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December 6th...A changed scenario: ‘Now neither bitterness nor displays of bravado’; Hindus and Muslims forget the past and write a new chapter

The atmosphere in Ayodhya on December 6th is no longer one of tension, but rather a symbol of brotherhood and progress, where Hindus and Muslims are together forging a new identity. The construction of the Ram Temple and the rapid development have created a new atmosphere of trust, peace, and communal harmony in the city.

The atmosphere in Ayodhya is changing rapidly. There was a time when the mere mention of December 6th would cast a pall over the city, but now that same day is becoming a symbol of social harmony and progress instead of religious tension. There is no bitterness, no accusations or counter-accusations, and no displays of bravado... instead, Hindu and Muslim communities are seen working together, shoulder to shoulder, writing a new chapter in Ayodhya’s history.

The rapid development work underway in the city after the construction of

the Ram Temple has not only given new energy to the economy but has also instilled a sense of stability and confidence in the hearts of the people. Anil Chauhan, who came from Kanpur to visit Ram Lalla, said, “What are you talking about, brother?...Now who even talks about December 6th?”

Look, the religious flag is fluttering atop the Ram Temple; this is the pinnacle of Ayodhya’s prosperity.”

People say there is no longer any bitterness regarding December 6th

Mahant Shashikant Das



said that Ayodhya's identity is now being defined not by conflict, but by spirituality and harmony. Even after the temple's construction, there is no tension anywhere; this is a victory for our shared values. Our Muslim brothers are equal partners in the city's progress. There is no longer any bitterness left regarding December 6th.

Witnessing the changing atmosphere firsthand

Businessman Santosh Gupta said that we traders have witnessed the changing atmosphere firsthand in the past years. The dispute had blocked the path of development.

Now, harmony and trust have increased, and this is the real progress of Ayodhya. We feel that there are equal opportunities for everyone in the new atmosphere of Ayodhya.

Generations should see Ayodhya as an example of brotherhood

Azam Khan, chairman of the Sunni Waqf Board Committee, said that we want future generations to see Ayodhya as an example of brotherhood, and not associate it with any old dispute. The incident of December 6th was painful, but now only

development should be discussed. The understanding and respect that has been established today is the real capital of this city.

The past is behind us

Social worker Mohammad Aslam said that the past is behind us. Today, our only aim is that Ayodhya should move forward and peace and tranquility should prevail here. Now, the progress of the city is the first priority for all of us. Employment opportunities have increased, and both Hindus and Muslims are benefiting from it.

A New Dawn of Communication Revolution in Kondapalli: Villagers Dance with Joy as Their Village Gets Mobile Network Access

Decades-long Wait Ends: Mobile Network Reaches Kondapalli for the First Time, Village Erupts in Celebration

Niyad Nella Naar Scheme Transforms Reality: Life in Kondapalli Becomes Easier

Raipur: While basic amenities like telecommunications, electricity and roads are the foundation of daily life in most parts of the country, some remote forested regions of the Bastar division had never seen these facilities for decades. One such area is Kondapalli village in Bijapur district, where an unprecedented celebratory atmosphere was witnessed as the village got mobile network coverage for the first time.

Kondapalli, located in a dense forest zone on the Telangana–Chhattisgarh border, has long lived without access to roads, electricity and drinking water. In such circumstances, the installation of a mobile tower is not merely a technological step forward for the local community, but a symbol of connecting with the outside world.

The moment the tower's activation was announced, a wave of excitement swept through the villagers. Women, men and children all marched in a rally to the tower site. Traditional rituals were performed to consecrate the tower. To the beat of the



'mandar' drum, people danced with emotion. The scene was nothing short of a festival.

People from neighbouring villages also joined the celebrations. Villagers said the new service was not just a technological facility, but their "first real connection with the outside world." Security personnel also joined in the celebrations and distributed sweets.

Mobile network connectivity will now serve as a gateway for villagers to access banking, Aadhaar, ration, health schemes, pensions and educational services — facilities that



had long been out of reach. For many, this day marks the beginning of a new chapter in their lives.

Under Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai's leadership, the Niyad Nella Naar scheme aims to deliver basic services to sensitive regions, build trust and integrate people into the mainstream. The scheme is expediting the delivery of roads, electricity, education, health, drinking water, banking, communication and administrative services.

The scheme has a wide scope — covering 403 villages

around 69 new camps, where 18 community services from 9 departments and 25 individual-centric schemes from 11 departments are being delivered, ensuring no villager is deprived of basic amenities.

Communication infrastructure has emerged as the most impactful component of this effort. Over the past two years, 728 new towers have been installed in the region — including 116 under the LWE programme, 115 in aspirational districts, and 467 towers as 4G installations. Additionally, 449 towers have been upgraded from 2G to 4G.

