

Economic Survey 2024-25 reaffirms Telangana's growth under BRS regime

Hyderabad: The Economic Survey 2024-25 has reaffirmed Telangana's exceptional economic and developmental progress under the BRS regime, debunking allegations by the ruling Congress that the previous government had left the State in financial shambles. The report highlights Telangana's leadership in revenue generation, infrastructure development, IT growth, irrigation and women's entrepreneurship, proving the strong governance under former Chief Minister K Chandrashekhara Rao.

Telangana has emerged as the top-performing State in revenue generation among 15 major Indian States. The State Own Tax Revenue (SOTR) accounts for 88 per cent of Telangana's total revenue, the highest in India. This means Telangana was largely self-reliant and did not depend heavily on Central funds, outpacing Karnataka and Haryana (86 per cent each). A strong Own Revenue Receipts (ORR) ratio helped Telangana maintain a low revenue deficit, proving its financial resilience despite the economic challenges being cited by the Congress government now. The Economic Survey also confirmed that Telangana achieved 100 per cent rural drinking water coverage under Mission Bhagiratha, a landmark initiative by the Chandrashekhara Rao government. This revelation exposes the Congress government's false claims about gaps in water supply. Only seven other States managed to complete this feat, but long after Telangana achieved it. Mission Bhagiratha

provided safe drinking water to every household across the State, a feat unmatched by most States in India. Telangana also continued to dominate India's IT and digital services sector, standing alongside Karnataka as a leading technology and innovation hub. The survey acknowledges Telangana's service-driven economy, which boasts a high per capita Gross State Value Added (GSVA) in the IT sector. With Hyderabad emerging as India's fastest growing tech city, Telangana has attracted global investments and created thousands of high-paying jobs. Despite Congress' repeated attacks on the Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Scheme (KLIS), the Economic Survey proved that Telangana's irrigation projects are among the most successful in India. The State ranks among the top four in the country with 84 per cent irrigation coverage, thanks to flagship projects such as the KLIS, Sitarama project, Mission Kakatiya and others. Between FY16 and FY21, irrigation coverage in India increased from 49.3 per cent to 55 per cent, and Telangana led the way, reaching 84 per cent coverage, after Punjab (98 per cent) and Haryana (94 per cent). The survey also lauds WE Hub, Telangana's pioneering women entrepreneur incubator, as a national role model. Telangana is the only State in India with a government-led initiative that provides financial, technical and policy support to women entrepreneurs. The key achievements of WE Hub include Rs 177 crore raised in funding, 6,376 startups and SMEs incubated, 7,828



women entrepreneurs supported, 87 startup programmes launched, and 75 per cent of startups surviving beyond two years. This pro-business ecosystem proves Telangana's commitment to empowering women and fostering entrepreneurship, setting a benchmark for the rest of India. The survey also highlights Telangana as the best State in India for labour flexibility, allowing higher overtime hours and better wages for workers. India's national limit is 75 overtime hours per quarter, with an overtime wage rate at 200 per cent of regular wage and Rs 10,556 of overtime earnings per quarter. Telangana has been adjudged the best-per-

forming State, with 156 overtime hours per quarter and overtime wages per quarter pegged at Rs 21,957, which is the highest in India. This flexibility enables Telangana's industries to stay globally competitive, attracting manufacturers and investors to the State. The Economic Survey cements Telangana's position as one of India's most developed and financially stable States, crediting its achievements to the progressive policies of the BRS government. The data clearly contradicts Congress' allegations and proves that Telangana's robust economic model is driven by self-sufficiency, industrial strength and social welfare.

French Embassy launches 'Classes Internationales' for Indian students

Hyderabad: The French Embassy in India and Campus France have announced the launch of the second edition of Classes Internationales, an initiative unveiled by French President Emmanuel Macron during his visit to Jaipur in January 2024 where he announced, "30,000 Indian students in France in 2030. It's a very ambitious target, but I am determined to make it happen". The program is designed to create an exclusive pathway for Indian students into the prestigious French higher education system. Classes Internationales allows Indian students—whether complete beginners or advanced French learners—to access French-taught undergraduate programs after completing an immersive foundational year of French language training and academic preparation.

This unique approach aims to bridge linguistic and cultural gaps, offering students the tools they need to succeed in a globally renowned education system. In its second edition, the program is being offered by 30 prestigious institutions across France, covering a wide range of disciplines (arts, engineering, social sciences, design and more).

Students who successfully complete the International Classes will get direct access to over 200 academic programs taught in French. Students are only required to focus on strengthening their French proficiency during the preparatory year. Several academic programs are offered in the apprenticeship mode in France, allowing students to split their time: half at the university/school and half in a company in the concerned field.

In most cases, the hiring company not only pays the apprentices but also covers tuition fees for as long as the students are working/training with them. A foreign national can get an apprenticeship status after one year of presence on French soil, therefore if the university/school offers this status, any student completing a Classes Internationales can benefit from it. The application deadline is March 31 for students with no prior knowledge of French, allowing time for pre-departure language preparation through Alliance Française while it is May 15 for students already proficient at the A2 level or higher, a press release said. Students can explore programs and contact participating institutions



directly through the official website: www.classesinternationales.org. Admission is based on academic background and motivation, with no entrance exam required. On February 8, students dreaming of studying abroad can check opportunities at the

Classes Internationales Education Fair. They can explore a wide range of study programs and gain personalized guidance on scholarships, visas, and life in France. To join the fair, they can register on <https://www.choosefrance.in>

Genocide and the world's averted gaze

Eighty years ago, on January 27, 1945, Soviet soldiers stumbled upon the barbed wire surrounding Auschwitz-Birkenau. Inside they found 8,000 emaciated prisoners, along with 44,000 pairs of shoes, piles of spectacles, and mounds of cooking utensils. This was all that remained of the approximately 1.1 million people, mainly European Jews, who were killed at Auschwitz. As the retreating Nazis destroyed their meticulous records along with much evidence of the brutally efficient killing operation, a precise figure is not available. This year, on the anniversary of the liberation, the few remaining survivors and world leaders have been invited to remember the dead and to renew the international community's pledge of never again allowing genocide to take place. A stain in human history. As the Genocide Convention of 1948 recognises, the crime of genocide — 'acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group' — has stained human history down the ages. The United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres, said on December 9, 2020, on the international day to commemorate victims of genocide, 'Genocide always has multiple clear warning signs.' The Soviet soldiers who liberated Auschwitz later said they were wholly unprepared for what they found. However, while the industrial scale of the killing that would eventually claim six million Jewish lives, in addition to tens of thousands of Roma, Sinti, and other people deemed inferior or political opponents, was not known in its entirety, the Allies were not entirely unaware. On assuming power in 1933, the Nazis codified the persecution of Jews in hundreds of laws, culminating in the Nuremberg Laws of 1935 that took away German citizenship from Jews and others considered 'non Aryan'. Yet, when those Jews who could overcome restrictive German emigration laws tried to leave (until 1941, when Germany forbade Jewish emigration), they encountered bureaucratic obstacles, xenophobia and antisemitism.

