is nowhere you need to rush to. My family often say living in the heart of India's financial capital is a privilege. But sometimes I think I'd give anything for the luxury of a quiet street at night.

—Rituparna Ray

## HILLS CALLING

Trust a deadline to make you do the things you have been procrastinating about. The first thing I would do is move to Palampur, my hometown. Our house there overlooks the Dhauladhar; a small stream runs right outside where my dog Tom could swim. I would spend my days playing, running and walking with Tom in the hills—with nowhere else I need to be and no reason to rush or meet a deadline. On the side, I would study cultural and social anthropology, something I wanted to pursue in college but gave up for commerce. I would also learn Chamba Rumal embroidery, one of my favourite traditional crafts from the region. I would use my savings to travel every three months to a new place, slowly rather than frantically. And, most importantly, I would stop saving things for a future that may never arrive. I would wear the clothes and jewellery I have kept

aside for "special occasions" every day. For, if there were only some years left, every day would be a special occasion.

—Pooja Singh

## CIRCLE OF LOVE

The end comes for all of us, AI invasion or not. But knowing an exact expiry date hits differently. A hard stop, no doubt, will send some of us into a tizzy of ticking items off our bucket lists. But others (like Carol, the stoically ordinary protagonist of the adult animation show, *Carol and the End of the World*) will probably simply want to do what they know best. Show up at work every morning if only to banter with colleagues, eat stuff that makes them happy (not necessarily healthy), and spend more time with loved ones instead of doomscrolling their way to doomsday. I'd most likely follow a similar script, except my loved ones would include the stray cats and dogs who remain a source of unbridled joy in my life. The attractions of a Michelin-star meal or a final trip to Paris, the city I love most, are immensely alluring. But after a lifetime of chasing self-gratifying goals, I'd like to build a sanctuary for our furry friends, give them a taste of care, comfort and unconditional love. To spend time with all these animals, who for no fault of theirs are going to be erased along with humankind, feels like the most fortifying gift to hold on to in the end of days.

—Somak Ghoshal

## OFF THE GRID

One of my favourite feature stories *Life's Sweety* by journalist Susan Orlean was published in the magazine *Women Outside* in 1998. It documents teenage girls who surf professionally. They train hard, they are home-schooled, and they spend their days among the waves with their surfer friends. They dream of out-sized wardrobes in their "sand-caked" skin. My idea of a good life is similar. It involves logging out from all digital platforms, doing stuff with people I love and learning something that involves the mind and body. There will be a landline and letterbox, and the smartphone will be nowhere to be found. A garden beyond the front porch for flowers and vegetables, and maybe a dog lying on a chair. The newspaper and a few magazines will bring information from the world outside. The neighbours will include my friends and family who I don't meet as much I would like to. My grandmother was an expert weaver and crocheter, and I plan to learn both. There won't be too much, but just enough for a life that's swell.

—Jahnabee Borah

## KUNG FU FIGHTING

"If you're not having a good time, there's no point in anything at all" was a tenet I lived by until pretty recently. Apparently, you can have too much fun, and I've had it. This phase of my life has been marked by discipline, with a focus on improving my strength and physical abilities. If the world were to end soon because of the AI apocalypse, I'd fulfil a long-standing fantasy of disappearing and combine it with a longing to master a martial art. I'd ship off to China to train in kung fu with Shaolin monks. Maybe it's watching *Enter the Dragon* a few too many times growing up, or maybe my grandfather's obsession with me learning martial arts has finally pervaded into a want of my own. There is a specific kind of reward in conquering the things you are naturally bad at. Forcing your mind and body through something that doesn't come easily feels far more real than coasting on what you already know. If the clock is truly ticking, I'd rather spend the remaining time pushing past my own limits than just waiting around for the sky to fall.

—Ghazal Chengappa

## SEE THE WORLD WHILE IT'S THERE

If I knew humanity was about to end in 10 years, I honestly feel I would be extremely depressed and paralysed into inaction for a while. A year or so of therapy might snap me out of it. Then, if society hasn't descended into anarchy and chaos, I'd like to see as much of it as possible.

I'll have to set some rules. To start with, no repeats: there just isn't time. In the first few years, I'll need to fill in some glaring gaps in my travelled map: no running off to Europe and America because it's the done thing. While my general preference is for cities and human ingenuity over nature and tons of walking, I'll have to mix it up—a range of experiences, ideas, sights. I want to hear the Berliner Philharmoniker, and I want to see a giraffe in the wild. I'd like to visit Machu Picchu, and I'd also like to walk through the streets of Hong Kong at night, a place that has recent experience of living with an impending deadline.

—Uday Bhatia

## LEARNING HOW TO DIE

As with everything else, one has to learn how to die. Or is it learn how to accept death? Either way, you get my drift. It's a difficult thing I'm sure, and most people probably don't manage it. At least without the hopeful thought of another existence

in a realm beyond death, where you retain your sense of self. Objectively speaking though, such hopes are misguided at best. Humans are but a unique configuration of complex chemistry, and like all natural processes, must come to an end. So, if I were to know for sure that humanity has a fixed expiry date, and that too within the decade, what would I do? My first thought is to go into the deepest Himalaya, but then, to do what exactly? One thing I know for sure, I certainly wouldn't want to be where AI can easily find me. So, in an ideal world, I would probably like to retreat to a Buddhist monastery. This isn't just because I admire the philosophical and soteriological aims of the Mahayana, but because of Arthur Conan Doyle. I read his brilliant short story, *The Nine Billion Names of God*, as an impressionable child (rather, Satyajit Ray's equally brilliant Bengali translation), and as a result, I've always admired the cool sangfroid of Buddhist monks, even in the face of the Universe ending. In the final years of humanity, I would like to cultivate something similar in myself. And learn how to die.

—Bibek Bhattacharya

## IN THE WOODS

I was a rather fanciful child, but seem to have grown into an adult who takes journalism very seriously. I never realised I might have a bucket list—until the team started discussing what the end of the world would mean. Being a journalist was always on that list (I thought I didn't have, but so was pilot, wildlife ranger, tree conservationist (no, I'm not sure if that's a thing), gymnast and forensic scientist. Some of these might be out of reach considering how short we are of time to the end of the world according to tech bros, but I still want to do what I can for the life forms that have supported, sustained and reconciled themselves to human activity for the past 5,000 years, give or take a few centuries. I'd work as a volunteer with a rewilding project to learn, understand, dig, touch, plant and work with the land that sustains us. There's so much about the natural world which we're destroying that we're yet to learn, but plenty of research and numerous projects have shown that when habitats are restored, most species of birds, insects and animals return. Yes, of course it's a lost cause, but then again, it would be in character—I have spent the better part of 25 years as a journalist, living with "hopium" as my *Mint* colleague Abhishek recently described any long-time reporter's particular brand of optimism.

—Shatini Umachandran



# 'Angh' shows us Naga history from the inside

The film, set in a Nagaland jungle in the 1960s, is about the chief of an indigenous ethnic tribe, the last visible proof of a culture



Poulomi Das

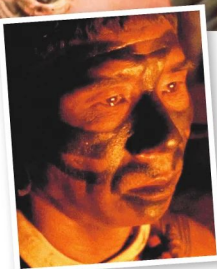
**T**heja Rio's *Angh* ends with a line sharp enough to double as an epitaph: Today, Nagaland is the most baptist state in the world. What precedes it is the beginning of that ending—a haunting account of how a state on India's margins was drawn into a colonial fold it never fully chose. In that, Rio's debut feature measures the toll of that assimilation on a single family, a village, and an entire history. It is also an act of correction: Naga history has rarely been told from the inside, and *Angh* insists on being one of the few records of a past that has remained largely ignored.

Set in a remote Nagaland jungle near the Indo-Myanmar border in the early 1960s, *Angh* follows Anghba (a masterful Anglong Konyak), the chief of a Konyak—an indigenous ethnic tribe—village that has otherwise emptied out. His people left gradually, one household at a time, drawn to new settlement built around an American mission nearby, where they now dress in Western clothes, attend church and school, and speak English instead of Konyak. What's left behind is Anghba, his ailing wife, and Amao, his young, mute son, the last visible proof of a culture the rest of the village has already traded away.

The arrival of an American missionary (Douglas Henshall) sets what is left of that transformation in motion. Rio is precise about the mechanics: conversion moves through gifts, comforts, small kindnesses, each one quietly reframing Konyak life as something lacking rather than whole. Amao, still debating what his father has already decided against, becomes the missionary's real target—his attention drawn, gift by gift, toward the church and away from his father's beliefs. *Angh* resists sentimentality throughout, observing this erosion at close range. What lands, by the end, isn't a single tragic moment but the accumulated weight of many small ones.

Premiering as part of the Platform lineup at the ongoing Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), *Angh* is the only Indian film in competition this year. Now in its 11th edition, Platform is the festival's sole competitive section, built for emerging and established directorial voices. This year also marks a new stage for Platform: the section's winner qualifies for the Best International Feature Film race at the Oscars, and *Angh* is competing for that prize against 11 other non-English titles.

That distinction isn't lost on Rio. "I definitely do think about where I want my films to go and which audiences they need to find, especially coming from a region that has remained largely underrepresented on screen." For the filmmaker, more audiences signal more visibility for indigenous films like *Angh*. "I don't feel like we have the privilege or the position, at least yet, to make a film without thinking about the audience."



The script is disciplined in a way few debut features manage, willing to let tension accumulate through gesture and silence rather than incident

*Angh* expands on Rio's eponymous 2021 short, which won the Special Jury Award at Clermont-Ferrand, France. He made it just before leaving for film school in London, where he met co-writer James Davis and cinematographer Adam Pietkiewicz—collaborations that solidified the film's feature ambitions. What began as an intimate father-and-son story has grown into something wider: a film about cultural rupture, survival, and a community confronting a world changing faster than it can adapt.

Pietkiewicz's filmmaking works as an atmospheric texture, catching the grain and rawness of a world that already looks like it is dissolving at the edges. In the opening minutes, Anghba hunts for food, dressed in the traditional manner of a Konyak chief—a loincloth, tattooed face, ornaments of brass and bone at his ears—a figure who looks entirely outside of time. That illusion doesn't survive the film's next sequence. Anghba's wife is dying, and when the missionary arrives with help, flanked by villagers who have already converted, Anghba turns him away, knowing what accepting would cost him. When she dies, he puts her to rest through indigenous funeral rites—graphic and unflinching—that ends with the sacrifice of an animal. Rio doesn't look away from it, and neither does the camera. But Amao does. He watches with visible discomfort: a small, telling detail that Anghba's son flinches at his own inheritance the same way the Americans do.

What's left after a father and son with nothing but each other. Anghba has lived a full life inside the customs and traditions passed down by his ancestors. But his son hasn't. Through the boy's eyes, the new village holds everything the old world doesn't: other children, food that no longer needs hunting, and orchards where fruit once grew wild and free, now fenced off, owned by a select few. Amao and Anghba still spend their days wandering the jungle for a meal the mission's converts no longer have to earn, but the boy is already elsewhere in his head, drawn toward a world that asks less of him and gives more back.



Stills from 'Angh'; and (below) Theja Rio.