Kondapalli has witnessed rapid transformation through the Niyad Nalla Naar scheme. Since the camp was established in December 2024, the administration has been able to reach the village regularly for the first time. The long-defunct road is being reconstructed by the Border Roads Organisation, and work on a 50-km stretch is currently in progress.

Electricity reached the village for the first time just two months ago. Since then, children's studies, small businesses and daily life have seen remarkable positive changes. The administration is conducting saturation camps to ensure every family receives the benefits of all schemes.

With the arrival of mobile network services in Kondapalli, it is now evident that the light of development is finally reaching those regions that had waited for years. This new dawn of communication has given villagers confidence that their hamlet too will progress,

connected with modern facilities like the rest of the state.

The arrival of mobile connectivity in Kondapalli is not just about erecting a tower — it represents the rising aspirations of people who had long lived cut off from the world. "Our government is committed to ensuring that every village and every family in

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Bastar becomes part of the development mainstream, gains access to digital services and sees new avenues of opportunity open before them. This is not merely the beginning of communication, but the dawn of an era of trust, transformation and new possibilities." — Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai.

State Government Issues Detailed Clarification on Misconceptions Around Guideline Rates

Simple, scientific, and transparent system implemented across Chhattisgarh, including Kanker

Raipur: To dispel public confusion arising over the new guideline rates approved by the Central Valuation Board, Chhattisgarh for the financial year 2025–26, the state government has released detailed information. The government clarified that the new guideline rates are not only “simpler and more scientific” but have also resolved discrepancies that persisted for several years.

According to the government, misleading claims are being circulated in some places suggesting excessive hikes in guideline rates or disruption of document registration. In reality, the revised guidelines have been effective since 20 November 2025, and nearly 98 documents have already been registered smoothly in Kanker district during this period. All sub-registrar offices in the district continue to operate as usual.

Extensive simplification in urban areas



GOVERNMENT OF CHHATTISGARH

Earlier, due to multiple segments within the same ward, there were variations in rates despite similar geographical and commercial conditions, leading to public dissatisfaction. After a fresh survey, physical verification, and rationalisation, these segments have been reduced and rates standardised. In Kanker Municipality, 56 segments across 21 wards have been reduced to 26. Similarly, in Charama, Narharpur, Bhanupratappur, Antagarh, and Pankhajur Nagar Panchayats, 253 segments have been reduced to 105. The government stated that the guideline structure is now based on a “more transparent and scientific method.”

Clarification on perceived rate hike

The state government has clarified that guideline rates were last revised in 2019–20.

After six years, this revision includes only a 20 per cent increase in urban areas, which is “logical and naturally aligned with current market conditions.” The government noted that if annual increments had been applied, the rates would have been much higher today. Hence, claims of steep hikes are unfounded.

E-registration system fully function

Some individuals are spreading misconceptions that registration has halted due to the new rates not being updated online. Contrary to this, the government confirmed that all sub-registrar offices in the district are conducting registrations without any interruption, and there is “no situation of procedural disruption.”

Issues arising from non-revision of rates

The government stated that continuing old guideline rates encourages the circulation of unaccounted money. Often, despite higher actual transaction values, registrations are carried out on outdated guideline rates, creating differences that turn into unaccounted amounts and lead to disputes. Low valuations also reduce loan eligibility for buyers.

Discrepancies also arise in determining compensation. In cases of government acquisition, outdated rates lead to inadequate compensation, particularly affecting farmers, who do not receive the fair value of their land. The government emphasised that the revised guideline rates are "more reasonable and reflective of real market conditions."

Appeal to the public

The state government has appealed to citizens not to be influenced by rumours or misinformation. For any clarification regarding guideline rates, individuals may contact their nearest registration office to obtain accurate and authentic details.

The revised guideline rates are seen as an important step towards ensuring transparency in real estate transactions, preventing tax evasion, and making land valuation "more credible and trustworthy" across the state.

Chhattisgarh Creates New History in Eliminating Naxalism: Chief Minister Sai

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He said that Naxalism has been crippled and is now on its last legs. on Monday December 8, 2025



Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai addressing a press conference on Monday December 8, 2025 at Rajnandgaon

Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai during a press conference at Rajnandgaon on Monday December 8, 2025 said that the two years of the Chhattisgarh government's tenure have proven to be a decisive turning point in the state's history. Chief Minister Sai said that Chhattisgarh is rapidly progressing towards the goal set by Prime Minister

Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah – "complete elimination of Naxalism from the entire country by March 31, 2026."

He said that Naxalism has been crippled and is now on its last legs. on Monday December 8, 2025

Chief Minister Sai added that security forces have achieved unprecedented suc-

cess in the last two years. More than 500 Maoists have been neutralised in encounters, while over 4,000 Naxalites have surrendered or been arrested, which is a clear indication of the weakening of Naxalism. He said that the valor of the security forces has given a decisive edge against the violence that had plagued Bastar for decades.