Following the 1929 Stock Market Crash, the United States tightened already restrictive immigration quotas. The United Kingdom required those entering until 1938 to be self-supporting or sponsored; after the Anschluss it introduced a visa system. Neither made provisions for refugees. After 1938, Britain also restricted Jewish immigration into Palestine, then a British mandate. Some Jews moved to neighbouring European countries, only to be caught in Hitler's net as German tanks rolled over Europe. France, Belgium and the Netherlands were particularly assiduous in following Nazi orders to round up Jews for concentration camps. The reality of 'Never again'

The Allies responded to the growing refugee problem by gathering at Evian in July 1938; apart from sympathetic statements, the 32 delegates offered little else. By the time the U.K. and the United States met at the Bermuda Conference of April 1943, reports of mass Jewish killings were unambiguous. The World Jewish Congress had submitted a report outlining Hitler's plans that Jews, 'after deportation and concentration in the East, be at one blow exterminated' (Riegner telegram, December 1942). The Polish Government-in-Exile in London published a pamphlet in December 1942 titled 'The Mass Extermination of Jews in German Occupied Poland.' Escapees from the concentration camps brought their own harrowing stories. The evidence for genocide was mounting, but the

Allies would not, or could not, look too closely. Never again, they declared in 1945. And yet, between 1975 and 1979, the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia are estimated to have killed over two million people by execution, starvation, disease and exhaustion as they sought to recreate Cambodian society in some communist ideal. As refugees fled to neighbouring countries and a new regime was installed in Phnom Penh after Vietnam's invasion, the international community's responses were conditioned by Cold War calculations: China and the West supported the fleeing Khmer Rouge while Vietnam and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) supported the newly installed communist government.

Never again. And yet, in Rwanda, in 1994, between 8,00,000 to 10,00,000 people, mostly minority Tutsi with some moderate Hutu, were murdered over 100 days while UN peacekeepers watched helplessly. In July 1995, 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys were herded from a UN compound in Srebrenica — a place declared a safe zone (it is inescapable that safe zones were also created to prevent refugees flooding out of the former Yugoslavia) — and executed, as part of a careful campaign of ethnic cleansing. The Dutch UN commander requested reinforcements from both the UN and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, which never arrived. It was the culmination of three years of indecision by Europe and America on how to respond. This year is the 30th anniversary of Srebrenica (July 11). Never again. Less than a decade later, violence broke out in Darfur, Sudan. Approximately 2,00,000 people were killed in 2003-05 in what the International Criminal Court (ICC) and some states have recognised as genocide. The violence in Sudan continues and there are renewed fears of genocide occurring now while the international community's attention is focussed on Ukraine and Gaza. Then there is Gaza. As world leaders gather at Auschwitz on January 27 to commemorate the 80th anniversary of its liberation, Gazans will attempt returning to the rubble of their homes. Some will be sifting through the debris to locate the remains of family still buried underneath, part of the 10,000 estimated to be missing. The International Court of Justice is examining whether Israel is guilty of genocide under a case brought by South Africa. The ICC has issued arrest warrants for the Israel Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, and the former Israel Defence Minister, Yoav Gallant, for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Gaza in response to Hamas' October 7, 2023 attacks. There are arrest warrants for Hamas leaders too. And, yet, America's and western Europe's response was to criticise the ICC, expressing outrage that there should be any semblance of equivalence in the arrest warrants for the leaders of Hamas and Israel. In some perversion of international norms, there seems to be an acceptance of a hierarchy of suffering. Arms have continued to flow to Israel, even as the death toll in Gaza crosses 47,000, mostly women and children. The UN estimates that 92% of all homes have been destroyed, health-care infrastructure and 87% of schools destroyed, and entire populations forcibly displaced multiple times. All this happened while Gaza was under siege, the foreign press was barred from entering, and the world acquiesced in looking away. Israel has a right to defend itself, and Hamas' actions in October 2023 are completely indefensible. Yet,



when does self-defence cross over into genocide? Where is that line? Arguably, that line is where we avert our gaze. Priyanjali Malik

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Goa's Serendipity Art Festival: Potential of human creativity

Sitting in a small Italian restaurant one night last month, celebrating a get-together amongst friends from over 50 years, we were all surprised when a young lady, the owner of the restaurant, approached us and handed a personalised box of chocolates to one of us. She had recognised him, which prompted this gesture. She said, "Sir, you have made an enormous difference, not only to the economy of Goa but also to its cultural milieu."

She was referring to Goa's annual Serendipity Arts Festival and was saluting the man who had conceived the idea nearly a decade ago, and whose unwavering commitment and support has led to the birth of one of Asia's most diverse multidisciplinary art festivals — Sunil Kant Munjal. His efforts in conceiving, implementing, and continuously expanding the festival's scale have made Serendipity not only Goa's premier event but also the country's leading art festival.

Sitting there in the restaurant, listening to the soft-spoken Munjal recount, after much prodding, the long journey to elevate Serendipity to the level and status it enjoys today, made you realize that there was nothing serendipitous about Serendipity Arts Festival; far from it. What you see today has not happened by chance; it didn't come about accidentally. It is the result of years of planning, conceptualising, and curating. It is a reflection of Munjal's perseverance and vision to make Serendipity one of the largest, most immersive art experiences in the country — one that now encompasses nearly every genre associated with the arts and performance.

Munjal's extraordinary contribution has not only fostered artistic expression but has also significantly enriched the cultural fabric of India. The first edition of the Serendipity Arts Festival took place in 2016 with the aim of encouraging inclusive engagement with the arts in India. The festival spans almost the entire vibrant city of Panaji in Goa, showcasing a diverse array of performing arts, visual arts, site-specific performance arts and culinary experiences. These include

music, dance, theatre, multimedia, AI, folklore, and craft, along with workshops, film screenings, talks, and specialised programming for children and individuals with disabilities. Its mission goes beyond mere entertainment; it seeks to create a space where artists, audiences, and communities come together to celebrate creativity, ignite conversations, and explore the transformative power of the arts through immersive experiences at the festival.

Munjal, a business leader and philanthropist, has consistently advocated for the integration of arts and culture into everyday life. His deep-rooted belief that art is essential to societal growth and cohesion has driven him to invest time, resources, and passion into initiatives like Serendipity. He recognized the need for a platform that transcends traditional boundaries, offering artists a stage to express diverse narratives. He set up the first major initiative in the arts in the shape of the Ludhiana Sanskritik Samagam (LSS) — a performing arts foundation in Ludhiana, Punjab that is still active after 25 years.