The script, co-written by Rio and Davis, is disciplined in a way few debut features manage, willing to let tension accumulate through gesture and silence rather than incident, trusting an audience to sit with discomfort instead of resolving it too soon. Underneath its coming-of-age frame is a harder question about legacy: whether we

get to decide what we inherit, or whether that gets decided for us by whoever is watching us live. The film never asks outright what it means to be civilised, or who earns the right to decide, but every apple plucked from a fenced orchard, every wince at a father's ritual is already answering the question.

Much of *Angh*'s power comes from the way Rio and Pietkiewicz choose to look at it. The film favours wide shots and slow pans over close, urgent coverage, giving the jungle room to feel vast and indifferent. Forests are cleared and trees felled for roads, in the name of development, in the name of connecting the jungle to other villages—progress arriving dressed as kindness, as it always does. Sugar Dasa's score stays out of the way in the same spirit, an intimate, understated accompaniment that never swells to cue an emotion the images have already made clear. That patience gives *Angh* an observational, almost hallucinatory quality, as if the camera is simply present for whatever happens rather than shaping it.

It helps, too, that Rio never resorts to easy tragedy. A slight stays a slight rather than swelling into spectacle, and it's the faces of his leads—largely non-actors—that carry the film's real weight. "When I was writing the film, I was trying to write it in the most neutral perspective possible," the filmmaker says. "I like to make films about things I am conflicted about."

That refusal to pick a side is what gives *Angh* its impact. Rio trusts his audience to read a look rather than wait for a line of dialogue to explain it, and by the time the film's startling climax arrives, taking sides is no longer an option. What emerges is a filmmaker in full command of his restraint: someone unafraid to sit inside a difficult history and confident enough in his own instincts to let *Angh* convey that history on its own terms.

Poulomi Das is a Goa-based film critic.



# 'Crash' is a masterpiece that deserves its notoriety

## WORLD VIEW

A look at what's making waves on the global cinema scene

We look back at David Cronenberg's controversial film and its trailblazing producer, the late Jeremy Thomas

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I dreamed of other accidents that might enlarge this repository of offices, relating them to more elements of the automobile's engineering, to the ever-more complex technologies of the future. What wounds would create the sexual possibilities of the invisible technologies of thermonuclear reaction chambers, white-tiled control rooms, the mysterious sciences of computer circuitry?"

If David Cronenberg didn't exist, these lines from J.G. Ballard's *Crash* would have invented him. This 1973 novel was about a group of people who find sexual satisfaction in car crashes. Ballard called it a "pornographic novel about technology"—what makes it particularly unnerving is the calm, cold manner in which his graphic ideas are delivered. It takes a lot to even read it, let alone consider adapting it. But Cronenberg has always been fascinated by the sexual possibilities of invisible tech-

nologies. In the words of producer Jeremy Thomas, "It isn't a book that was calling out to be made into a movie, but it was calling out to be made into a movie by David."

It was also calling out to Thomas. The English producer, who died this week at 77, loved Ballard's novels. He also loved a challenge. His first productions were Ozploitation western *Mad Dog Morgan* (1976), horror film *The Shout* (1978) and the fractured, erotic *Bad Timing* (1980). He helped Nagisa Oshima thread an impossible needle with *Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence* (1983), and made possible Bernardo Bertolucci's epic *The Last Emperor* (1987), shot in Beijing's Forbidden City. He gave a music video director named Jonathan Glazer his start with *Sexy Beast*. He seemed to gravitate towards boundary pushers: Oshima, Cronenberg, Jerzy Skolimowski, Nicolas Roeg, Takashi Miike. Some producers have taste, others courage; Thomas had both.

Cronenberg's *Crash* (1996) begins with James (James Spader) and Catherine (Deborah Kara Unger), a married couple in the most open of relationships, having unsatisfactory sex with other people, and comparing notes later. Soon after, James loses control of his car while driving. He slams violently into an oncoming car, whose driver is propelled through his windshield and into James' passenger seat. As he looks on, dazed, the dead man's co-passenger in the front seat tries to take off her seatbelt. Her shirt opens in the process, baring her breast.

In the hospital, a recovering James is ignored by the woman from the other car, Helen (Holly Hunter), and is examined, in



Deborah Kara Unger and (right) James Spader in 'Crash'.

the hallway, by someone wearing a doctor's coat, though with an intensity far beyond professional curiosity. James and Helen start an affair, having sex in his battered car. She takes him to an underground parking garage, a recreation of the fatal crash of James Dean, emceed by the weirdo from the hospital, a crash connoisseur named Vaughan (a feral Elias Koteas). James is inducted into Vaughan's circle, which includes leather-clad paraplegic Gabrielle (Rosanna Arquette) and Helen,

all accident victims who are turned on by auto accidents.

Cronenberg sets his film in the present day, as Ballard had done with his novel. This is key, because it removes the temptation to dismiss the urges and predilections of these characters as "another time." Most of us can't imagine crashing into another car in pursuit of sexual fulfilment. But we can know what it's like to feel connected, physically and spiritually, stuck in our sterile lives, hoping for a vis-

ual connection. There's a beautiful passage in the book describing Catherine—who's drawn into this world—having sex with Vaughan in the backseat as James drives them through a carwash: "The light refracted through the soap solution jetting across the windows covers their bodies with a luminous glow, like two semi-metallic human beings of the future making love in a chromium bower." With Peter Sarsgaard's dark, gleaming photography and Howard Shore's eerie, chiming score, Cronenberg fashions this into the film's most stunning passage, a fever dream of violent eros.

Before *Crash*, Thomas and Cronenberg had worked on an adaptation of William Burroughs' equally controversial *Naked Lunch*. It's a memorable film in many ways, but I find *Crash* to be the more satis-

fying adaptation of the two, in how closely Ballard's imagined psychologies vibrate with Cronenberg's eternal theme of bodies breached, marked and transformed by science. Vaughan describes his work as "the reshaping of the human body by modern technology"—which includes everything from tattoos of famous car crashes to the kinkiness of Gabrielle's prosthetic limb to the far more dangerous accidents the group engineer and undergo in an attempt to achieve that elusive ultimate climax.

*Crash* belongs with *Peeping Tom* (1960), *In the Realm of the Senses* (1976) and *Salo, or the 120 Days of Sodom* (1975) as a rare film that fully earns the moral panic it provoked. The backlash started with its Cannes premiere; jury president Francis Ford Coppola apparently hated the film. An early review by critic Alexander Walker called it "beyond the bounds of depravity", and there were attempts to ban the film in England. *Crash* is absolutely not for the feeble-hearted; there are so many points at which it's justifiable to tap out. Yet, unlike some other directors touted as transgressive, Cronenberg isn't doing this to test his audience's appetite for punishment. He's genuinely curious about his characters, and doesn't see them as freaks or deviants. His films also have a dry humour that's rarely acknowledged. In an interview for the Arrow blu-ray release of *Crash*, Jeremy Thomas brings up one of cinema's first great shocks, the eyeball sliced open in *Un Chien Andalou* (1929). It's hard to imagine Luis Buñuel, an observant of human extremes, enjoying the films of Cronenberg.



# A life trapped inside the debt machinery

Geet Chaturvedi's novel in translation chronicles the plight of a man lured into the consumerist trap by a system that thrives on selling greed

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Geet Chaturvedi's powerful novel, *Gomutra* (literally, cow urine), translated from the Hindi by Anita Gopalan as *Scent of the Nameless* (though "stench" rather than "scent" feels better suited to the mood of the text), begins on a note of menace. The unnamed protagonist, a family man who works as a "store coordinator" at a multinational company in Mumbai, wakes up in the dead of the night, reeking of cow urine. No amount of washing or scrubbing with fragrant soaps can get rid of the foul odour. It seeps underneath his skin, stubbornly sticking to his armpits, fills him with self-loathing, and trails him for days on end.

Chaturvedi's narrator may not be as radically transformed as Gregor Samsa, the protagonist of Franz Kafka's novella *The Metamorphosis*, who wakes up one morning to discover he has turned into a giant vermin; but the salaryman's predicament is no less distressing. Caught inside an impenetrable miasma of hallucinations, unable to confide in anyone the extent of his troubles, he is trapped in a disaster of his making. Or rather, a disaster that has become endemic to the time he lives in.

The misfortune that befalls Chaturvedi's protagonist is insidious, yet far too common, even banal, to escape. It is the crippling grip of debt, manifesting in his case as mounting credit card bills. From farmers in drought-ridden regions neck-deep in debt choosing to end their suffering by consuming sulphate tablets to middle-class office-goers hounded by herchemen sent by banks to collect outstanding instalments, the victims of this phenomenon range far and wide. As Chaturvedi's plot unfolds, the reader begins to reckon with debt as the great leveler of the 21st century, forcing its prey into a state of "living on imbecility".

Fictional critiques of capitalism tend to operate out of a realist mode, as Aravind Adiga's Booker Prize-winning *The White Tiger* (2008) did, albeit without much nuance. However, writers like Kazuo Ishiguro in *Never Let Me Go* (2005) and J.G. Ballard in *High-Rise* (1975) have offered no less scathing perspectives on the moral bankruptcy of capital by profoundly defamiliarising the world as we know it. In *Scent of the Nameless*, Chaturvedi achieves a similar effect by cleverly setting his story at a time and place that feels like an amalgam of George Orwell's 1984 and contemporary India. Some may argue that there isn't much of a difference between the two any more.

As his protagonist realises, at great personal cost, the reality he inhabits is radically skewed, built on contradictions and inequality. "It wasn't



Pest infection in 2018 affected millions of farmers in Maharashtra and Vidarbha; and (below) Geet Chaturvedi.

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

borrowing... It was a way of earning," he tells the reader, referring to the argument presented to him by an importunate bank agent desperate to fix a credit card on the man. "Earnings came from circulating that money in the market itself," is another tosy-turvy maxim he learns. Such painfully learned wisdom about the secret workings of the system leads him to a despairing truth: "The ones who can sell run the economy... The ones who can't sell become its prey."

Time and again, this bitter pill bites home for Chaturvedi's protagonist through his experiences and epiphanies. The stress of defaulting on his EMIs leaves him suspended in a limbo, where it becomes impossible to separate practical worries from catastrophising terrors, nightmares from waking thoughts. One day, he has an outburst in office, leaving his colleagues shocked by the volley of expletives he utters. When he seeks help from his boss "Baba", the latter confesses to being in the same boat. Such is the twisted force of the free market that it doesn't matter whether you earn lakhs or in the measly thousands. Everyone, Baba tells him, is drowning in debt.

As in his previous novel *Simsim* (2023), Chaturvedi diffuses the boundaries between the real and the surreal in *Scent of the Nameless*, leaving the reader to grapple with the challenge of reading between the lines. For instance, in one striking episode, his protagonist, consumed as he is by inner demons, discovers a hidden fund of bravado in him when he rouses an army of daily commuters on a Mumbai local to



wage a revolt against the government. Does this scene belong to his subconscious or does it enter the world of the novel through a crack in his realist fabric? Is the "Finance Minister", who appears like an uncaring official, real or a figment of the protagonist's oppressed mind? And what about the smell of *gomutra* that drives him up the wall but doesn't seem to affect others?