He also provided detailed information about the state government's new rehabilitation policy. This includes the approval of 15,000 Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Prime Minister's Housing Scheme) houses for surrendered Naxalites, monthly financial assistance of Rs. 10,000 for three years, skill development training, and employment-related programs. The Chief Minister said that "leaving the path of violence and joining the mainstream" is now becoming a reality in Bastar. Innovations like the Pandum Cafe are symbols of social change.

CM Sai noted that with the rapid opening of security camps and increased administrative reach in Bastar, more than 400 villages have been repopulated. Through the Niyad Nella Nar scheme, basic services such as roads, electricity, drinking water, healthcare facilities, and education are reaching these areas. The Chief Minister said, "Where once the sound of gunfire was heard, today school bells are ringing. The national flag has been hoisted in many villages after many years, people are participating fearlessly in elections,

and facilities ranging from ration cards to mobile networks are now easily available."

Chief Minister Sai described Bastar as a major center for future development, stating that unprecedented opportunities are emerging in agriculture, irrigation, forest products, animal husbandry, and small-scale industries besides tourism. He said that the new industrial policy (2024–30) includes special provisions for Naxal-affected areas.

By promoting value addition to forest products, processing, and rural entrepreneurship, local youth are being provided with employment and sustainable income.

Chief Minister Sai said that with tourism being granted industry status, Bastar is rapid-

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ly gaining recognition on the global map. The Kutumsar Caves, waterfalls, the forests of Abujmarh, and the tribal cultural heritage are becoming major tourist attractions. The homestay model is flourishing and strengthening the rural economy.

In his closing note, the Chief Minister said that this historic progress in eliminating Naxalism is a victory for the state's martyred soldiers, the tireless efforts of the security forces, and the trust of the people. He expressed confidence that, in line with the resolve of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah, Bastar will be freed from Naxalism and join the mainstream of development, CM Sai affirmed.

As Global Climate Deal Sinks, India, China Must Innovate



All climate change decisions are political because they reflect and affect the power, influence of countries and peoples

● **Venkateshwar Rao** | The author is a Delhi-based commentator and analyst

It is unrealistic to think that the issue of global climate change should be decided on science-based empirical evidence alone. All climate change decisions are political because they reflect and affect the power, influence of countries and peoples. This was quite evident at the 30th edition of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which is popularly known as the Conference of the Parties (COP30), at Belem in Brazil, which ended in late November. It was a difficult conference, perhaps the most difficult so far. It was a disaster in many ways because no forward movement could be agreed on.

The two major issues that stood out were about setting a timeframe for ending the reign of fossil fuels, which has fuelled modern industrial civilisation as we have known it. About 80 of the 195 countries were in favour of setting a deadline to phase out use of fossil fuels as a way of cleaning up the climate crisis. It was inevitable that there would be a clash, and resistance.

At the end of the conference, European Parliament del-



egation chair Lidia Pereira said in a statement: "At COP30, despite our persistent efforts and the European Parliament's clear mandate on mitigation and the phase-out of fossil fuels, we faced a unified Brics-Arab front and a presidency unwilling to match our level of ambition, and we must regret that the final outcome did not go further." In contrast, the secretary-general of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) Haitham Al Ghais said in a statement on the last day of the conference: "Petroleum and petroleum-derived products are essential for modern civilisation, raising living standards and fuelling sustainable devel-

opment. They are vital to health services, agriculture, trade, commerce, the distribution and administration of aid relief, and much more." The EU, as represented by the European Parliament, and Opec are both influential groups. The Europeans wanted to push their point of view, while the Opec blocked it. And each had legitimate motivations. The larger political agenda of Europe is to lessen its dependence on fossil fuels, on Opec, to move on to cleaner and better technologies. Opec depends solely on its oil exports.

Russia, China and India, among many other countries, were opposed to any

timeline over fossil fuels. Russia depends on its gas and oil exports, much to the discomfort of Europe. This was especially so after the economic sanctions against Russia in the wake of Moscow's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 failed to cripple the Russian economy. Both China and India know that they cannot cut off their dependence on coal and oil anytime soon despite their success in creating renewable energy alternatives of reasonable proportions. While they are sure to increase their share of renewable energy in running their economies, they do not want to make any hasty commitments to ending their use of fossil fuel-based energy sources.

The other major issue that stood out like a store thumb was climate finance. While developed Europe wants a timeline for edging out fossil fuels, it is not willing to make any reasonable promises on financing poor and developing countries to make the transition to greener energy sources. Financing the shift to renewable sources of energy would be an effective way of phasing out fossil fuels. But Europe and the West are by and large not willing to do anything about it beyond the minimal commitment of \$100 billion annually, which was made at COP28 in Dubai, and \$300 billion annu-

ally, a commitment made in Baku at COP29. The climate finance which is needed was reckoned at \$1.3 trillion. The West has suggested that the rest of the money, apart from the \$300 billion they committed, should be raised from the private sector, including from agencies like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. But there were no concrete pathways worked out to funnel the funds and meet the challenge of climate change goals.