Serendipity stands out by prioritising authenticity and experimentation, encouraging artists to take risks and explore new ideas without the constraints of commercial success. This is also reflected in the large number of visitors across all the venues from Goa, other parts of India and also from several countries overseas. Therefore, the festival has successfully cultivated an environment where creativity flourishes, providing invaluable exposure and opportunities for emerging talent.

To foster collaborations among artists from various disciplines, allowing for the cross-pollination of ideas and innovative performances. As a result, neurotypical and neurodivergent individuals, local Goans and global attendees, early career artists and seasoned practitioners, and artists and audiences alike come together, fostering a rich and inclusive cultural exchange. This commitment to inclusivity is a testament to Munjal's understanding of the rich tapestry of Indian culture.

Amidst Gaza ceasefire, India revives diplomatic outreach for economic corridor with West Asia, Europe

With a third round of hostage and prisoner exchanges completed and signs that the Israel-Gaza ceasefire is still holding, reviving talks on the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) is back on the agenda in India's diplomatic outreach to the region. Sources confirmed that External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar discussed taking forward infrastructure and trade facilitation initiatives during his visit to the United Arab Emirates this week.

He is also expected to travel to Oman in mid-February for bilateral meetings and to address the Indian Ocean Conference, being organised jointly by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and the India Foundation, where he will meet with about 20 other counterparts from the region as well. A visit by Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani is also being discussed. IMEC will feature prominently during next week's back to back Delhi visits by Greece's Foreign Minister Giorgos Gerapetritis who will hold Foreign Office consultations, and Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty for a strategic dialogue with Mr. Jaishankar. Mr. Abdelatty, who will visit a few weeks after the Gaza ceasefire and the re-opening of the Rafah border crossing from Egypt to Gaza, is expected to share his views on the reconstruction of Gaza during his visit to India. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is also expected to discuss the IMEC project with French President Emmanuel Macron on his visit to France for the Artificial Intelligence Summit between February 10 and 12, and with new U.S. President Donald Trump during a visit to Washington that is still being planned.

Ceasefire hopes Official and diplomatic sources said that while no specific moves on the project were being discussed at present, hopes for a stable and lasting ceasefire in Gaza and the region had grown in the past few weeks. However, they conceded that it would be difficult to pick up the diplomacy over IMEC between Israel and Arab countries until there was some kind of commitment from the Netanyahu government regarding talks for a two-state solution, which seemed unlikely at present. In the interim, however, the sources said, India would keep the project on the agenda with the countries concerned. "We remain positive about the IMEC project and we are speaking to all the stakeholders about it. This is a long-term project, and we can't see it only in terms of one conflict," said one official. Greek optimism The Greek government has been keen to move ahead on the project, and Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis has touted IMEC as a key element of the India-Greece Strategic Partnership, suggesting that Greece could be "India's gateway to Europe". "The war in Gaza and turmoil in the Middle East is undoubtedly destabilising but it does not undermine the powerful logic behind IMEC. Nor should it weaken our resolve to work towards realising it," Mr. Mitsotakis had said during a visit to Delhi in February 2024. Officials in Delhi and Athens said they expected to take the discussions on IMEC forward during Mr. Gerapetritis's visit, expected from February 5 to 7. The Greek Foreign Minister is one of the few leaders to have visited both Tel Aviv and Ramallah since the October 2023 at-

tacks, and as a member of the UN Security Council this year, Greece occupies a key position on hopes to resolve the conflict.

The Egyptian FM, Mr. Abdelatty, is also expected to discuss the project, although officials said the Egyptian government had been unhappy with the IMEC announcement, as they saw it as a geopolitical and commercial rival to the Suez Canal. The IMEC launch took place just months after Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi had travelled to India as the chief guest for Republic Day celebrations in 2023, and took the Egyptian government by surprise. However, officials feel that, over time, Cairo has come to see the "collaborative opportunities" of the project, and is now more willing to discuss its potential.

Viability concerns The IMEC project was launched on September 9, 2023 by India, France, Germany, Italy, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, the United States, and the European Union during the G-20 Summit. It includes plans for a shipping, road, and rail route from ports in western India, taking trade to the UAE's Ras Al Khaima, and on to Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Israel before crossing the Mediterranean Sea to a European destination. Questions about its viability have grown as it was virtually shelved after the October 7 attacks on Israel and the bombardment of Gaza, as well as other conflicts in West Asia, involving Iran, Yemen, Lebanon, and Syria. Although the original MoU had committed to all stakeholders meeting within 60 days or two months of the launch, India has been unable to convene the meeting in the last 16 months. "The continuity of ceasefire in Gaza and chances of it turn-



ing into a permanent one is still uncertain," said former Ambassador Anil Trigunayat, an expert on West Asia.

"IMEC relevant countries remain invested and India and UAE and Saudi Arabia are incrementally establishing the requisite infrastructure and mechanisms. But speedier movement on several pillars of the IMEEC will follow after calm is established," he added. Slow progress As it awaits a resolution of the Israel-Gaza conflict, New Delhi has held discussions with all the countries

involved in IMEC. France appointed a special envoy for IMEC, while India and the UAE have set up a number of tracks to discuss possible rail and shipping projects. "Prime Minister [Narendra Modi] laid special emphasis on the implementation of the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor (IMEC) as a historic initiative to foster regional connectivity and prosperity," the MEA had said in a statement last year after UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan called on the PM during a visit to Delhi last year.

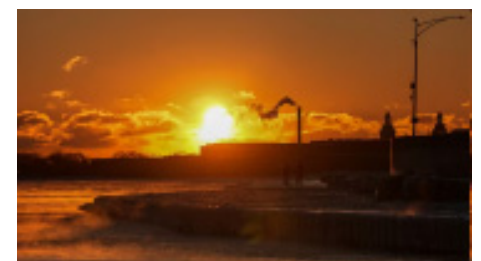
January 2025 all set to be the warmest January month on record

Global average temperature in January 2025 is all set to be the highest for January month, according to ERA5 data from the Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) up to January 28. While the data for January 28 is preliminary and January has three more days after that, it is unlikely that the broad trend will change significantly by the end of the month. This means that January 2025 will likely be the fourth January month when warming relative to the pre-industrial average is at least 1.5°C, the long-term warming threshold set by the 2015 Paris Agreement to avoid catastrophic climate change. ERA5 data is not the only global temperature dataset. The World Meteorological Organization tracks six global temperature datasets, for example. However, the daily ERA5 data has a lag of just two days, which allows one to get an early estimate of global temperature trends from this dataset.