The reader doesn't—indeed, cannot—know the answers to these questions. In fact, to look for them is to misread the intentions of the writer. In a world full of grey areas, Chaturvedi is interested in manipulating the sympathy of the reader by holding a mirror to their own lives, which aren't immune from the claws of market economics. The protagonist's choices aren't uniquely his own, nor are the mistakes that lead him down the path to doom. These are, in fact, part of a larger affliction that infects most of his contemporaries, heirs to "democracy and greedocracy," as he puts it, burning their own lives to fuel the engine that drives big capital.

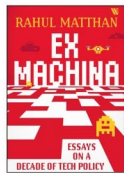
Chaturvedi's lambent prose, especially the droll despair with which his protagonist speaks, comes alive in Gopalan's inspired translation, which comes with a note explaining specific stylistic choices in the end. For instance, the decision to use compound epithets—"cooking woman", "washing woman", and so on—to describe the shape-shifting roles assumed by the protagonist's wife, provides a subtle but revealing clue into the interpersonal dynamics of the couple. With her quiet inscrutability, she remains the firm hand that keeps him going, even while he is crumbling inside, until she can no more. For his part, he harbours an unspoken strain of misogyny towards her, blaming her consumerist greed for his profligate spending. The reader can only infer the contours of the couple's relationship, each pushing the other away while desperately seeking some form of closeness.

The protagonist's use of his wife as a convenient moral shield, along with his stubborn refusal to heed her counsel about selling off their belongings despite his pathetic loss of face before creditors, paint a portrait of a man who has reached the end of his tether. Not only does the reader witness fragile modes of masculinity crumbling in an innately patriarchal society, they also follow a familiar disintegration of the notion of selfhood, under assault since the advent of the industrial era, and becoming much more exacerbated since the economic meltdown of 2008.

As Gopalan reminds the reader, Murali Prasad's iconic novel, *Godan* (1936), which tells the story of a poor farmer's struggle with inhuman debt, looms over Chaturvedi's modern morality tale. The question the latter leaves us to ponder is, in the end, rhetorical: "What, really, has changed between the debt of 1936 and 2008?"

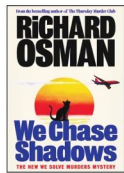
## NEW ON SHELVES

Chronicle the sweep of changes over the last decade, this upcoming collection of essays, drawn from Matthan's long-running *Mint* column of the same name, offers key insights into the way the state's engagement with technology has evolved. From UPI payment infrastructure to the onslaught of AI in public life, the articles cover an array of topics that have an impact on citizens' lives. *'Ez Machine'*, by Rahul Matthan, Westland, 248 pages, ₹699.



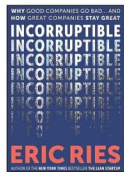
A new Richard Osman

novel has dropped like an early Christmas gift, packed with all the things that make for a gripping mystery. Second in his *We Solve Murders* series, this multi-continental drama has action, humour and, above all, the oddball team of Amy, Rose and Steve, who have to chase a killer across Italy, Palm Springs and Barcelona. *'We Chase Shadows'*, by Richard Osman, Penguin Random House, 432 pages, ₹999.



Eric Reis,

best-selling author of *The Lean Startup*, returns with a book urging founders and C-suite leaders to look at their businesses afresh. As AI causes disruptions, he argues that the need of the hour isn't to focus on beating the competition, but to tackle systems that are eroding the first principles of businesses. *'Incorruptible: Why Good Companies Go Bad and How Great Companies Stay Great'*, by Eric Reis, Penguin Random House, 432 pages, ₹1,099.



Popularly called the "Nutrition Man of India",

Basant Kumar Kar draws on his experience in the field to explain the roots of malnutrition. The latter doesn't always stem from famine and poverty. Rather, a variety of sociological and cultural choices may lead to it. The factors causing malnutrition are complex. Kar demystifies the science behind it. *'Malnutrition: Fed or Misled? The Truth Beyond Food'*, by Basant Kumar Kar, Hachette India, 416 pages, ₹799.



## Did foreign capital reshape India's healthcare?

Ameer Shahul's book dwells on the healthcare sector, from the growth of corporate hospitals to the rise of foreign players

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Ameer Shahul's third book, *The Silent Syndicate*, arrives with its thesis in the subtitle—*How Big Finance is Destroying India's Healthcare*—and a prosecutor's confidence in its pages. Following *Heavy Metal*, his award-winning account of mercury poisoning and corporate negligence in Kodaikanal, and *Vaccine Nation*, a history of immunisation in India, Shahul, a journalist-turned-policy professional, again marries dogged reporting to argument. The result is an absorbing and meticulously sourced read. But it is also more certain of its villains than its economics quite warrants.

The book is built as a tour of the healthcare sector, beginning with the growth of corporate hospitals in India, most of them led by entrepreneurs who started with the idea of using it as a platform to launch a Thiruvananthapuram, which began, in Shahul's words, as a "symbol of altruistic ambition" in 2002 before private equity

arrived a decade later, first from an Indian and a global private equity fund and later from True North and the US-based Blackstone. He takes readers through similar trajectories of Apollo Hospitals, Medanta, Narayana Health, Manipal and others whose fortunes were built with PE funds. Ranjan Puri-promoted Manipal Hospitals, for instance, was founded in 1961 and had just three hospitals for nearly 40 years until Singapore fund Temasek expanded its stake to 59%, helping the group expand to 40 hospitals in the next 20 years.

From there Shahul moves to diagnostics—Dr Lal PathLabs and WestBridge's early bet, Velumani's Thyrocare and CX Partners, then Vijaya and Aarthi, all growing with PE money—and on to medical devices, pharmaceuticals, insurers, and finally, the lobbies that grease the machine. It is a comprehensive map, and Shahul draws it well.

The trouble is the moral that the map is asked to carry. Across every segment, Shahul's recurring evidence is that foreign capital "swooped in." But private equity in unlisted companies is, fundamentally, a question of who is willing to take a risk at what price. Based on his own facts, Indian capital was repeatedly at the table, only to be outbid most times by foreign investors. For instance, British firm Apax Partners bought Sures India after US-based TPG Growth and Indian PE firm CX Partners had already been through it, rebanded it



Behind the growth of healthcare in India is the multibillion-dollar shift toward foreign private equity.

Healthium, and expanded it from 50 to 90 countries. When US investment firm KKR paid roughly ₹7,000 crore for the Healthium in 2024, it outbid the Indian Chrys Capital-Mankind combine, which chafed at ₹6,500 crore. The opportunity, in every case, was visible to all. But foreign firms valued it more aggressively.

This reframing matters, because "destroying" is a strong verb for what

looks, from another angle, like the arrival of capital that Indian investors would not pay at valuations that their competing foreign counterparts were willing to. The sector did not attract serious money even at the close of the last century. When it finally did, capacity multiplied.

One cannot lament the terms without pretending the alternative—a starved, slow-growing system—was kinder to patients.

Shahul's book, powerful on the last 15 years of frenetic PE activity, is thinner on why domestic capital sat out the decades before or on the network effects that make founders prefer a foreign backer.

The dynamic is more fluid than the book's alarm allows. In pharmaceuticals, Indian investors and domestic institutions have bought back in as foreign investors exited, raising domestic ownership.

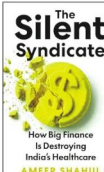
In the Hyderabad-based Dr Reddy's Laboratories, over the last three years, domestic institutional investors have come to hold a bigger stake than the foreign ones. In Divi's Labs, the second most valued pharmaceutical company, Indian institutions hold as much as foreign investors. Most of the hospital chains are now listed on Indian exchanges, where ownership will churn for years before it settles. To freeze the picture at a single anxious moment—foreign ownership at its 2024 high-water mark—and call it a permanent "syndicate" is to mistake a snapshot for a destination.

Shahul's singular focus is the rise of for-

ign ownership of India's healthcare. He hardly touches on government actions or initiatives. Where he is truly valuable is in insisting that decisions about Indian care are being increasingly taken in London, Munich and New York rather than in Mumbai or Bengaluru, and in his refusal to let the middle class mistake its own convenience as a sign of progress.

Shahul also argues that wider health insurance coverage in India has not necessarily made healthcare more affordable. Rather, the entry of private equity, global insurers and reinsurers has financialised the healthcare ecosystem, shifting the focus from patients and doctors to return on capital. In particular, he says the entry of global reinsurers starting 2016 has led to tighter underwriting, higher premiums, more exclusions and complicated policy conditions.

Those are worthwhile provocations. But the reader who finishes *The Silent Syndicate* should carry one counter-question: the author does not press it: this was a heist, where were the doors left open so long, and why did India's own financiers keep walking past them?







Many copies originate in art schools, say experts, istocphoto

## India's art boom is spawning a flood of fakes

FROM PAGE 16

dependent on specialist expertise. Vikram Bachawat, founder of Akriti Art Gallery, said, "Sometimes an image is obviously fake, in other cases, even an expert may not be certain. There is no technology which can authenticate a painting," he said.

Instead, specialists rely on an artist's style and technique, catalogues, publications, exhibition histories and other documentation to assess a work, Bachawat said.

Art critic, writer and curator Uma Nair said the problem extends beyond the artwork itself to the documentation accompanying it. Certificates can be produced relatively easily, she said, making provenance and supporting records as important as the physical work.

"Fakes have increased at least by 25% in the past 10 years. Suddenly everyone has become a collector, and everyone sells masters," she said. Nair also pointed to the limited availability of forensic testing for paint, canvas and paper in India. Such analysis can provide additional evidence but is not routinely accessible or economically viable for every transaction. In Europe, she estimates that verifying such painting can cost about \$600.

Bachawat said advances in large-format printing and reproduction around 2005-06 created another avenue for imitation.

He recalled cases involving Hussein works reproduced on canvases matching the dimensions of originals, with some such works circulating for years.

"Unfortunately, there is no statistical data to establish whether there are more fakes and forgeries in the market today than there were a decade or two ago," independent analyst and commentator Venetia Vickers said. She said auction houses would be best placed to provide such information.

Vickers said the works of artists such as P. Prabhakar, Hussein, Raza, Roy and Souza have a large number of fakes.

Auction houses are also placing greater emphasis on provenance and research as the market becomes more international and prices rise.

Christie's India chairman Sonal Singh said provenance, specialist expertise, research and transparency remain central to maintaining the integrity of the auction market.

For an extended version of this story, go to [livemint.com](#).

# India weighs ₹51,000 crore proposal to solarize farms

Aims to cut agriculture's reliance on conventional power; farms now have 18-19% usage share

Vijay C. Roy & Rituraj Baruah  
NEW DELHI

The Union cabinet is expected to consider a proposal worth around ₹51,000 crore to extend the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthaan Mahabhiyan (PM-KUSUM), with the government proposing a shift towards feeder-level solarization and battery storage as it aims to cut agriculture's reliance on conventional grid power.

Under the proposed second phase, central financial assistance would be released when projects are commissioned rather than linked to electricity generated, three officials aware of the development said on condition of anonymity. Projects are likely to have capacities of 500kW to 2MW.