A recent European report has showed that China had lent more than a trillion dollars to countries across the world, including developed countries like the United States. So, if China wants to, it can contribute \$600 billion a year to supplement the modest \$300 billion that the West had agreed to pay.

But China would not like to take on that responsibility because that would be allowing the West to get away with the damage they had caused because of their reckless industrialisation programmes, which is responsible for the climate change disaster looming on the horizon. India's environment minister Bhupendra Yadav had emphasised the moral liability of the West and its obligation to transfer funds and technology for developing countries to make the transition to green energy resources. The economic development of the last 200 years and more has been an amoral one. It is unlikely that moral arguments will make any sense to the West.

This turns out to be a politi-

cal and economic tussle between the West and the rest of the world. We are at the moment leaving out the elephant in the room, the United States under President Donald Trump, which remains the highest greenhouse emitter, at around 29 per cent or so. Despite his irresponsible stance on climate change, President Trump would want to continue to depend on Arab and Opec oil resources and not entirely exhaust the indigenous resources of the United States, including shale gas. Europe would be isolated.

Every country, including the Opec bloc, recognises that oil cannot last forever, and there is need to look for alternative energy sources. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are already looking at nuclear power, and they are likely to expand their nuclear power base. The developing countries like India and China, and the Asian, African and Latin American nations have to move forward with their alternative plans. They should not be too worried by European restrictions on trade based on carbon-emission related restrictions. This would mean that India and China will have to innovate aggressively on sources of energy, and not depend on the West to provide scientific and technological aid. Like Japan in the last century, India and China have been quick to absorb the scientific and technological breakthroughs made in Europe and America. The urgent need now is to forge ahead and achieve breakthroughs of their own.

Do We Work to Live or Live to Work? Do Longer Hours Raise Our



Mr Murthy's call for the "9-9-6" formula essentially applies to employees in the organised sector, such as the government, state-owned enterprises and private companies

● **Anita Anand** | The writer is a development and communications consultant and the author of *Kabul Blogs: My Days in the Life of Afghanistan*

A couple of years ago, a statement by Infosys founder N.R. Narayana Murthy advocating a 70-hour workweek had led to a lot of controversy. In October 2023, Mr Murthy called for a 70-hour workweek, stating that for India to compete with the world's fastest-growing countries, such as China and Japan, young people must work 70 hours a week. He praised the Chinese "9-9-6" formula, which involves working from 9 am to 9 pm, six days a week, totaling 72 hours.

The "9-9-6" rule had been declared illegal by China's Supreme People's Court in 2021 for violating labour laws that set a standard workday of eight hours and a workweek of 44 hours.

Mr Murthy's call received backing from some corporate leaders and opposition from others. At the core of this debate are some key questions. Do longer working hours always result in higher productivity? Should India follow China's example? What are the drawbacks of extended working hours?

Mr Murthy's call for the "9-9-6" formula essentially applies to employees in the organised sector, such as the government, state-owned enterprises and private companies. There are approximately 625 million people in India's



labour force, with six hundred million currently employed.

Agriculture employs just under half of India's workers, or 280 million people, while industry employs 150 million and services 180 million. The remaining roughly twenty-five million are unemployed. More than 94 per cent of workers are employed

In unincorporated, unorganised enterprises, ranging from pushcart vendors to home-based businesses. For both organised and unorganised sectors, longer work hours do not necessarily boost productivity. In China, it is estimated that more than three-quarters of urban workers in major cities like Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou experience work-related fatigue, musculoskeletal pain, sleep or eating dis-

orders, occupational stress, and work-family imbalance. According to China's state-owned People's Daily, a 2013 survey revealed that 98.8 per cent of Chinese IT industry workers reported health issues. Numerous overwork-related deaths and suicides have occurred over the past decades due to the "9-9-6" system and other overtime work arrangements. The workplace is changing. Consider self-employment, which has created most jobs in India's economy. The HSBC Bank's Employment Trends in India report shows that the numbers increased from 23.9 crores in 2018 to 35.8 crores in 2024. This seven per cent annual growth rate makes self-employment the fastest-growing part of India's labour market, surpassing both salaried jobs and

casual work. After the Covid-19 pandemic, new ways of working appeared. Workers can be at the workplace and/or work from home. It reduces travel time and provides more time for a private life.

Is there life beyond work? Yes. Over the past several decades, there has been a global call for a better work-life balance to improve physical and mental well-being.

This includes time with family, friends, and engaging in activities a person enjoys. Both men and women should be encouraged to share homemaking and child-care responsibilities (if there are children) and be more involved in their communities. The Economic Survey 2024 highlights that spending long hours at one's workplace is "detrimental" to mental well-being and that individuals who work 12 or more hours a day experience distressed or struggling levels of mental well-being. Labour codes help establish a healthy balance between work and rest. On November 21, 2025, India replaced twenty-nine old labour laws with four new labour codes, altering workplace rights.