The data from ERA5 for January 2025 are available up to January 28. This shows that the average warming in the month relative to the pre-industrial average is 1.75°C, the highest ever for this part of the month. The previous record for the highest global temperature for the first 28 days of January

was held by January 2024, which was 1.63°C warmer than the pre-industrial average. Daily data shows that only four dates in January this year were cooler than January 2024 (January 1-2 and January 27-28). It is largely the middle part of the month that has made January 2025 shoot past the warming seen last year. Given the high warming in the middle of the month, it is not likely that warming in January this year will fall behind last year's level although the temperatures have converged towards the end of the month. The difference between the warming for January taken in its entirety and the warming for the first 28 days of January in the past 10 years has been at most 0.02°C. In comparison, the month so far is warmer than the first 28 days of January 2024 by 0.12°C. Given the trends described above, and the fact that data for only four days needs to be finalized, it is even less likely that January 2025 will show less than 1.5°C warming. This means that this will be the fourth January month when warming in global temperature is at least 1.5°C. This will also make January 2025 the sixth consecutive month when warming has been more than 1.5°C.

What do the trends seen in January



mean? One: They are in line with the UK Met Office's forecast that 2025 is likely to be among the three warmest years on record, along with 2024 and 2023, which hold the record for the two warmest years so far. Secondly, the January trends also mean that La Nina (a cyclical cooling of the equatorial Pacific that has a cooling impact on global temperatures) that started in mid-December is yet to have an impact on air temperatures (or what is simply known as temperature). To be sure, temperatures in the Pacific are expected to have an impact on air temperatures only with a 2-4 month lag (this was discussed in detail here). However, there is still reason to worry about January temperatures. El Nino (cyclical warming in the equatorial Pacific that gives a bump to air temperatures) ended in April 2024.

A note for New Delhi on dealing with 'Trumperica'

With a flourish of his pen, United States President Donald Trump waded through dozens of files within hours of being sworn in, with executive orders (EOs), revocation orders of Biden-era decisions, campaign commitments to the 'Make America Great Again' (MAGA) base and exit orders from a number of multilateral agreements and organisations. The decisions, which the White House referred to as '100s of Executive actions in the first 100 hours to kick off America's Golden Age', will, no doubt, have lasting implications for the U.S and for the world. For India — that has seen a year-on-year improvement in ties with the U.S. for the past quarter-century — the visible signs from the Trump administration have been positive, given India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's visit to the Trump inauguration, the meeting of the Quad Foreign Ministers and the bilateral with his counterpart Marco Rubio — which was Mr. Rubio, the new U.S. Secretary of State's first — followed by the Trump-Modi call. On closer analysis of the economic impact, however, these optics may be deceptive. As New Delhi prepares for a visit by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Washington, and Mr. Trump's visit to India later this year, a detailed analysis over the issues that will most affect India, with the duopoly of immigration and taxes at the forefront, is necessary.

The immigration crackdown

On immigration, Mr. Trump's specific orders on securing borders, guarding against "invasions" by illegal aliens, designating cartels as foreign terrorist organisations and advanced vetting of the visa issuance process on the one hand, as well as raids and arrests by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency on the other make it clear that this is a major priority. While New Delhi has reacted to these measures with sanguine statements on taking back all illegal immigrants who are verifiably Indian, it would be short-sighted not to see the deeper, three-pronged economic effect on India.

Indians are now the second largest group of citizens being granted U.S. citizenship legally (after Mexico) and have cornered a predominant share of H-1B visas; but they are also the third largest in terms of illegal entry. Mr. Trump's actions will affect not just thousands of Indians who undertake perilous journeys by air and sea, and then by foot over South and Central America and Canada to the U.S.'s land borders, but also those currently in the U.S. A Pew Research analysis of ICE numbers says 7.25 lakh Indians are amongst about 14 million in the total undocumented migrants, with more than 18,000 Indians in detention centres on a "final removal list" for deportation. First, if the Trump administration does escalate deportation flights — as it did in its first term — over the next four years, India will have to deal with the loss of remittances and provide for the returnees, adding to the unemployment crisis in India. Second, as Mr. Trump has shown by successfully strong-arming Colombia into accepting deportations without conditions, or face the imposition of 25% tariffs instead, any refusal to do so would also incur economic costs.



With the new U.S. President's policies impacting immigration, technology and trade, India must count the cost to its economy

Third, these migrant numbers refer largely to blue-collar workers, but other measures by Mr. Trump are also aimed at the white-collar, middle-level managers, engineers and other professionals. Mr. Trump's EO to end citizenship birth rights may be struck down by the judiciary, but the message from the move, that follows restrictions on H-1B spousal work privileges in his first term, is clear — the welcome mat for those seeking to move permanently and raise families in the U.S. is being removed. This will require a reassessment of India's own education and skilling policies to ensure that all the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) graduates who would be impacted can be absorbed. Trade and the weaponisation of tariff the impact of immigration actions takes some imagination, the result of Mr. Trump's trade policy plans needs none whatsoever, going by his pronouncements and the harsh punitive measures he undertook in his first term. On inauguration day, Mr. Trump's EOs and Exit Orders included an "America First Trade Policy" and a directive to Mr. Rubio to implement an "America First Foreign Policy". India must be prepared for how it will respond to the U.S.'s weaponisation of tariffs as a means to enforce Trumpian diktats. During Trump 1.0, New Delhi quietly accepted the withdrawal of its Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) status, and Mr. Trump's order to end all oil imports from Iran and Venezuela. In Trump 2.0, such actions might not only enable the U.S.'s bully-tactics further, but it may also incentivise others such as China to follow suit.

The U.S.-China relationship has confused many over the past week: Mr. Trump's threat of 10% tariffs on China is far lower than the 60% he had said he would impose, while

his invitation to China's President Xi Jinping for the inaugural, a U-turn on the TikTok ban and Mr. Rubio's contention that the "US does not want Taiwanese independence" could upset many calculations. While previous attempts by earlier Presidents for a U.S.-China "G-2" have been short-lived, Mr. Trump's description of his call with Mr. Xi on January 17, where they had agreed to do "everything possible to make the world more peaceful and safe", suggests he is also attracted to some version of the idea, which will affect an Indian economy now primed for the U.S.-China rivalry to escalate, bringing in an inflow of investments. In addition, Washington's withdrawal from the World Health Organization, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's Global Tax Deal, the Paris accord on climate changes, the freezing of USAID funding worldwide, and its revocation of previous mandates for green businesses, electric vehicles and wind and solar power will also carry a cost for India, that had been promised by the U.S. of funding for its development and energy transition.