The proposal includes ₹35,000 crore for new projects and ₹16,000 crore to meet existing liabilities. The new allocation would cover 10 gigawatts (GW) of agrivoltaic installations, solar pumps and battery energy storage systems (BESS), the officials said. The existing ₹34,000 crore PM-KUSUM scheme ended in March.

The proposed expansion comes as agriculture accounts for 18-19% of India's electricity consumption, while farm-pump demand hovers around a weak monsoon. Shifting more agricultural demand to decentralized solar generation could reduce pressure on the grid.

ETNOW reported in January that the Union budget for FY27 could announce the scheme with an allocation of ₹50,000 crore.

Under the proposal, Component A, covering agrivoltaic projects, would receive around ₹4,500 crore, while Component B, covering solar pumps, and Component C, covering



The proposal includes ₹35,000 crore for new projects and ₹16,000 crore to meet existing liabilities.

pumps, and Component C, covering solarization of agricultural feeders, may receive a total of ₹26,000 crore.

Unlike the broader approach under the first phase, the second phase would focus Component C on feeder-level solarization—installing a centralized solar plant to supply an entire agricultural

Taken together, the proposed allocations for Components A, B, and C would aim to fund the new phase, while a further ₹16,000 crore would clear existing liabilities, taking the overall requirement to as much as ₹51,000 crore.

"The draft proposal has been moved and the union cabinet may consider it

2MW on their land and sell surplus power to discoms.

The scheme also aims to de-solarize the farm sector through standalone solar pumps and the solarization of existing grid-connected pumps. For solar power plants under Components A and C, power purchase pacts are signed for 25 years, providing assured day-time solar power to farmers.

"States have reported reduced cost of power procurement, reduction of per unit supply cost of energy, reduction of energy losses and improved operational efficiency of discoms through implementation of feeder level solarization. With the help of feeder level solarization, scheme allows for assured day-time solar power to the farmers and relieve the state from the financial burden for providing free and subsidized electricity for agriculture," said a second government official.

"Solar pumps offer farmers greater independence from the electricity grid, while also helping reduce carbon dioxide emissions. By selling surplus power to the grid, a farmer can potentially earn around ₹5,000-6,000 a month, providing additional and recurring source of income," said Vishal Modasariya, executive at Unnati Pumps (P) Ltd.

Querries to renewable energy and agriculture ministries, and the cabinet secretariat went unanswered.

"With around 12 million pumps representing 5,830 GW already solarized under Component C by December 2025, there is a sizeable base to build upon. As penetration increases, however, agricultural net demand from the conventional grid could increasingly move towards non-solar hours, strengthening the need for flexibility through storage," said Anish Mandal, partner, Deloitte India.

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## Sebi board may discuss PMS, ads, settlement rules

FROM PAGE 16

ically deliverable upon contract expiry. Sebi proposes to allow them to participate in non-agricultural index derivatives with the underlying commodities c-ash or physically settled.

It is also likely to take up changes to Sebi's settlement framework. In August, its paper seeking review of the Sebi (Settlement Proceedings) Regulations, 2018.

The review followed Sebi's finding that in cases where settlement applications were rejected or withdrawn and the matter subsequently resulted in a penalty, the settlement amount averaged about eight times the final penalty. Under the proposed framework, Sebi expects the gap to narrow to about four times.

Moreover, the regulator has proposed a fast-track mechanism under which cases involving settlement independence of up to ₹10 lakh would not be referred to the High Powered Advisory Committee. This would remove a layer of deliberation between the Internal Committee and whole-time members.

Sebi has also proposed issuing settlement notices before initiating certain formal proceedings, giving parties an opportunity to settle earlier.

Another agenda item is likely to be the proposed common advertisement code for regulated entities, including mutual funds, brokers, investment advisers and research



The board meeting may nullify overhaul of PMS norms. REUTERS

analysts. The regulator floated the proposal in June. Among the recommendations was allowing celebrity endorsements, on a pre-approved basis, for asset management companies. The provision is currently restricted to industry-level advertisements.

Mint reported in July that the proposal drew criticism from some industry executives, who said celebrity-led

advertising could encourage investors to select fund houses based on star appeal rather than investment performance or long-term track records.

The board may also take up proposals on Reits, InvITs and vault managers. It has also proposed expanding the scope of the Sebi (Vault Managers) Regulations, 2021 for secure storage of gold underlying electronic gold receipts traded on recognized stock exchanges.

Emailed queries to Sebi did not elicit a response until press time.

For an extended version of this story, go to [livemint.com](#).

### SOLAR SHIFT

|                                                                                                     |                                                                                                  |                                                                                           |                                                                      |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>UNION</b> cabinet is pegged to consider a proposal worth around ₹51,000 crore to extend PM-KUSUM | <b>THE</b> government is proposing a shift towards feeder-level solarization and battery storage | <b>NEW</b> allocation would cover 10GW of agrivoltaic installations, solar pumps and BESS | <b>THE</b> existing ₹34,000 crore PM-KUSUM scheme had ended in March |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|

tural feeder rather than solarizing individual farm pumps.

The proposal also includes a dedicated ₹4,500 crore allocation for BESS. Storage could be integrated into Components A and C, allowing solar power to be stored and used when required.

soon," said the first official.

The scheme is designed around "food plus energy," allowing farmers to continue cultivation while generating electricity and creating an additional source of income. A farmer can install a grid-connected solar power plant of up to

## Hallmarking fee hike could sour jewellers' festive mood

Vaishnavi Kashnani & Neethi Lila Rogen  
BENGALURU, MUMBAI

India's jewellers are facing higher compliance costs in the run-up to the festive and wedding season after the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) raised the gold hallmarking fee by 67% to ₹75 per article from ₹45 on 14 September.

With gold prices at elevated levels and consumers shifting towards lightweight jewellery and exchanges, the flat per-article fee has a greater impact on lower-value pieces and raises costs for retailers that absorb it.

Anit Modak, chief executive and director of Reva Diamonds by P.N. Gadgil & Sons Ltd, said the additional cost will become meaningful for small retailers that hallmark a large number of articles. "The ₹30 increase per article may appear small in isolation, but when multiplied across large number of articles that an organized retailer hallmark, it becomes a meaningful incremental cost," said Modak.

The impact will be more for lightweight jewellery, as the fee is flat regardless of the weight. Small earrings, rings and pendants are now more popular as consumers adjust to higher



The fee hike impact is more pronounced for lightweight jewellery.

gold prices. "A lower fee slab for articles below a certain weight could help address the disproportionate impact on small earrings, rings and pendants," Modak said, adding that BIS, industry, and other stakeholders must decide a threshold through consultations.

Supriya Kataria, founder of Kurnati Fine Jewellery, said her firm faces high customer turnover the notified fee at actuals. "Hallmarking is a statutory consumer protection fee directly assuring purity and HUID traceability," Kataria said BIS consignments help optimize the per-piece cost.

Darshan Chauhan, chief growth officer and executive director of Sky Gold & Diamonds, also expects limited impact. The company said the revised fee follows its existing billing mechanism through retail partners and would not materially change its operating cost structure. Even for jewellery priced at ₹5,000-10,000, the additional ₹30 represents a small proportion of the purchase value, Chauhan said.

The increase raised concerns in the industry over whether the charge is collected and its effect on customer experience. "The amount is not very big, but the customer refuses it. The customer argues, 'Have taken such a big order. Why are you talking about ₹30 or ₹40?'" said Rajesh Bhole, an industry representative at the All India Gem and Jewellery Domestic Council.

Gold is already expensive, then come making charges, and GST, he said, adding that a higher hallmark fee has now been added. Rokde said the industry was not properly consulted on the move and called for a review. Gold prices—at ₹1,57,860/10 gm for 24-carat, have risen nearly 17% in 2026.

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For an extended version of this story, go to [livemint.com](#).

## India may double port contract tenures to spur investments

FROM PAGE 16

announced in July and approved by the Union Cabinet. The ministry did not comment on the plan related to non-captive commercial terminals.

Captive terminals are dedicated facilities set up by port-dependent industries such as steel, cement, fertilizer, oil and gas companies to handle their cargo. The policy allows government entities qualifying as port-dependent industries to get concessions or extensions at market-linked reference prices without tenders, subject to safeguards. Existing captive concessionaires can seek renewal between 25th and 27th years of their concession.

Industry participants said a longer concession period provides more clarity and is the right way forward, given that port projects require substantial upfront spending on land-side infrastructure, cargo-handling equipment, mechanization and connectivity, while cargo volumes often take years to build up.

"The longer and more predictable duration of the concession period can certainly help make maritime infrastructure more attractive to



Industry participants said a longer concession period provides more clarity. REUTERS

private players," said Pushpankash Kaushik, chief executive and head of business development for the subcontract, Middle East and Southeast Asia at Jassper Shipping. "A longer concession period may give more clarity to the investors about the process of recovering their capital and let them have a more long-term perspective in the development of infrastructure."

In India, the operation, management and development agreement framework for airports provides for a 30-year term with a 30-year extension, while several new PPP airports have operation

tenures for 50 years. In mining, auctioned leases have a uniform 50-year tenure.

Some industry executives said the longer horizon could support mid-life investment in automation, green technology and capacity when operators would otherwise tend to defer spending as the end of a concession approaches.

In a recent interview to Mint, DP World's global CEO Yuvraj Narayan had argued for greater certainty through longer-term, even perpetual, concessions and joint-venture-like structures, which he said would provide investors greater confidence to keep investing in port assets. DP World's Nhava Sheva International Container Terminal at Jawaharlal Nehru Port Authority in Navi Mumbai is nearing the end of its original 30-year concession in 2028.

The plan comes as private participation in India's port sector is expanding. According to the Economic Survey for 2025-26, public-private partnership port projects increased from 37 in FY15 to 87 in FY25, with their combined value increasing from ₹16,180 crore to ₹61,029 crore.

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## RBI curbs, CAS take a toll on proprietary volumes

FROM PAGE 16

retail investors accounted for 35%, per the data.

The NSE had a 68.6% share of equity operations trading at the end of August, with the BSE accounting for the remainder. Effective July, banks began asking prop traders to provide 100% collateral for funding, up from 50%, in line with a RBI directive. The move has curbed derivatives, which assure payments to trading counterparties if a client defaults.

Also, Sebi introduced CAS for stocks with listed derivatives, effective 3 August, to improve price discovery. The session, however, has faced liquidity concerns and contributed to unusual volatility in index options during weekly, monthly settlements.

CAS changed the method used to determine prices for 23 stocks with listed derivatives, including Nifty and Sensex stocks. It replaced the earlier volume-weighted model with a single price discovered through an auction during the final 15 minutes of cash-market trading, until 3:30 p.m. Derivatives trading goes on till 3:40 p.m.

The change has reduced liquidity in both cash and derivatives markets during the final 15 minutes of trading, analysts said.

"The funding curbs and CAS have played an equal role in reducing the market share of prop traders," said D.K. Mangarwal, chairman and managing director of SMC Capital Ltd.

Sebi is considering changes to the settlement methodology for index derivatives. The options include using a blend of CAS prices and volume-weighted average prices, or reverting to the earlier model for a year before transitioning to a blended system.