Employees will now receive timely wages and gratuity, fixed work hours, stricter safety standards and free health services. Notable changes include a flexible four-day workweek (up to 12 hours per day, up to 48 hours per week), a 12-hour minimum rest period between shifts, and double overtime pay. The codes also expand work opportunities for women, with safety measures in place. Of course, implementation is the key. Increasing India's productivity requires more than just working longer hours. It needs modern infrastructure, a literate and skilled workforce, and progressive workplace policies to create an environ-

ment that satisfies workers' needs and realistic productivity goals.

Employers can support work-life balance by adopting flexible work policies, promoting time off and breaks, fostering a culture that values balance, training managers to recognise burnout, and providing resources for mental and physical health. Mr Murthy recently clarified that he regarded the 70-hour workweek as a goal, and he personally worked those hours for 40 years of his career.

He acknowledged that there are other models, but emphasised that productivity requires hard work.

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According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the average working hours in India are around 48.5 hours per week. Productivity is low due to rigid work ideologies, hierarchical structures, and low levels of educational and technical skills. How have longer working hours affected Japan and China, which Mr Murthy recommends India should follow?

In Japan, the salaryman (primarily men) is a white-collar worker who must demonstrate complete loyalty and dedication to the employer. They are often expected to work over 80 hours per week. They socialise with colleagues and bosses by singing karaoke, drinking, and visiting hostess bars, leaving little time for family or other pursuits. The emerging IT sector also demands long working hours. Work-life balance in both industries is a major concern due to the long hours, which puts them at risk of "karoshi", or "death by overwork".

The controversy sparked by Mr Murthy's remarks is beneficial. It promotes discussion of critical issues, such as the meaning of work and productivity. Should we blindly assume that other countries serve as role models? What is the Indian reality? What is work really about?

Then, there is also the existential question. We struggle to lead an authentic life despite the apparent absurdity or incomprehensibility of existence. In examining meaning, purpose, and value, existentialist thought often includes concepts such as existential crises, angst, courage, and freedom.

Putin Says to Continue Uninterrupted Fuel Shipments to India



Russia is a reliable supplier of oil, gas, coal, and everything that is required for the development of India's energy: Putin

Russian President Vladimir Putin said Friday December 5, 2025 he was ready to continue “uninterrupted shipments” of fuel to India, as New Delhi faces heavy US pressure to stop buying oil from Moscow. “Russia is a reliable supplier of oil, gas, coal, and everything that is required for the development of India’s energy,” Putin told Prime Minister Narendra Modi on a visit to New Delhi.

“We are ready to continue uninterrupted shipments of fuel for the fast-growing Indian economy,” he said via an official translator. US President Donald Trump imposed 50 percent tariffs on most Indian products in August, citing New Delhi’s continued purchases of Russian oil — revenue Washington argues helps fund the war in Ukraine.

Modi thanked Putin for his “unwavering commitment towards India”, and said that “energy security has been a



strong and important pillar of the India-Russia partnership”.

However, while he referenced nuclear power, Modi made no specific reference to oil. Modi addressed “my friend” Putin and praised New Delhi and Moscow’s longstanding ties.

“We have agreed on an eco-

nomie cooperation program until 2030,” Modi told Putin, after officials exchanged a raft of agreements spanning jobs, health, shipping, and chemicals.

“This will ensure that our trade and investment are diversified, balanced, and sustainable.”

India-Russia to achieve USD 100 bn bilateral trade target before 2030: Modi



The Prime Minister recalled that last year, President Putin and he set a target of reaching USD 100 billion in bilateral trade by 2030.

New Delhi : Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday December 5, 2025 exuded confidence that the USD 100 billion bilateral trade target between India and Russia will be achieved ahead of 2030.

Speaking at the India-Russia Business Forum, along with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Modi invited Russian businesses to 'come and Make In India...and partner with India'.

The Prime Minister recalled that last year, President Putin and he set a target of reaching USD 100 billion in bilateral trade by 2030.

"However, after further discussions with President Putin and considering the tremendous potential in our partnership, I am confident that we will achieve this target well ahead of schedule. We are making rapid progress towards this goal," Modi said.

He further said that simplified and predictable mechanisms are being created for businesses, and discussions have begun on the FTA between India and the Eurasian Economic Union.

Whether it is business or diplomacy, the foundation of any partnership is mutual trust, he noted.



Modi invites Russian businesses along with Russian President Vladimir Putin, to 'come and Make In India...and partner with India'

"The greatest strength of India-Russia relations is this trust. It is this trust that gives direction to our joint efforts and also provides momentum," the Prime Minister said, adding that this is the launchpad that gives inspiration to take flight towards new dreams and aspirations.