On an 'AI-Pocalypse' The biggest economic consequences of Trump 2.0's measures, will however come from his overdrive on artificial intelligence (AI). In the inaugural seating plan, tech tycoons eclipsed top members of the Trump cabinet on the dais. The launch of the \$500 billion Stargate AI Infrastructure project by Mr. Trump, to be built by a group of tech companies, was another marker of this priority for the new administration. It is conceivable for Mr. Trump, that encouraging investments in AI is the stone that kills two birds — taking the U.S. to the top of the technology game in the face of the latest "DeepSeek" competition from China, and also reducing the need for foreign mi-

grant 'techies'. While some of the 'labour disruptions' from the use of AI will simply require repurposing tech professionals for new tasks, the massive scale of replacement that some tech leaders predict with Artificial General Intelligence (AGI), will make them completely redundant.

Listen carefully when Google CEO Sundar Pichai says that more than 25% of new code at the company is already generated by AI, although it is reviewed by engineers at present. And pay heed to Mark Zuckerberg when he says that AI will begin to replace mid-level engineers at Meta and other tech companies from this year. India's trade policy, free trade agreement negotiations, and the walkout from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership over the last decade have been largely driven by the logic of promoting Indian services. Services account for 55% of GDP, and about 40% of India's exports, with IT-BPM (Information Technology-Business process management), a major contributor to service earnings. If the big tech wave that first sent hundreds of thousands of successful Indian-Americans to U.S. shores from the 1960s was necessitated by the U.S.'s desire to outrun the Soviet Union on technology after its launch of the Sputnik satellite, this new big tech tsunami could instead drown out the hopes of the new generation of Indian tech professionals wishing to migrate. Despite commentary suggesting a distancing of foreign policy from the problems of Indian migrants, the sheer numbers involved mean that the government cannot. As a result, New Delhi must engage with what all these tech, trade and migration trends portend for India's future, and the economic concerns it must factor into in its diplomatic negotiations with "Trumperica".

An enduring commitment to the Indo-Pacific

The inauguration of Donald Trump as the 47th President of the United States marks an unparalleled comeback in American political history. It also signals a vital moment in global geopolitics, particularly for the Indo-Pacific region. During his first term, Mr. Trump redefined U.S. engagement in the Indo-Pacific. As he embarks on his second term, expectations of a more assertive U.S. security posture and strengthened alliances are high. The presence of the foreign ministers from India, Japan, and Australia — America's key Quad partners — at the inauguration underscores the strategic importance of this grouping in Mr. Trump's foreign policy vision. With the Indo-Pacific being central to U.S.'s strategic priorities, Trump 2.0 signals a renewed focus on deepening defence, economic, and technological cooperation with 'like-minded' nations to address persisting and emerging challenges, while ensuring regional stability. Importance of Indo-Pacific

Mr. Trump's first term marked a pivotal shift in Washington's approach to this region, redefining the strategic landscape in three ways. First, under Trump's leadership, the U.S. adopted the term 'Indo-Pacific', replacing the previously favoured 'Asia-Pacific', which reflected a recalibration of the geopolitical lens, moving beyond a focus solely on East Asia and the Pacific Rim to encompass a wider area critical for global trade, security, and strategic stability. The term expanded the geographic focus to include the Indian Ocean, emphasising the importance of securing sea lines of communication, addressing maritime challenges, and underscoring the U.S.'s intent to counterbalance China's growing influence. The Indo-Pacific expanded the strategic narrative, integrating defence, security, and political considerations alongside economic cooperation. Second, there were structural changes in the U.S. defence and security framework, including the renaming of the U.S. Pacific Command as the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command in 2018, reflecting the operational import accorded to the Indo-Pacific. The Office of the Secretary of Defence was reorganised to establish specialised units focusing on Indo-Pacific allies and partners.

Third, the revival of the Quad underscored the Trump administration's recognition of the Indo-Pacific as the fulcrum of 21st century geopolitics, reflecting a pragmatic convergence of interests among its members. The U.S. provided a robust push to institutionalise the grouping. The Trump administration elevated the Quad dialogue to the ministerial level, laying the groundwork for deeper collaboration in maritime security, supply chain resilience, and technological standards. The Joe Biden administration inherited the Indo-Pacific framework and maintained its strategic centrality. Mr. Biden elevated the Quad further by convening the first-ever Quad leaders' summit in 2021, marking a significant institutional leap. He emphasised multilateralism and sought to broaden the Quad's agenda by initiating collaboration on vaccines, climate change, critical technologies, and infrastructure development. He also introduced the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework in 2022, complementing the strategic focus with economic engagement. The emphasis on a rules-based order and inclusive development in the Indo-Pacific aligned the Quad's mission with broader global governance goals. Prospects in Trump 2.0

The bipartisan consensus on the Indo-Pacific's importance ensures continuity in U.S. engagement. While Mr. Trump could take a more assertive stance against China, his reliance on India, Japan, and Australia to share the burden of regional security would remain and likely be strengthened. The new administration's first major foreign policy initiative was a meeting of the Quad foreign ministers on January 21. At his confirmation hearing, the U.S. Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, characterised China as the most formidable adversary the U.S. has faced, noting that the challenges prompting the Quad's revival under Mr. Trump have intensified. This was the administration's first significant engagement with foreign leaders. All four members reaffirmed Washington's unwavering commitment to the Indo-Pacific region while also setting the stage for this year's Quad Summit early in the Trump Presidency. Mr. Rubio also met with the three Quad foreign ministers separately with India being the first bilateral meeting. A joint statement released after the meeting emphasised the importance of international law, peace, stability, and maritime security for regional prosperity while opposing unilateral actions to alter the status quo through force or coercion.



It also highlighted the dedication to enhancing regional maritime, economic, and technological security, alongside promoting resilient and reliable supply chains. The members agreed to hold regular ministerial meetings and prepare for a leaders' summit to be hosted by India. Under the new Trump administration, the Indo-Pacific is likely to retain prominence but with a sharper focus

on hard power dynamics. The Indo-Pacific has changed since Mr. Trump's last term in office, and so have the priorities that would influence the President's approach this time. It is likely that alongside boosting security-related frameworks, Mr. Trump may also bolster mechanisms that have a broader and more diverse agenda so long as they serve to preserve the existing rules-based order.

Marco Rubio: Secretary of faith

Marco Rubio, the new U.S. Secretary of State has not been a typical acolyte of Donald Trump. The fact that the entire Senate voted for this confirmation is proof enough of the bipartisan acceptability he has nurtured over the years. Mr. Rubio represented Florida in the Senate since 2010 for three terms and in the interim, in 2016, he was among the several Republicans who ran against Mr. Trump in the presidential primary. That was a bitterly fought primary in which the gatecrasher vanquished Republican veterans and captured the party. Mr. Trump has nicknames for all his opponents and it was "Little Marco" for Mr. Rubio. Mr. Rubio called his future boss a "con artist". But soon after he quit the primaries, Mr. Rubio aligned with Mr. Trump and in 2024, he openly campaigned for him. Mr. Trump considered him as running mate, before choosing J.D. Vance.