For an extended version of this story, go to [livemint.com](#).

## MINT SHORTS

### FSSAI acts against Nestlé over infant food violations

New Delhi: The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has started legal action against Nestlé India Ltd in three cases involving alleged promotional violations and nutritional non-compliance in its infant food portfolio, the regulator said on Friday. Nestlé India said it remains compliant with all applicable regulations in the country.

### Govt relaxes sugar holding limits for bulk importers

New Delhi: The government has doubled the stock-

holding limit for bulk sugar consumers to 30 days but restricted the additional amount to imports under the Advance Authorisation Scheme and Tariff Rate Quota. The move is aimed at ensuring adequate supplies for food and other industries ahead of the festive season without putting additional pressure on domestic stocks, the government said in a statement on Friday.

### Dr. Reddy's to sell Takeda's dengue jab in India next year

Indians will get the first dengue vaccine Qdenga next year, a key milestone to control the infectious disease that is a major public health concern for India. Dr. Reddy's Laboratories Ltd will start selling the shots—manufactured by Japan's Takeda Pharmaceutical Co.—commercially in the first half of 2027, subject to completing applicable processes, it said in a statement on Friday. They did not disclose any upfront payments.

### El Niño puts India on track for driest monsoon in 17 yrs

India is on course for its driest monsoon in 17 years as a strengthening El Niño curbs rainfall, threatens crop yields and raises food-price risks. Cumulative rainfall in June-September monsoon season is 15% below long-term average so far, per India Meteorological Department. If the deficit persists, it would be the weakest monsoon since 2009, when precipitation was 18% below normal.

### SCO trade ministers adopt action plan for 2026-30

New Delhi: Trade ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) member states on Friday adopted an action plan for 2026-30, aimed at implementing the bloc's programme for multi-lateral trade and economic ties, as India called for greater intra-SCO trade, lower trade costs and more resilient supply chains.

### Net direct tax collections rise 13% to ₹12.1 trillion

New Delhi: Net direct tax collections rose 12.96% year-on-year to ₹12.12 trillion as of 17 September of fiscal year 2027, as per the Income Tax Department's provisional data released on Friday. Gross direct tax collections grew 15.19% to ₹14.32 trillion. Corporate advance tax grew 18.09% to ₹4.61 trillion.



## Warren Buffett steps down as Berkshire Hathaway chairman

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**W**arren Buffett is stepping down as chairman of Berkshire Hathaway after serving in the role at the \$1 trillion conglomerate for more than 50 years. Buffett, 96, will become chairman emeritus and will take on his new role immediately, the company said Friday. His son, Howard, will become Berkshire Hathaway's chairman, part of a long-planned succession. Howard Buffett has been on the Berkshire Hathaway board since 1993.

Warren Buffett, known by a legion of financial market followers as the Oracle of Omaha, will remain a director. He has been Berkshire Hathaway's chairman since 1979.

Greg Abel took over for Buffett as the CEO of the \$1 trillion conglomerate at the start of this year, even though Buffett remains one of the most influential investors in the world.

"I have served Berkshire since 1965," Buffett said in a letter to shareholders. "Sixty-plus years in, I still have the best job in the world. That is not something many people my age can say, and I have never felt better about what comes next."

Buffett said that he is confident with Abel and his son Howard leading Berkshire Hathaway. "Greg runs the company; Howard will guard its culture and values — both worth more than anything on our balance sheet," he said. "Think of Howard as a policy the shareholders own and hope never to claim against."

Buffett's fortune has been amassed through Berkshire Hathaway stock. The company, which was a New England textile firm that was



Warren Buffett, 96, will immediately assume the role of chairman emeritus.

built into an investing conglomerate and an icon of Wall Street. In 2024, Berkshire Hathaway became one of the first non-tech companies valued at more than \$1 trillion.

Buffett, a longtime philanthropist, has given away roughly \$66 billion worth of stock since 2006.

Buffett's take on finance has created its own gravitational pull. When Berkshire Hathaway revealed the stocks that the company has acquired or sold in public disclosures, it can shake markets.

During his time as CEO of Berkshire Hathaway, the company nearly doubled the returns of the S&P 500, with a 19.9% compounded annual growth rate compared with the index's 10.4% gain.

"Warren's impact on Berkshire and its owners is without parallel in the history of American business," Abel said in a prepared statement. "The cult of Warren built and the values he championed will remain at the heart of Berkshire, and Howard will be their guardian."

Shares of Berkshire Hathaway pointed lower before the opening bell Friday.

## General stores may get to sell home-use medical devices

Centre plans to amend rules to ease retail distribution of low-risk devices such as BP monitors

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**R**etail general stores and grocery outlets may soon be allowed to sell home-use medical devices such as pulse oximeters, blood pressure monitors, glucometers, pregnancy test kits, thermometers and basic bandages over the counter without a separate sale licence or registration certificate, according to two government officials and documents reviewed by Mint.

As part of the reform, the Centre plans to amend the Medical Devices Rules, 2017, to deregulate retail distribution of basic, low-risk medical devices and first-aid products, eliminating the need for vendors to hold specific sale permissions in India's \$14-billion medical device sector. The move is aimed at reducing compliance requirements for low-risk products that health authorities want to make more widely available. The Union health ministry will soon issue a draft notification for stakeholders' comments.

The proposal was deliberated upon and recommended for approval at a meeting of the Drugs Technical Advisory Board (DTAB), the apex technical advisory body of drugs and medical devices.

This move represents from quick-commerce firms and industry bodies such as the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (Ficci) and Surgical Manufacturers and Traders Association, seeking exemptions for such devices under Chapter XI of Medical Devices Rules.

While quick-commerce firms deliver many healthcare items, they operate under a continuous regulatory framework to comply with separate retail



The Centre's proposal would allow grocery stores to sell Class A devices and select Class B products, including BP monitors and glucometers.

registrations for microwarehouse, prompting platforms to seek blanket exemption to streamline operations nationwide, one of the officials said.

The rules create compliance needs for exhibitors, where exhibitors displaying certain medical devices for

essential in nature and pose low risk to the user. Hence, their easy accessibility and availability is essential for public health," the document said.

The proposal covers Class A devices, which are considered low-risk products such as absorbent cotton, surgical dressings, bandages and digital thermometers, as well as select Class B devices, which carry low-to-moderate risk, including digital BP monitors, pulse oximeters, glucometers and rapid urine pregnancy test kits.

Higher-risk Class C and D devices, including ventilators, dialysis machines, orthopaedic implants and infusion pumps, will continue to be subject to licensing and other regulatory requirements.

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### EASIER COMPLIANCE

**THE** Union health ministry is likely to issue a notification seeking stakeholder comments soon

**THE** drug advisory board has discussed and recommended the proposed reform for approval

**THE** move aims to improve access to essential medical devices, reducing regulatory burdens

demonstration have been asked to obtain temporary registrations.

"Certain devices such as absorbent cotton wool, bandages absorbent gauze and adhesive plaster and other self-test medical devices such as pulse oximeters, BP monitors, thermometers, pregnancy test kits, etc., are very basic and

## Moody's raises India FY27 growth forecast to 7% despite war risks

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**G**lobal credit ratings agency Moody's on Friday sharply raised its India growth forecast for fiscal year 2026-27 (FY27) to 7% from 6%, citing the country's "demonstrated resilience to global shocks" wrought by the West Asia war.

Moody's revised projection is more optimistic than that of peers such as S&P and Fitch, which are assessing potential economic risks stemming mainly from the Iran war. S&P retained its FY27 growth projection for India at 6.6% in August, while Fitch Ratings trimmed its forecast to 6.4% this month from last month's 6.7%.

India's economy expanded

at a faster-than-expected 7.8% in the first quarter (Q1FY27), as investment jumped and private consumption gathered pace from a year ago, defying external headwinds.

Both Moody's and Fitch have maintained India's sovereign credit rating at the lowest investment-grade level, S&P, the largest of the global rating agencies, raised its rating a notch from that level in 2025, after an 18-year gap.

But risks remain. With a lasting resolution to the West Asia war elusive, elevated energy prices could push Moody's inflation above Moody's 4.8% forecast for FY27, compared with 2.4% in the previous fiscal year, the agency said in its statement. "Although we continue to expect India to grow faster



Domestic consumption and forex reserves provide buffers, but elevated energy prices, weaker external demand pose risks.

than all other G-20 economies, as well as similarly rated emerging market sovereigns, risks remain," Moody's said, adding that El Niño-related weather disruptions could drive up food prices, weighing on private consumption and

economic activity.

Elevated energy and fertilizer import costs, softer external demand and weaker remittance inflows from West Asia could widen the country's current account deficit and weigh on growth momentum, it said.

Moody's said diversification of India's crude-import sources, robust foreign-exchange reserves and strong domestic demand provide important buffers. A fresh flare-up in the West Asia war this month has pushed global Brent crude prices above the crucial \$100-a-barrel mark.

India's growth accelerated to 8.2% in the first half of calendar 2026 from a year ago, compared with 7.3% for the full year in 2025, Moody's said. The acceleration was aided by stronger private consumption, continued public infrastructure spending and a likely revival in private-sector investment, along with sustained momentum in services.

India's fiscal response to the West Asia war has been muted, reflecting the government's commitment to containing its fiscal deficit at 4.3% of gross domestic product in FY27, down from 4.4% the previous year, Moody's said.

"Nevertheless, notwithstanding adjustments to retail fuel prices since May, higher global energy prices could further increase subsidy outlays and raise pressure for additional support measures, while rising defence expenditure and sustained infrastructure investment will constrain the pace of fiscal consolidation."

The credit rating agency debt reduction will be gradual and debt affordability will "stay weaker than that of similarly rated peers", given the country's high debt burden and elevated interest costs.

For an extended version of this story, go to livemint.com.

## HealthKart weighs \$300-400 mn IPO

Priyamvada C &  
Agnidev Bhattacharya

MUMBAI

**H**ealthKart, a fitness supplement brand, is considering an initial public offering (IPO) to raise as much as \$300-400 million (about \$2,800-3,800 crore), three people in the know said.

"The company has begun early discussions with stakeholders and intermediaries to kickstart the process," one of the people said. Formal pitches are likely to happen over the next quarter, he said.

"It will likely be a mix of primary capital raise and a secondary share sale by some existing investors," the second person said.

If it goes as planned and market conditions sustain, HealthKart will aim to list on the exchanges by the end of 2027. All the people spoke on the condition of anonymity as the discussions are private.

HealthKart's IPO preparations come amid a pickup in

listing activity among Indian technology and consumer businesses, with public-market investors placing greater emphasis on positive unit economics and operating discipline besides revenue growth.

Mint's sources emailed to the firm remained unanswered.

India's nutrition and supplements market is gaining momentum as rising health awareness and online access drive demand for protein, vitamins and wellness products.

HealthKart's rivals include Nutrabay, Hygula-life and Healthy-Hey, say reports.

HealthKart is one of the largest players in the segment.

Other deals include Fast&Up's \$300 crore raise from Elev8 Venture Partners and Hygula Life's \$100 crore round from IvyCap Ventures, besides Earthful's \$26 crore from Fireseed and V3 Ventures and Ace Blend's \$3.3 million round led by Fireseed Ventures.