He noted that India is a global leader in affordable, efficient electric vehicles, two-wheelers, and CNG mobility solutions, while Russia is a major producer of

advanced materials.

By partnering in EV manufacturing, automotive components, and shared mobility technologies, the two countries can not only meet their domestic demands but also contribute to the development of the Global South, Modi said.

President Putin said Russia is for strengthening its multi-faceted relations with India in various fields.

He also said that Russian companies are ready to increase purchases of a wide range of goods and services from India.

Crude oil supplies, nuclear reactor deals... find out what India stands to gain from the agreements with Russia



19 agreements have been signed between India and Russia

Russian President Vladimir Putin visited India for the first time since the start of the Ukrainian war. His visit was significant in several ways. Putin's visit came at a time when the United States has imposed an additional 25 percent tariff on India for purchasing Russian crude oil.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has returned to Moscow after completing his two-day visit to India. This visit was a significant one for Putin. A total of 19 agreements were signed between the two coun-

tries. But the question is, what will both countries gain from these agreements?

Russia announced that it will continue to supply India with crude oil, natural gas, refining, petrochemicals, and nuclear power. This means that despite pressure from Western countries, India and Russia may see even greater cooperation in the energy sector, and India may continue to purchase crude oil from Russia.

The second major announcement between the two countries concerned

increased cooperation in the civil nuclear sector. Currently, most of India's electricity is generated from coal, but now we want to install small nuclear reactor plants, and Russia will assist us in this endeavor, and this is no small deal. Russia is considered a global leader in this technology, and now that Russia provides further support in this area, India's goal of generating 100 gigawatts of power from small nuclear reactors by 2047 can be achieved, whereas currently, we are only able to generate eight giga-

watts.

The third major announcement between India and Russia is that the two countries will increase their mutual trade to \$100 billion, or ₹9 lakh crore. Currently, the annual trade between the two countries is ₹5.8 lakh crore, of which India faces a significant deficit. India purchases goods worth ₹5.39 lakh crore from Russia, while selling goods worth only ₹41 thousand crore.

During this meeting, it was also announced that Russia will provide new employment opportunities for Indians. Russia is the world's largest country by area, but its population is only 150 million. Now, there is a significant labor shortage there, which is why Russia needs Indian workers. Today, Russia is ready to employ up to 1 million Indians annually.

Another announcement was that India will not only purchase weapons from Russia, but both countries will also jointly manufacture these weapons. India will emphasize research and development, co-development, and co-production under the "Make in India" initiative. This means that we will now try to manufacture as many weapons as possible using Russian technology in our own country, just as we developed the BrahMos missile.

India and Russia have also reached an agreement on the space sector, under which both countries will work together on human spaceflight missions. Cooperation will also increase in navigation, deep space, and rocket engine development.

“ India and Russia have also reached an agreement on the space sector, under which both countries will work together on human spaceflight missions. Cooperation will also increase in navigation, deep space, and rocket engine development. President Putin also promised that he supports granting India a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council, and Russia is also supporting India's presidency of BRICS in 2026.

President Putin also promised that he supports granting India a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council, and Russia is also supporting India's presidency of BRICS in 2026.

An agreement has also been reached between the two countries against terrorism, and President Putin has stated that he will work with India to prevent and ban terrorist funding. It was also announced during this meeting that most trade between India and Russia will be conducted in Indian currency, the rupee, and Russian currency, the ruble. Currently, 96% of trade between the two countries is conducted in rupee-ruble

terms, but there have been no discussions between the two countries on a digital currency platform.

The final decision is to build the International North-South Transport Corridor between India and Russia, a route through which both countries will be able to trade with each other, saving time and money. This corridor will connect Mumbai to Iran's Chabahar Port. From Chabahar Port, it will then reach the northern tip of Iran by road, and from there, it will connect Russia via this corridor via sea. If this corridor is completed, the current 30 to 35 days for transporting goods from India to Russia will be reduced to just 20 to 25

Country Now In Full-fledged 'Reform Express' Phase, Claims Modi



The Prime Minister further recalled that the government trusted citizens by allowing self-certification, and emphasised that this trust has worked successfully for 10 years without misuse

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday December 9, 2025 said that the country is now in a full-fledged 'Reform Express' phase, where reforms are happening rapidly and with clear intent, according to the source. The Prime Minister was addressing the NDA parliamentary party meet. PM Modi emphasised that the government's reforms are completely citizen-centric, not just economic or revenue-focused. The goal is to remove everyday hurdles so people can reach their full potential.

The Prime Minister urged all the MPs to actively share real problems faced by ordinary people, so that the Reform Express can reach every household and remove day-to-day hardships. PM Modi also said he wants to end the culture of 30-40-page forms and unnecessary paperwork, stressing that we "need to provide services at the doorstep of citizens" and eliminate repeated data submissions.