Mr. Rubio is the first Latino to become Secretary of State. His parents left Cuba in 1956, and came to Florida. Mr. Rubio cites his life story as an example of American opportunity. He inherited from his parents a strong commitment to family. "They're the most important legacy any of us will leave behind," he said after being sworn in on January 21, referring to his four children who were present, along with his wife. His Christian faith is as strident as his opposition to communism and socialism. "...Almighty God and my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. That is truly the singular purpose of our lives," he said in his first remarks in the new role. Mr. Rubio has been a champion of vocational education since early days in politics and later it merged with his aversion to 'woke' politics. "Welders make more money than philosophers," Mr. Rubio said during his 2016 presidential campaign. "We need more welders and less philosophers."

Mr. Rubio's political career took off as a city commissioner in Florida, and by 34, in 2005, he was Speaker of the Florida House



of Representatives. When the Tea Party movement was shaking up the Republican Party, Mr. Rubio sensed his chance. Riding the popular resentment against party veterans, Mr. Rubio was elected to the U.S. Senate in 2010. Within five years, someone more unconventional, Mr. Trump, would beat him in the home turf of Florida in the Republican primaries. Middle path

In the Senate, Mr. Rubio broadly traversed a middle path, though he is hawkish on most international issues, which places him at odds with Mr. Trump. But on one critical question, China, Mr. Rubio and Mr. Trump are perfectly aligned. Both see China as the real challenger to U.S. supremacy. Mr. Rubio has mellowed down his harsh views with regard to Russia and its President Vladimir Putin who he once termed a "war criminal". In the last one year, he moved from being a supporter of Ukraine in the war with Russia, to a more nuanced approach and closer to Mr. Trump's views. He now says U.S. interest is not served by endlessly financing a stalemate, and a compromise has to be found. He thinks Russia may be a problem,

but what matters in the timeframe of a century is China. His hawkish views have earned him a travel ban by China. The new Secretary of State thinks that the U.S. should not be caught in Europe and the focus should be on the Indo-Pacific. This thinking may guide the State Department in its dealings with India.

Mr. Rubio has supported most of U.S. interventions that Mr. Trump views as detrimental to the country's interest. He endorsed American role in Libya and is fiercely against the regime in Iran. He has made it clear that he would take the lead from the President on all issues, who has also appointed several special envoys for various regions and issues. Mr. Rubio was one of Gang of Eight lawmakers who drafted a comprehensive immigration reform plan that proposed conditional amnesty for undocumented residents in the country. Since then, U.S. politics has turned much more hostile to immigrants, and so has Mr. Rubio himself. Mr. Rubio will have a tough task of navigating American foreign policy in an extremely volatile world under an extremely volatile boss. His faith may help.

Paris Agreement: Present tense, future dangerous

In January 2015, the Île-de-France region suffered three shooting incidents perpetrated by terrorists. Twenty people were killed, including three assailants. On November 12 the same year, suicide bombers attacked a suburb of Beirut in Lebanon, killing 43 people. The next day, terrorists struck in three places in Paris, killing 130 people in all. France promptly declared a three-month emergency and escalated its own war against terror. But just two weeks later, in a city still indignant with grief and trauma, representatives and leaders from 196 countries around the world gathered to hammer out what eventually became the Paris Agreement. In the face of the world's fondness for fossil fuels and against the backdrop of uncertainty and apparently imminent chaos, the Paris Agreement was hailed by its negotiators as a triumph of political engagement.

A decade later, the world presents a very different face. An internecine conflict grinds on in Eastern Europe while West Asia mulls a tense stability after a war that invited allegations of genocide. Both inflation and right-wing nationalism are on the rise. Four UN summits on environmental matters flopped in 2024 alone. And a new U.S. President signed an executive order to pull the country out of the Paris Agreement on his first day in office.

The Paris Agreement has nearly 200 parties but the U.S., with the world's largest and highly industrialised economy, is particularly important. After analysing multiple climate models, Carbon Brief concluded Donald Trump's second term as U.S. President could add 4 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (or 4 GtCO₂e) more to what the country is already expected to emit by 2030. This is reportedly "equivalent to the combined annual emissions of the EU and Japan, or the combined annual total of the world's 140 lowest-emitting countries". His predecessor, Joe Biden, had pledged to lower U.S. emissions by half from 2005 levels by 2030. Under Mr. Trump, it's expected to drop by around a quarter.

Republicans in the U.S. government have also declared plans to undermine the Inflation Reduction Act, 2022, weaken the Environmental Protection Agency, do away with incentives for electric vehicles, scrutinise individual states' ability to adopt emissions standards at odds with federal ones, and increase the extraction of fossil fuels (including reversing a ban on offshore drilling). On January 24, Mr. Trump blocked federal approvals for new wind farms. The effects of these changes are expected to allow U.S. emissions to expand by 27 GtCO₂e by 2050, even if they depend to a non-trivial degree on subnational climate action and global market response. China for one will be happy to overtake the U.S. in the development of green technologies, including electric vehicles, whereas Europe may retaliate with its Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism — already controversial among developing economies — should the U.S. hike tariffs on imports from the bloc. Threats of climate feedback

The world just before the U.S. presidential elections last year was in no position to meet the Paris Agreement's goals nor was Mr. Biden instituting radical (by necessity)

climate policies in his country. Instead, Mr. Trump's decision to withdraw from the Agreement has simply rendered worse possibilities more likely. As the temperature records reset in 2024 attested, the world is already doomed to shoot past 1.5° C. Still, clawing back every fraction of a degree is crucial because of the threats of climate feedback — natural responses to global warming that increase the rate of warming — and irreversible change. The Agreement holds the vast majority of the world's countries to keeping "the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2° C" and to endeavour to "limit the temperature increase to 1.5° C above pre-industrial levels". Parties to the Agreement have decided to achieve this via Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs); how each contribution adds up to the Agreement's goal will be determined through the 'Global Stocktake'. However, the NDCs aren't legally binding while governments' reports for the Stocktake are expected to have data gaps. '1.5° C' is a figure of convenience, yet for its arbitrary origins it became significant when the Alliance of Small Island States pushed countries to include it in the Paris Agreement because the alliance's members would be devastated by the effects of a world 2° C warmer. This contention, however, ignored the latent heat accumulating in the oceans — which is released slowly and could add half a degree to current measurements — plus the idea that the planet is objectively "safe" under 1.5° C of warming rather than "less unsafe". As such, then, the Paris Agreement was really only a political victory, but even then of the sort the world has since found lacking. To its credit, it has been used as the basis for litigation in many countries to force errant corporations and governments to restore reducing emissions as a policy priority and for sidebar deals to restrict methane emissions, improve the prospects of 'green hydrogen', and protect biodiversity.