For an extended version of this story, go to livemint.com.

## India's ethanol rush drives perfume makers to weigh price hikes

FROM PAGE 16

considerable pressure on the manufacturing economics and margins," he cautioned.

India's perfume market grew from 17,000-8,000 crore in 2019-20 to 12,000-14,000 crore in 2024-25 and is seen swelling to 23,000-28,000 crore by 2029-30, a 14-15% annual growth, according to business management consultant Wazir Advisors. Mid- and mass-market perfumes priced below ₹4,000 account for 75-85% of the market.

Perfume makers require highly-purity alcohol, mainly ethanol. Depending on the formulation, they may use highly purified extra-neutral alcohol or denatured alcohol,

which has additives that make it unsuitable for drinking. Alcohol can account for more than half of a perfume product.

An eau de toilette typically contains 5-15% fragrance concentrate, while an eau de parfum has 10-20%, as per Geneva-based International Fragrance Association. The rest is mainly alcohol and water, which carry the fragrance. As more ethanol is diverted for blending with petrol, less is available for perfumery industries such as perfumes, potentially tightening supplies and pushing up prices.

For 20% blended, or E20 petrol, ethanol procurement by oil-marketing companies rose to over 12 billion litres in 2025-26, while output capacity expanded to about 20 bil-



India's perfume market is seen swelling to ₹23,000-28,000 crore by 2029-30.

lion litres, as per the petroleum and natural gas ministry.

However, most brands are unwilling to raise consumer prices at this stage, Mhatre said. A few domestic brands have agreed to partially offset

the higher costs through case-by-case price revisions, while manufacturers continue to absorb a major share of the increase, resulting in an estimated 10% hit to profitability.

"The immediate challenge is, therefore, likely to remain margin pressure on manufacturers, rather than visible price hikes for consumers," Mhatre said. He expects ethanol supply to gradually stabilize over the next 6-10 months as production improves, although he does not necessarily expect a meaningful decline in prices.

Vanessa Care, which owns the Denver and Envy brands, has passed on some of the higher costs to consumers, said Saubh Gupta, director of marketing and sales. The firm is locking in alcohol sup-

plies ahead of the festivals.

For Plum, the impact has been delayed because the company is still using cheaper ethanol inventory bought earlier. "So far, we have not seen anything, but I think once the inventory starts running out, we'll start seeing," said founder Shankar Prasad.

Ethanol-linked formulations account for 5-7% of Plum's formulations. But Prasad said cosmetic alcohol comes from specific sources, leaving companies with little flexibility to switch suppliers.

Plum has raised prices by 7-10% amid higher packaging

and imported input costs. The festive season accounts for about 30% of its annual sales.

Not all brands face the same pressures. Secret Alchemist co-founder Akash Valia said the brand mainly uses grain-based ethanol and has so far

seen little direct impact on costs. Mass-market perfumes priced about ₹600-700 typically use more ethanol made from petrochem feedstock rather than farm sources and could

therefore face more cost pressure, Valia said. Secret Alchemist had hiked prices in June. For an extended version of this story, go to livemint.com.

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# Tata feud wipes ₹52,154 crore off listed firms' market value

TCS suffered the biggest erosion, losing ₹34,372 crore in market value in a single session

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The Tata Sons-Tata Trusts standoff has become a shareholder concern, wiping out ₹52,154 crore, or approximately \$5.44 billion, in market value from the group's listed companies on Friday as investors reassessed the implications for leadership and capital allocation.

The sell-off was concentrated in a handful of Tata stocks. Tata Consultancy Services Ltd (TCS) suffered the biggest hit, losing ₹34,372 crore in market value in a single session. Titan Co. Ltd followed with an erosion of 19,100 crore, while Tata Steel Ltd and Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles Ltd lost ₹4,057 crore and ₹3,996 crore, respectively. Tata Chemicals Ltd shed another ₹2.24 crore.

The market reaction reflects concerns over what the leadership standoff could mean for how the group deploys capital, analysts said.

"The jitteriness is primarily coming from concerns around capital allocation. Over the past few years, the Tata group has invested heavily across businesses such as Air India, electronics manufacturing, batteries, data centres and semiconductors. Investors were expecting these investments to start getting monetized over the next four to five years," said Pankaj Pandey, head of retail research at ICICI Securities.

Any change in capital allocation going forward could have implications for companies as well as the group as a whole, said Pandey, adding that "we could see some uncertainty in the listed Tata companies until there is greater clarity on the leadership side".

The sell-off was not uniform across the group. While most of Tata's listed companies lost market value, seven of the 26 listed entities gained, including

## The fallout

The market reaction followed a sharp escalation in the dispute at Tata Sons.

### Top 5 losers according to market-cap loss

|                                | M-cap (in ₹ crore) on 17 Sep | M-cap (in ₹ crore) on 18 Sep | M-cap change (in ₹ crore) |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Tata Consultancy Services      | 794,532.02                   | 760,160.19                   | -34,371.83                |
| Titan Co.                      | 4,31,375.30                  | 4,22,275.49                  | -9,099.81                 |
| Tata Steel                     | 2,34,688.97                  | 2,30,631.85                  | -4,057.12                 |
| Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles | 1,15,882.18                  | 1,11,886.24                  | -3,995.94                 |
| Tata Chemicals                 | 19,881.18                    | 17,667.35                    | -2,213.83                 |

Value erosion (in ₹ crore)

Market cap of 26 listed companies of the Tata group on 17 Sep 25,79,814.15

Market cap of 26 listed companies of the Tata group on 18 Sep 25,72,660.38

Net market value lost on 18 Sep -52,153.77

\*9 Tata group companies lost market cap and seven companies gained market cap on 18 September.

Source: Bloomberg

PRATEEK KUMAR/MINT

Tata Motors Commercial Vehicles, Tata Capital, Tata Power and The Indian Hotels Co.

"(The) impact is unlikely to be uniform across the group. Companies with strong standalone growth drivers may remain relatively insulated, while those dependent on larger group-level investments could see greater uncertainty," said ICICI's Pandey. Until there is clarity on leadership and capital allocation, some volatility in Tata stocks could continue, he said.

The market reaction followed a sharp escalation in the dispute at Tata Sons.

On Thursday, the Tata Sons board voted 4-1 to recommend a five-year extension for chairman N. Chandrasekaran, despite opposition from Tata Trusts, chairman Noel N. Tata. The decision deepened the standoff between Tata Sons and its majority shareholder, with Tata Trusts calling

the appointment an "illegal" move and saying it will continue its process to find a new chairman.

In a statement the same day, Tata Trusts said the resolution passed at the board meeting was a "legal nullity" because it did not comply with provisions of Tata Sons' Articles of Association (AoA). Noel Tata was the only director to vote against the resolution.

"Independent of the merits and legality of the decisions taken, Tata Sons' board has shown poor judgment in the choices made at its 17 September 2026 board meeting. Its actions appear rushed, undermining the principle of thoughtful deliberation. In doing so, the board has disregarded the intent of Tata Sons' AoA—legal opinions notwithstanding—and strayed from the group's own policies," Institutional Investor Advisory Services (IIAS), a proxy advisory firm, wrote in a note on Friday.

## Mistry urges Tata Trusts to back Tata Sons listing

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Shapoorji Mistry, the chairman of the Shapoorji Pallonji SP Group, urged all Tata Trusts to back the listing of Tata Sons Pvt. Ltd., saying that could also pave the way for a deeper relationship between the two business houses.

Mistry's comments come after Tata Trusts, led by his brother-in-law Noel N. Tata, vehemently opposed a Tata Sons listing. For the debt-laden SP Group, the listing would unlock value for its minority stake in the Tata group holding company.

"I would like to see Tata Sons evolve into a modern, globally respected and publicly responsible holding institution," Mistry said in a statement on Friday.

"I therefore appeal to every section of the Tata group—individual trustees, Tata Sons, its leadership, its shareholders, employees and all other stakeholders to come forward in a spirit of harmony and shared purpose."

Chairman Noel Tata has said he will block any decision to list. For an extended version of this story, go to [livemint.com](#)

FROM PAGE 16

while his brother Jimmy Tata owns 0.81%.

For now, SRTT and its five related smaller trusts, together owning 27.39%, cannot vote following a recent order from the Maharashtra charity commissioner. This means only those holding 72.61% of the shares can vote on Chandrasekaran's directorship, a resolution shareholders were expected to consider at the 18 August AGM.

However, following the commissioner's order, SRTT Pallonji SP Group, urged all Tata Trusts to back the listing of Tata Sons Pvt. Ltd., saying that could also pave the way for a deeper relationship between the two business houses.

Noel Tata opposed Chandrasekaran's continuance on Thursday, while Tata Trusts termed the decision "illegal." Noel's 1% shares—along with SRTT's 37.91%, add up to 38.91%. This means 53.6% of the voting pool is opposed to Chandrasekaran's continuance.

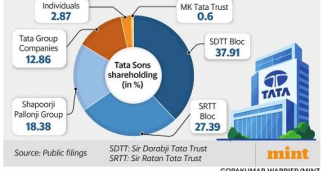
Simply put, even if all the non-trustee shareholders back Chandrasekaran, the numbers are loaded against him.

As May ordered by the Maharashtra charity commissioner prohibited SRTT from undertaking any business after Tata Trusts vice-chairman Venu Srinivasan, also a Tata Sons director, complained that the number of permanent SRTT trustees exceeded the new rules' limit.

The commissioner had ordered on 1 September that the number of permanent trustees cannot exceed a fourth of the total trustees. Three of SRTT's five trustees

## Vote count

Even if all the non-trustee shareholders back Chandrasekaran's return, the vote numbers required are still loaded against him.



Source: Public filings

PRATEEK KUMAR/MINT

are permanent trustees. Tata Trusts maintains that all three—Noel Tata, Jimmy Tata and Jehangir HC Jehangir—were made permanent trustees well before the rule took effect.

"It is the understanding of the Tata Trusts that the said amendment is prospective in nature and does not affect the appointments of perpetual trustees made prior to its coming into force on 1 September 2025. This is substantiated by both opinions and clarifications obtained by the Tata Trusts," said Tata Trusts in response to Srinivasan's petition.

Chandrasekaran's reappointment needs approval from the shareholders.

"The Tata Sons board has violated the basic governance principle of shareholder supremacy. The mutiny of the board against the controlling shareholder is possibly a first, and not the right precedent for corporate India," Institutional Investor Advisory Services, a proxy advisory, wrote in a note on Friday. "We are

not arguing who is right, just that despite both Tata Trusts nominees not forming consensus, the board took decisions that may not carry if voted on, rather than having them deferred till consensus between the two Tata Trusts nominees was reached."

However, this calculation depends on when Tata Sons holds its AGM, and if that meeting can happen without SRTT taking part.

For now, the corporate affairs ministry has given Tata Sons a three-month extension, meaning the privately owned company must hold a meeting before 18 November.