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years without misuse. PM Modi stressed that both "Ease of Life" and "Ease of Doing Business" are top priorities of the Modi-led NDA government. The NDA leaders felicitated PM Modi at the Parliamentary Party meeting at the GMC Balayogi Auditorium in the Parliament Library Building (PLB). The leaders of the National Democratic Alliance presented him with a large garland upon his arrival to attend the meeting in the morning.

Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw, JDU MP Sanjay Jha, NCP MP Praful Patel, Union Minister S Jaishankar, L Murugan, and other leaders

also attended the meeting. Earlier, Union Parliamentary and Minority Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju highlighted the Prime Minister's concern over the chaos that ensued after several IndiGo Airlines flights were cancelled during the NDA parliamentary meeting.

The Minister said that the PM emphasised that passengers should not be inconvenienced. "During the NDA parliamentary meeting, the PM told NDA MPs that people should not be troubled, face inconvenience. Rules and laws are good but in order to correct the system it is not right to harass people," said Rijiju.

India-Russia Legacy Ties: Strategic Autonomy 3.0?



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The expectations in New Delhi are that the first part of the terms of the Bilateral Trade Agreement dealing with tariffs with the US will be sorted out soon

● **Shikha Mukerjee** | The writer is a senior journalist in Kolkata

It is also not to argue that the visits planned for the arrival of teams from the European Union are not equally significant. The difference is that India's relationship with Russia is a legacy with its own dynamics, which makes it easy to revise and renew, that is tailor-made, to fit in with the uncertainties of the present global environment

The visit of Russia's President Vladimir Putin to India was a neatly choreographed performance to deliver a message to the multiple poles of this period in "the current complex, tense, and uncertain geopolitical situation", as the joint statement called it, and the resilience of Russian-Indian ties under "external pressure". India, impacted by punishing tariffs, the highest in the world, imposed by the administration of US President Donald Trump for being friends with Russia and buying its oil, and Russia, because of punishing sanctions and disagreements on how to end the war with Ukraine, have problems in common and the same sort of axes to grind.

That is not to say that the American delegation expected



The visit by President Putin was a message that India used effectively to reiterate its "strategic autonomy", which includes holding firm on imports of Russian oil, even though it invited punishing sanctions from the United States in terms of massive tariff increases. It was a moment which Mr Putin chose to underscore, that the relationship with India was "deeply rooted in history, but it is not the words that matter; it is the substance, which is very profound". — Internet

in India later this month to informally discuss the terms of a trade agreement will not be just as welcome and the parleys will not be just as important. The expectations in New Delhi are that the first part of the terms of the Bilateral Trade

Agreement dealing with tariffs with the US will be sorted out soon. What happens after the officials have ironed out the terms of the trade agreement is between the leaders, and as one commentator put it: "Now it really is up to the leaders,

and that too, one more than the other

It is also not to argue that the visits planned for the arrival of teams from the European Union are not equally significant. The difference is that India's relationship with Russia is a legacy with its own dynamics, which makes it easy to revise and renew, that is tailor-made, to fit in with the uncertainties of the present global environment.

By describing the partnership as a "guiding star, Prime Minister Narendra Modi was indulging in cringe-making hyperbole, but there was truth in his statement that the relationship was "based on mutual respect and deep trust, these relations have always stood the test of time".

The India-Russia Strategic Partnership in 2000, upgraded to the "Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership" in 2010, was an evolution that progressed from the 1971 India-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation, a 20-year agreement that covered the tumultuous period of change and upheaval, including the end of the Soviet Union and the emergence of Russia.

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The substance in sum is wide-ranging; it covers fuel and energy, including nuclear energy, defence and defence technology, trade, culture, politics and geopolitics, terrorism and peace. The expectation is that trade between the two countries will grow to \$100 billion by 2030, though how India deals with the imbalance and millions of rupees stashed in Russia because of it, remains to be seen.

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immigration rules and the sheer unpredictability of how and when the rules will change, affecting lakhs of Indian students, Indians working in the US and now even those who are seeking the coveted green cards, Russia’s move to open up the labour market to enable up to 70,000 Indians to work in that country is a lifeline.

There is more that Russia has offered that temporarily bails out the pressure on the Indian government vis-a-vis students who look for places to study overseas.

There is more Russia can do for India to tide over its cur-



rent crisis in exports triggered by the Trump administration's tariff war; it can import fish and seafood and rescue the nearly three crore people whose livelihoods depend on the fisheries sector in politically sensitive states for the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party.

And it can endorse India's position that the additional 25 per cent tariffs was unjust and unreasonable by stating, as Mr Putin did, that: "The US continues to buy nuclear fuel from us for their nuclear power plants. That is also fuel. Energy.