But the fulfilment of its aspirations currently desperately needs legally binding commitments and implementation targets, which the Agreement itself doesn't provide for. At the UN COP27 climate talks in Egypt, for example, the decision to have a 'loss and damage' fund was followed by considerable disagreement over its setup and management. At COP28 UAE, countries agreed to move away from fossil fuels but without meaningful commitments. And at COP29 Azerbaijan, the talks' format itself came under criticism for its vulnerability to being 'hijacked' by the reluctance of a few countries to commit to steeper financing and emissions targets. Distrust towards wealthy nations

In the course of trying to meet their commitments under the Paris Agreement, less wealthy countries' resentment of and distrust towards wealthier nations has increased. The world hasn't exactly come together. At present, rich countries have committed to providing \$300 billion a year to poor ones until 2035, after missing their previous commitment to provide \$100 billion by 2020 by two years. Mr. Trump has now withdrawn from the Paris Agreement, thus ending at least for four years U.S. participation in the contentious processes that determine these



targets for the world. These four years also lead up to 2030, a deadline year for many countries' commitments. The withdrawal is thus a blow, no matter that it creates opportunities for other countries to step up depending on their political will and acumen and economic ability. However, if it also creates pres-

sure on other countries to strengthen the Paris Agreement, such as incentivising governments to keep their promises when new parties take power or sanctioning them when they pull out, that can only be good for a vital instrument that also has considerable room for improvement.

How has India revised obesity parameters?

India has revised guidelines for obesity treatment and diagnosis after 15 years. The move comes after a call for global recalibration on how obesity is measured. In a recent report published in *The Lancet Diabetes and Endocrinology*, the global commission noted that Body Mass Index (BMI) apart, the distribution of body fat is also a key indicator of overall health and disease patterns. In step with this report, experts in India, including a group of doctors, nutritionists, and others from the National Diabetes Obesity and Cholesterol Foundation, Fortis C-DOC Hospital, and the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), have issued updated guidelines for India.

What are the aims of the global recommendations?

The proposed recommendations, endorsed by more than 75 medical organisations around the world, are designed to address limitations in the traditional definition and diagnosis of obesity that hinder clinical practice and healthcare policies, resulting in individuals with obesity not receiving the care they need.

What is new?

The revised classification system introduces two stages in obesity — 'innocuous obesity', characterised by increased body fat without organ or metabolic dysfunction; the second stage is obesity with consequences, marked by the impact on physical functions and presence of obesity-related diseases. This framework places special emphasis on abdominal fat distribution, which has particularly adverse effects on Asian Indian populations. "An important development occurred in 2009 when India introduced revised obesity definitions specifically for Asian In-

dians. This revision acknowledged that Asian Indians typically have higher body fat percentages than Western populations and develop diabetes at lower BMI levels," said Anoop Misra, co-author of the paper. The new guidelines set lower thresholds for BMI criteria which are now adjusted downward, with overweight defined as =23-24.9 kg/m² and obesity as =25 kg/m², compared to the Western standards of =25 kg/m² and =30 kg/m² respectively. Also, ideal waistlines have to be >90 cm for men and >80 cm for women, lower than Western standards of 102 cm and 88 cm respectively.

These guidelines influenced obesity management for South Asians in other countries, including the U.K. and the U.S., and, sparked numerous research studies that deepened the understanding of obesity in Asian Indian populations.

Why are Indian bodies different?

Studies show that excess fat in Indian populations leads to higher levels of inflammation and metabolic disturbance at lower BMI thresholds compared to Western populations. The only available antidote is to start exercising and have a diet plan early in life. The current report states that using BMI alone to diagnose obesity is not a reliable measure of health or illness at the individual level. This can result in misdiagnosis, with negative consequences for people living with obesity. A secondary analysis of trends of prevalence, patterns, and predictors from 2005 to 2020 using the National Family Health Survey shows that in the 15-year period, the prevalence of overweight or obese (BMI =25 kg/m²) among women and men aged between 15 and 49 years increased from 12.6% to 24% and 9.3% to 22.9% respectively.

The failed 'Delhi model'

As Delhiites prepare to elect a new government, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government has been pushing its welfare-based governance model, called the 'Delhi model,' on the campaign trail. It has been advertising its welfare schemes, such as the free electricity and water supply, bus travel for women, and primary health care, arguing that it not only managed to prioritise human capital development by spending more on the social sector, but has also succeeded in augmenting the fiscal space by cutting down inefficient government spending and mobilising revenues. To check the validity of these claims, we examined the fiscal indicators of Delhi on average during the 10 years when the AAP was in power (2015-16 to 2024-25) compared with those in the pre-AAP decade (2004-05 to 2012-13).

Before the AAP came to power, Delhi had demonstrated fiscal prudence from 2004-05 by containing revenue deficit and gross fiscal deficit (GFD). The revenue account remained in surplus throughout the pre-AAP and AAP regimes. However, the revenue surplus declined on average from -2.38% of gross state domestic product (GSDP) during the pre-AAP regime to -0.82% under the AAP regime. Although the GFD-GSDP ratio was within the Fiscal Responsibility Legislation (FRL) limit of 3% in the pre-AAP and AAP regimes, it declined from 0.68% on average in the pre-AAP regime to 0.25% in the AAP regime. But this downward correction in GFD was achieved by reducing much-needed capital outlay, a violation of a 'golden rule' in public finance. The AAP government suc-

cessfully reduced Delhi's debt-to-GSDP ratio to 2% on an average from 13.7% earlier. This is a stupendous achievement.

The share of revenue expenditure in the total spending of Delhi increased significantly from 58.27% on average in the pre-AAP regime to 77.63% in the AAP regime. Concomitantly, the share of expenditures which are incurred on asset creation, namely capital expenditure (CE) and capital outlay (CO), declined significantly on an average from 41.73% (CE)/15.82% (CO) in the pre-AAP regime to 22.37% (CE)/10.32% (CO) in the AAP regime. These trends show that public expenditure quality deteriorated under the AAP regime. Both the quantity and quality of the development expenditure and its components were compromised in the AAP regime. As a percentage of GSDP, expenditure on social services declined from 3.60% in the pre-AAP regime to 3.41% in the AAP regime. In the case of economic services, the decline was steeper from 2.29% to 1.28%. This drop was caused by a cut in the capital expenditure on these two functional heads. The capital expenditure on social services declined from 0.82% of GSDP in the pre-AAP regime to 0.56% in the AAP regime. In the case of economic services, the decline was steeper from 1.82% of GSDP to 0.38%. As a percentage of GSDP, the expenditure on education and medical and public health increased by only 0.08 and 0.06 percentage points in the AAP regime over the previous regime. The expenditures on water supply and sanitation, housing, urban development, transport, and communication declined as a



percentage of GSDP under the AAP regime, with the decline being the highest for roads and bridges, water supply, sanitation, and urban development.