Tata Sons did not respond to queries on holding the shareholder meeting. "The Tata Sons board has not fixed a problem today. It has created a much bigger one," said Nitin Potdar, a Mumbai-based independent corporate lawyer. "A board owes a fiduciary duty to all its stakeholders: shareholders, employees and the public who trust the Tata name. Here, it seems to have acted in a hurry. Was it not worth discussing with the majority shareholder first? The damage to the group's reputation is far too big, and those directors must take responsibility for it."

For an extended version of this story, go to [livemint.com](#)

## EIL eyes oil pipeline projects in Saudi, UAE

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NEW DELHI

State-run Engineers India Ltd (EIL) is eyeing opportunities to develop crude oil and petroleum product pipelines and strategic oil reserves in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), as both countries plan to expand energy infrastructure to bypass the Strait of Hormuz and add storage capacity, chairman and managing director Atul Gupta said. Talking to reporters on Friday, Gupta said the proposed pipeline projects in Saudi Arabia and the UAE could be worth around \$1 billion, with a tentative gestation period of two to three years. "They (UAE and Saudi Arabia) are now planning for some infrastructure to bypass the Strait of Hormuz. We are also focusing on those infrastructure projects... We have already shown our interest that we can accelerate the process of creating the new infrastructure," he said.

"We anticipate more than \$1 billion investment should be there in all these countries together for the immediate infrastructure in which two to three years is something they can aim for because in the case of these pipelines, the gestation period is two to three years," Gupta added.

EIL builds long-distance pipelines to transport crude oil and petroleum products. The UAE and Saudi Arabia currently have two pipelines to supply crude to the ports. The UAE's ADNOC-operated Habshan-Fujairah strategic oil pipeline with a 1.5 million barrels per day (mbpd) capacity that opens to the Gulf of Oman; and the Saudi Aramco-run east-west crude pipeline with a 5 mbpd capacity that offers access to the Red Sea.

For an extended version of this story, go to [livemint.com](#)

## Indian refiners to buy Russian oil despite tariff threat

Rituraj Baruah & Ramita Mishra  
NEW DELHI

Indian refiners will continue importing Russian crude despite the prospect of US tariffs of up to 100%, as disruptions to supplies from West Asia have narrowed their alternatives, according to three people familiar with the development.

"There is no immediate concern of shortage as refiners have tied up supplies for the next 15 days. Russian supplies will continue as procurement is not done from any sanctioned entity, said an executive with a state-run refiner on the condition of anonymity. "Given our dependence on Russian crude, it cannot be replaced easily, especially now when supplies from West Asia are severely affected."

Russian oil imports contin-



Russian oil accounts for as much as 35% of India's imports.

ued even after the US announced a 50% levy on India in 2025, the executive added.

The US House of Representatives on Wednesday passed the Lindsey O. Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act of 2026, which seeks to increase economic pressure on Russia over its invasion of

Ukraine and authorizes President Donald Trump to impose tariffs of up to 100% on major buyers of Russian energy commodities.

The legislation and escalating tensions in West Asia pose a fresh challenge to India's energy security, with the country importing about 90% of its oil needs. Higher crude prices could widen the import bill, while potential US tariffs on buyers of Russian oil threaten to disrupt a key supply source. Russian oil accounts for as much as 35% of India's imports, according to the people. "The strategic impact of the US retaining the option of imposing a 100% tariff will be felt in the India-US bilateral relationship over the long term," said C. Uday Bhaskar, director at the Society for Policy Studies.

"Can US President Trump afford to have two major energy-exporting regions—West Asia and Russia—closed to the market, even as he prepares his party for the mid-term elec-

tions? These factors will shape the future trajectory of the 100% tariff option."

Refiners are currently paying a premium of around \$1 a barrel for Russian oil, the people said. However, the increase in crude prices has raised concerns about the cost of imports, with Brent crude trading at around \$103 a barrel.

Mint's queries emailed to the ministry of petroleum and natural gas, Indian Oil Corp. Ltd, Hindustan Petroleum Corp. Ltd, and Bharat Petroleum Corp. Ltd remained unanswered.

For an extended version of this story, go to [livemint.com](#)

the underlying activity takes place offshore, he added.

The court also rejected the idea that India could tax income simply because it had not been taxed in another jurisdiction. "The right to tax is not a right of exclusion but a right of taxation," it said, holding that taxing power must come from statute.

The court has rightly held that mere tax avoidance action was taken by the US authorities, India could not step into the void and claim that the transactions were subject to tax," said Pallav Pradyumn Narang, partner at tax firm CNK. The tax department "must build its case on accrual and business connection, rather than merely on the location of the payer".

Lawyers said the ruling could also lead to refund litigation in similar cases.

Mint's queries emailed to Sun Pharmaceutical and the I-T department remained unanswered.

## Overseas payments not always taxable: Delhi HC

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Payments made by Indian entities to overseas entities are not automatically taxable in India, the Delhi high court has ruled in a case involving Israeli drug-maker Teva Pharmaceutical Industries Ltd and erstwhile Ranbaxy Laboratories Ltd.

The ruling may give multinational companies greater certainty on the tax treatment of payments from Indian entities, particularly where the underlying transaction and income-generating activity are overseas. It may also help foreign companies challenge similar tax demands and seek refunds where no Indian tax liability exists.

In a 15 September judgment, a bench comprising Justices Dinesh Mehta and Vinod Kumar held that a tax receipt was entitled to a refund of about ₹783 crore, along with applicable interest. The court

found that payments received from Ranbaxy did not accrue or arise in India and were linked to the US market.

The ruling significantly narrows the ability of tax residents merely because an Indian resident makes the payment," said Dipesh Jain, partner at Economic Laws Practice.

The dispute involved payments made by Ranbaxy, now merged with Sun Pharmaceutical Industries Ltd, to Teva Israel under a 2011 settlement relating to the US launch of generic atorvastatin. The tax department argued that the payments were taxable in India because they were made by an Indian company. Teva maintained that the income was linked to activities and rights in the US.

The court said the tax department must establish a sufficient nexus between India and the income-producing activity. It found that the receipt was issued under a specific statutory provision. In Teva's case, the pharmaceutical rights, US



The court found that payments received from Ranbaxy did not accrue or arise in India and were linked to the US market.

regulatory process, litigation, settlement and market from which the economic return arose were substantially outside India.

The court further held that "mere payment by an Indian resident to a non-resident ipso facto does not constitute an income accruing or arising in India".

Tax experts noted the ruling could have wider implications for overseas companies receiving payments from Indian

entities, particularly where the underlying transaction, rights and commercial activity are outside India.

Ankit Jain, partner at Ved Jain and Associates, said the implications could extend beyond pharmaceuticals to technology, telecommunications, media and global supply chains. The judgment could be relevant to cross-border dispute settlements, non-compliance arrangements and commercial profit-sharing

**NOTICE INVITING E-TENDER**

Gujarat Energy Limited (GEL), desires to invite bids against Tender(s) under two bid system through e-tendering portal from eligible and interested parties for the following categories:

| Tender ID | Tender Description                                                                        |
|-----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 342836    | Supply of Type-1 Seamless Steel CNG Cascades of 3000 & 4500 VIL Capacity                  |
| 343987    | Appointment of Agency for Outstanding Recovery in GEL Operating Areas Surat and Hazira GA |
| 342570    | Comprehensive Annual Maintenance Contract for Air Conditioners (AC) across GEL Locations  |
| 344661    | Selection of Implementation Agency for establishing SCADA, AMI and CPM across GEL         |

Interested bidders can access the Tender Documents and related updates on <https://gel-tender.narcom.com> and <https://www.gujarat-energy.com/gel-current-tender>. Interested bidders are advised to regularly visit above websites to stay updated on the aforementioned tender.

**BRIHANMUMBAI MUNICIPAL CORPORATION**

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| Tender Document ID No               | Bid No. 2026_MCGM_1339517_1                                                                                                                  |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Date of issue and sale of tender    | 18.09.2026 from 16:00 Hrs                                                                                                                    |
| Last date & time for sale of tender | 28.09.2026 from 16:00 Hrs                                                                                                                    |
| A) Name                             | Shri. N. T. Jadhav                                                                                                                           |
| B) Mobile No.                       | 9769005647                                                                                                                                   |
| MCGM Web Site                       | <a href="https://portal.mcgmgov.in/">https://portal.mcgmgov.in/</a><br><a href="https://mahatenders.gov.in/">https://mahatenders.gov.in/</a> |
| E-mail Address                      | <a href="mailto:aeml.mcgmgov.in">aeml.mcgmgov.in</a>                                                                                         |

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EURO ₹110.09 ↓ ₹0.04

OIL \$111.59 ↓ \$0.33

POUND ₹128.19 ↑ ₹0.29

# Chandra's third Tata term faces vote hurdle at AGM

Noel, SDTT alone hold more votes than the rest of the voting pool combined

Varun Sood & Satish John  
BENGALURU/MUMBAI

**T**he shareholding math required for N. Chandrababu Naidu to retain his Tata Sons directorship appears heavily stacked against him, a day after the board revolted against the majority owner Tata Trusts to grant him a third term as chairman.

As the holding company's annual general meeting remains shrouded in uncertainty, the cold numbers needed to approve his directorship simply do not add up, *Mint* calculations showed. This is because the ongoing regulatory freeze on the Sir Ratan Tata Trust (SRTT) leaves only 72.61% of total shares eligible to vote, handing the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust (SDTT) bloc and Noel Tata—who oppose his reappointment—a decisive 52.7% majority of the active voting pool. To be sure, the two trusts cannot vote individually and must send joint representative to the AGM, and that itself remains stuck since SRTT is barred from taking any action.

No AGM or any general meetings of shareholders of Tata Sons can proceed without the presence of at least one representative

## TRUSTS SPLIT



### BOARD REVOLT

**ONGOING freeze on SRTT** leaves 72.61% of shares eligible to vote

**SDTT** bloc and Noel Tata have 52.7% of active voting pool

**BOARD** had revolted against SRTT to grant him a third term

jointly nominated by SDTT & SRTT as per Article 86 of the AOA of Tata Trusts, said a spokesperson for Tata Trusts. "We are hopeful that the restraint on SRTT shall be lifted soon," the spokesperson said.

"No, he does not," the spokesperson replied when asked whether Srinivasan, as Tata Trusts nominee, retains the right

to decide how SRTT or SDTT exercises its AGM vote.

Tata Trusts is an umbrella entity comprising 14 philanthropic entities, seven of which own shares in Tata Sons. SDTT and SRTT are the largest, owning 27.98% and 23.56%, respectively, totalling 51.54%.

SDTT oversees eight smaller trusts, of which three own Tata

Sons shares.

JRD Tata Trust (4.01%), Tata Social Welfare Trust (3.73%) and RD Tata Trust (2.19%). The SDTT alliance holds 37.91% voting rights.

SRTT has four smaller philanthropic entities, two of which also own shares of Tata Sons—Tata Education and Development Trust with 3.73% and Sarva Janik Seva Trust with 0.1%. So, the SRTT bloc holds 27.39% voting rights.

Apart from these, a small philanthropic entity, MK Tata Trust, which is not part of Tata Trusts, owns 0.6%.

Put together, all philanthropic entities own 65.9% of Tata Sons. The Shapoorji Pallonji family owns 18.38%, while nine Tata Group companies own 12.86% of Tata Sons.

Seven individuals own the remaining 2.87% of Tata Sons shares, bringing the total non-trustee shareholding to 34.1%. Incidentally, Noel Tata is Tata Sons' single-largest individual shareholder, owning 1% of the shares. Ratan Tata owned 0.83%.

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Tata feud costs ₹52,154 or less fed cos' market value >P15

# Funding curb, CAS sink prop trades to a 22-month low

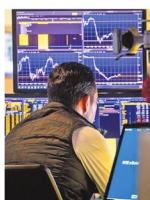
Ram Sahgal  
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**P**roprietary traders' share of equity options trading on the National Stock Exchange (NSE) fell to the lowest in 22 months in August, underscoring the impact of central bank's tighter bank funding norms and the closing auction session (CAS) introduced in the cash market.

Their combined share of index and stock options fell by 62 basis points to 47.3% in August from July, its lowest level since October 2024, when it stood at 47.1%, according to the NSE's latest Market Pulse data. A basis point is one-hundredth of a percentage point.

Proprietary traders, who trade on their own account, are the largest participants in equity options, followed by retail. A decline in their participation could affect overall market volumes, given their significant presence in equity and futures trading as well.

While both measures impacted prop volumes, the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) funding curbs had a disproportionately larger impact, said Ketan Marwadi, member of Commodity and Capital Market Participants Association of India (CCPMI). "Volumes could



Proprietary traders' share of options trading fell. *BLOOMBERG*

recover somewhat after the Sebi revision but the funding curbs will continue to impinge," he added.

The BSE does not provide a similar breakdown of participant shares. However, analysts said proprietary trading activity in BSE options would also have been affected by the funding norms and CAS.

NSE's average daily premium turnover in equity options fell 15.7% month-on-month to ₹42,332 crore in August. BSE's turnover fell by 26% to ₹18,672.32 crore.

Of the ₹7,879 crore decline in total equity options average daily turnover, proprietary traders accounted for slightly over half of the reduction, while

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## DON'T MISS



### Moody's raises India FY27 growth forecast to 7%

Global credit ratings agency Moody's on Friday sharply raised its India growth forecast for fiscal year 2026-27 (FY27) to 7% from 6%, citing the country's "demonstrated resilience to global shocks" wrought by the West Asia war. >P14

### Centre weighs ₹51,000 crore proposal to solarize farms

The Union cabinet may consider a proposal worth around ₹51,000 crore to extend PM-KUSUM, the government's flagship scheme for solarizing agriculture, to a broader range of farmers, including those in the West Asia war. >P13

### General stores may get nod to sell home-use medical devices

Retail general stores and grocery outlets may soon be allowed to sell home-use medical devices such as pulse oximeters, blood pressure monitors, glucometers, etc. over the counter without a separate sale licence or registration certificate. >P14

### Govt mulling pricing curbs on surgical consumables

Centre has begun consultations with private hospitals on billing practices and the pricing of surgical consumables, after Maharashtra FDA commissioner called for a review of wide gaps between hospitals' procurement costs and MRPs charged to patients. >P14



Ethanol accounts for roughly 45% of an alcohol-based perfume formulation, making it one of the biggest input costs. *MINT*

# Perfume prices may rise on ethanol high

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**A**spritz of perfume may pinch the pocket a little more this festive season. Perfume makers are grappling with higher costs of ethanol—a key input in alcohol-based fragrances—and glass bottles, putting pressure on margins and prompting some companies to mull price hikes.

Ethanol prices have risen as tighter domestic supplies and stronger demand from the country's fast-blending plant fuel supply, while glass bottle costs have risen by up to 20% from the past year, industry executives said. Eyering energy transition and energy self-reliance, India is blending 20% ethanol in petrol.

Vini Cosmetics Pvt. Ltd., which owns the Fogg and Ossum brands, is weighing a price increase during or after the festive season, with a decision likely by October and a possible hike from November. It, however, has no plan to reduce pack sizes or alter formulations to protect margins.

"It's going to become costlier. That's the only thing we're seeing as of now," said Darshan Patel, founder of Vini Cosmetics. He said alcohol is

currently available, but prices are fluctuating, which is why "we are not in a hurry to increase our price". Glass bottle costs have also risen almost 20% from a year ago, he added. Contract manufacturers are facing an even tighter squeeze on ethanol supplies. Subhash Mhatre, partner at Suhan Aerosol, which makes aerosol and fragrance products for Godrej Consumer Products Ltd's Park Avenue, Vanosha Care Pvt. Ltd, VLCC Personal Care Ltd, Wipro Enterprises (P) Ltd and others, said the price of industrial ethanol is up 15-20% from a year earlier. The sharpest rise came between February and April, with ethanol prices continuing to rise in May, when they surged by as much as 50%, he said.

Ethanol accounts for roughly 45% of an alcohol-based perfume formulation, making it one of the biggest input costs, Mhatre said, adding that Suhan Aerosol requires about 60 tonnes of ethanol a month, and securing steady supplies has become much more difficult. Even a 20-25-tonne batch now takes an average 8-10 days to arrive. "Another 10-20% rise in ethanol prices would place

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# Sebi board may discuss revamp of PMS, settlement regulations

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**T**he Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) board is likely to discuss an overhaul of portfolio management services (PMS) regulations, a common ad in recent months, including steps to boost foreign portfolio investor (FPI) participation in non-agricultural commodity derivatives, depository receipts for real estate investment trusts (REITs) and infrastructure investment trusts (InvTs), and the framework for vault managers.

In a consultation paper issued in July, Sebi mooted mutual-fund-only PMS



The market regulator's board will meet on 24 Sep. *REUTERS*

schemes that would allow portfolio managers to offer professionally managed portfolios of MF investments. Here, portfolio managers could exclusively manage client money in direct plans of schemes, including exchange-traded funds and specialized investment funds, through a separate MF-PMS registration.

PMS allows professional fund managers to manage customized investment portfolios for the affluent, with a minimum investment of ₹50 lakh. The paper proposed expanding the investment universe for PMS firms. Portfolio managers could be permitted to invest client money in yet-to-be securities. Discretionary portfolio managers could also invest up to 10% of a client's assets under management in investment-linked debt securities. The proposals would allow access to overseas markets through investments in listed foreign equities, listed debt securities, overseas mutual funds, unit trusts investing in listed securities, as well as overseas real estate investment trusts.

The board will discuss the regulator's proposal in August to allow FPIs to participate in non-agricultural index derivatives. FPIs now have access to non-farm derivatives that are cash settled, while bullion and base-metal contracts are phys-

ical. The paper proposed expanding the investment universe for PMS firms. Portfolio managers could be permitted to invest client money in yet-to-be securities. Discretionary portfolio managers could also invest up to 10% of a client's assets under management in investment-linked debt securities. The proposals would allow access to overseas markets through investments in listed foreign equities, listed debt securities, overseas mutual funds, unit trusts investing in listed securities, as well as overseas real estate investment trusts.

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# India considers doubling port contract tenures

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**T**he government is considering almost doubling the 30-year contract tenure, or concession period, for private and common-user port terminals to bring such infrastructure closer to the longer-tenure models adopted for airports and mining, two people aware of the discussions said. The idea is to attract more patient private capital into infrastructure that entails large upfront investments and long gestation periods, they said.

The ports, shipping and waterways ministry is examining whether the existing 30-year concession framework for non-captive terminals should be extended, said one of the people cited above, requesting anonymity.

The move to make the operations attractive could benefit global and Indian operators of



Longer port leases will boost infrastructure investment. *AFP*

container, dry bulk and liquid terminals at Indian ports, especially those whose concessions are coming up for renewal.

In an emailed response to *Mint*'s queries, a ministry spokesperson said that as per the recent captive policy, it is proposed to extend the concession period for captive terminal operators beyond the existing 30-year framework, potentially up to 60 years. A captive policy refers to rules

on port terminals or berths set aside for use of a particular company or industry, rather than being open to all users.

"This move is being contemplated to provide investors greater certainty and a longer recovery window for their upfront and future investments, thereby reducing risk perception and improving bankability of projects," the spokesperson said. "This reform complements the broader effort to provide stability, flexibility, and inclusivity in port governance, with certainty of tenure for concessionaires."

The proposed extension of concession periods is expected to catalyze fresh investment, strengthen India's maritime infrastructure, and align the port sector's captive framework with global best practices and other domestic infrastructure sectors.

The captive policy was

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# Art collector ambitions spurring a flurry of masters' fakes

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**I**ndia's burgeoning art market has a forgery problem. As prices of works by modern masters soar and a new generation of collectors piles into the market, fakes attributed to M.F. Hussain, F.N. Souza and S.H. Raza are increasingly surfacing in the resale trade.

Experts and art dealers are encountering everything: from single works to entire bodies of work and even those that have never previously appeared in the market. Experts said provenance and authentication face greater scrutiny just as Indian art is attracting more money and first-time buyers.

While there is no reliable estimate of the number of fakes in the art market, experts told *Mint* the numbers are growing. Akruti Art Gallery in Kolkata received three to four requests a week for authentication. The pool of suspect works has grown with the market and buyer base, with forged and copied works changing hands for lakhs of rupees. This year, an art work came to Akruti with 'Hussain' sign certificate. Last year, a Hussain work sold for about ₹40 lakh to a Delhi businessman was found to be fake by the gallery.

In November 2025, the gallery Art Pilgrim displayed a work attributed to Bikash Bhat- tachee at a fair in Mumbai. However, Bhat- tachee's



Left: An original work by artist Bikash Bhat- tachee. Right: a copy exhibited at an art fair in Mumbai in 2025. *AARTIST ART GALLERY*

daughter Balakot told *Mint* that the oil-on-canvas portrait of the young boy (her brother) exhibited at the fair was not an original but a "blatant copy". The 34-by-34-inch original remains with the family displayed in their home. "There

are more copies of this particular work we have seen," she said.

To *Mint*'s queries, Art Pilgrim said the painting question "is a study work for a large canvas painting by the artist and is by a historian on Bikash

Bhat- tachee's works.

India's art auction turnover jumped 87% to ₹3,041 crore in 2025, while modern art sales rose 13% to ₹5,548 crore in the six months ended June, accounting for almost three-fourths of the market, according to ASIGN, a product and services company built for the art and collectibles ecosystem based in Chennai. Much of the growth was price-led: the average value of an auctioned artwork rose 39% to ₹74 lakh from ₹53 lakh, while the number of works sold increased only 3.2%.

That concentration of value around a relatively small pool of sought-after artists is raising the stakes around authenticity, particularly for names such as V.S. Gaitonde, Hussain, Souza,

Raza and Jamini Roy.

"The artist who is most popular and who commands good prices will be faked the most," Mumbai-based veteran gallerist and auctioneer Dadiba Pun- dale said.

In the case of Gaitonde, he said, virtually every other work offered out there appears questionable.

Experts alleged that many copies originate in art schools, where students reproduce the works of established artists for study. Such works are not meant to be signed, but can later enter the market as originals, they claimed.

The challenge is that authentication is still heavily

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