On the revenue front, too, the AAP regime has performed poorly. On average, Delhi's total revenue receipts declined from 7.42% of GSDP in the pre-AAP regime to 5.82% in the AAP regime. Both own tax revenue and non-tax revenue contributed to the decline. The own tax revenue-GSDP ratio declined from 5.85% in the pre-AAP regime to 4.84% in the AAP regime. Own non-tax revenue decreased sharply from 0.85% to 0.10%, implying that the AAP government's

free electricity, water supply, bus travel, and health care policy have adversely impacted non-tax revenues. Interestingly, Delhi received more grants from the Centre (0.88% of GSDP) than the previous regime (0.71%). Overall, the revenue and expenditure trends reveal that the AAP regime has not augmented its revenue capacity to fund welfare programmes. Instead, fiscal space was created by reducing the much-needed capital expenditure. Sthanu R. Nair teaches Economics and Public Policy at IIM Kozhikode; Dhruv Jain is a post-graduate programme student at IIM Kozhikode. Views are personal

A turning point in India-Indonesia relations

Given the age-old civilisational connect, geographical proximity, and shared political impulses, India and Indonesia should have been much more cooperative partners, sustainably engaged with each other for common purposes, than has been the case so far. But this could change, with a successful State visit by President Prabowo Subianto to India. The four-day visit (January 23-26) was strong on pomp and protocol, with him as the chief guest at the Republic Day celebrations. Still, it was also a valuable opportunity for a comprehensive and fruitful dialogue. The eminent visitor was exposed to India's current political and diplomatic thinking, and, in turn, New Delhi saw--and liked--the real Prabowo, a veteran general, a courageous political fighter, and a newly-minted president who intends to adopt an active foreign policy for raising Indonesia's international profile.

"I am not a professional politician," President Prabowo said, "I'm not a good diplomat. I say what is in my heart." He openly admired Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi's leadership and added, "I would like to see India and Indonesia continue to be close partners and friends." The word 'continue' may have been his concession to the exigencies of diplomacy!

The two nations are now engaged in adding more substance and imparting new momentum to a relationship that has largely underperformed for long. An ambitious venture, it is anchored in New Delhi's recognition that geopolitically, Indonesia is the largest and the most important Association of South East Asian Nations (Asean) State and in Jakarta's conviction that an enhanced

partnership with a multi-aligned India will expand Indonesia's diplomatic space as a significant Asian power and player in the Global South. In a 55-para joint statement, the two sides defined in detail their consensus of views on "the full spectrum" of bilateral and international cooperation. As a senior official of the ministry of external affairs (MEA) put it, the visit involved a review of "the entire gamut of bilateral relations within the framework of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership" at the highest political levels. The specific areas covered included defense and security, maritime domain, trade and investment, connectivity, digital economy, tourism, health, and people-to-people ties.

Despite much pre-visit speculation in the media, no agreement emerged about Indonesia's reported plan to purchase the Brahmos missile system from India. However, it was announced that the discussion on the defense industry and supply chain cooperation had been underway and would continue when an Indonesian delegation visits India soon. Among the five MOUs signed during the President's visit, one deals with maritime safety and security cooperation between the Indian Coastguard and its Indonesian counterpart, BAKAMLA. No hint was provided about the larger geopolitical dimensions if sensitive issues like the United States (US)-China rivalry in the Indo-Pacific and China's growing assertiveness in the South and East China Seas were discussed. Yet enough indications were given to confirm that the subject stays on the minds of both sides. PM Modi hailed Indonesia as "an important partner in the Asean and the Indo-Pacific," adding that both countries were committed

to maintaining peace, security, prosperity, and rules-based order in the entire region. "We agree that freedom of navigation must be ensured in accordance with international laws," he noted. MEA reinforced this by stressing that the two nations have "a great commonality of views on what we see should be the Indo-Pacific rules-based order."

On economic development, the two governments have much work that lies ahead. Bilateral trade, which touched about \$30 billion in 2023-24, needs to be increased to \$50 billion in the next few years. This requires the Indian side to do more work to increase its exports as the trade balance favours Indonesia. The latter, too, needs to provide an environment that is friendly to Indian products. The visiting president promised to reduce regulation and "cut bureaucracy" for this purpose. A nearly 100-member strong business delegation accompanied him. So, it can be hoped that business and industry will now play a more active role, especially as Prabowo emphasised that the economy was open to more Indian investments in infrastructure, health, education, and digital transformation. It was noted that he was keen to have more Indian hospitals and institutions of higher learning to help expedite progress in Indonesia. Those involved in implementing the new proposals and ideas must draw suitable lessons from the past when work began enthusiastically and then was halted on some projects, such as the one to establish connectivity between Andaman and Aceh and for developing a civilian port in Aceh. Careful homework and persistence would be essential to ensure progress. Cultural cooperation and people-to-people ties, the third leg of the relationship,

continue to prosper. The number of Indian tourists in Indonesia last year touched 700,000 and could quickly go up to a million soon. Therefore, the decision to celebrate 2025 as the Indo-Asean Year of Tourism is timely. The expanding air connectivity between Indian and Indonesian cities is welcome. For this author, who spent four memorable years working in the Indian Embassy in Jakarta, it is heartwarming to note that after the Buddhist Borobudur Temple, India will now assist in the conservation efforts of the Hindu Prambanan Temple. These are among Indonesia's richest cultural treasures and are a living testimony to the influences that came from Indian shores.

The two governments would do well by conducting regular, in-depth dialogues on their respective roles in important plurilateral groupings such as G20, the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), Asean-related mechanisms, and now BRICS that Indonesia joined recently. The highlighting of trilateral cooperation involving India, Indonesia, and Australia to address common collaboration issues was noteworthy. In addition, Indonesia should be invited as a member of another trilateral grouping composed of India, Brazil, and South Africa (IBSA). Strategic cooperation in the Global South where India and Indonesia play a balancing role, would help revitalise the special connect forged at the historic Bandung Conference of 1955, the precursor of the Non-Aligned Movement. Political leadership has achieved much through this well-prepared visit. Think tanks such as India's Gateway House and Indonesia's CSIS are already contributing to strengthening relations with innovative ideas and initiatives.