This is uranium for nuclear power plants that are functioning in the United States." In domestic politics, the Putin visit is marketable, even though it has less popular traction than a visit by a US President, a British Prime Minister, or even a US vice-president. It allows the Narendra Modi government to build up the image of India as the "Vishwa Guru", or sage to the world, in trou-

bled times. The careful confirmation by Mr Modi that India's policy was for peace (particularly in Ukraine) by gifting a copy of the Gita, translated into Russian, was part of the choreography to use the visit to message the world and Indian audiences who could relate to the visual of a Gita being handed over as a token. Neither Russia, nor President Putin, are the same as the Soviet Union and the leaders of the Communist Party, who profoundly influenced the popular imagination and were welcomed by spontaneous crowds.

In a report in *The New York Times* in 1955, A.M. Rosenthal wrote: "The Calcutta police had to rescue the touring Soviet leaders today from the welcoming crush of one of the largest crowds in Indian history. More than 2,000,000 Bengalis turned out to greet Soviet Premier Nikolai A. Bulganin and Communist Party chief Nikita S. Khrushchev and

turned a day of welcome into a security officer's nightmare."

The irony is that a partnership that began as an ideological connection and admiration for socialism and planning, predated the Cold War and endured even after it ended, was crafted and built by the Congress, especially Jawaharlal Nehru, and to some extent by the Communist parties in India.

In Narendra Modi's world, the root of all that is evil in today's India is the Congress and Nehru and the Gandhis. Despite that serious aversion to acknowledging the assets and achievements of his predecessors, Mr Modi was compelled to pay tribute to, albeit obliquely, the leaders who built the "deep trust" that has "always stood the test of time". There is no way in which the Modi government can claim that it has taken the India-Russia relationship to never-before heights. It is a legacy relationship and Prime Minister Modi is its beneficiary.

Division of Vande Mataram song led to partition of India: Home Minister

The division of 'Vande Mataram' song for "politics of appeasement" led to partition of India, Home Minister Amit Shah said in the Rajya Sabha on Tuesday December 9, 2025, as he slammed Opposition for linking the debate on 150 years of the national song with the upcoming West Bengal elections.

Initiating the debate in the House, Shah said Vande Mataram was the "mantra" that awakened India's cultural nationalism, and remains as relevant today as it was during the freedom struggle.

He stressed that the song will remain relevant in the days to come as well, in taking the country towards Viksit Bharat.

Shah also attacked Congress for questioning the need for a debate on Vande Mataram, and accused first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru of "dividing" the poem and limiting it to two stanzas.

"Recently some MPs in the Lok Sabha questioned what is the need to discuss Vande Mataram. The need for discussion...was as relevant when the song was written, during the freedom movement, today, and will be as relevant in 2047 when the Viksit Bharat would be achieved," Shah said.

"Some people are saying Vande Mataram is being discussed because elections are coming in West Bengal... They are trying to reduce the



importance of Vande Mataram by linking it with Bengal elections," he said.

The home minister urged members to take the spirit of the message of Vande Mataram to the youth of the nation.

He said the song was written by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay in Bengal, but it spread across the nation, and became the chant for India's freedom struggle.

The home minister said the song was written years after India tolerated "Islamic attacks", and the British tried to impose a new culture on the country. "The song reestablished the culture of witnessing nation as a mother. Even though the (British) government tried to ban it, and people were beaten and jailed for chanting Vande Mataram, it touched people's hearts and spread from Kashmir to

Kanyakumari," he said.

That is why Maharshi Aurobindo said Vande Mataram is the mantra of India's awakening.

"India is the only nation whose boundaries have not been decided by any act, its borders have been decided by our culture, and culture has united it. That is why the idea of cultural nationalism, this cultural nationalism was awakened by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay," Shah added.

He also accused the Congress and Nehru of 'dividing' the song.

"Many members of Congress questioned why the discussion on Vande Mataram was required, calling it a diversionary tactic. We are not scared of taking up any debate. We do not stall Parliament, we have nothing to hide, we are ready to discuss any issue," Shah said.

Simplification Of Customs Will Be Next Big Reform, Says Finance Minister

“We need a complete overhaul of customs we need to have customs simplified for people to feel that it is not cumbersome to comply need to make it more transparent,” Sitharaman said

A head of Budget 2026, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday Decemver 6 , 2025 said the simplification of customs would be the next big reform agenda for the government. During the current financial year, the government undertook reforms such as rate rationalisation and simplification of the income tax and Goods and Services Tax (GST) in a bid to boost consumption by providing more cash in the hands of the common man.

“We need a complete overhaul of customs... we need to have customs simplified for people to feel that it is not cumbersome to comply... need to make it more transparent,” Sitharaman said while speaking at the HT Leadership Summit here. There is a need to bring the virtues of income tax to the customs side in terms of transparency, she said, adding that the proposed reforms will be comprehensive and entail customs duty rate rationalisation.

The announcements to this effect can be made in the upcoming Budget, like-



“We have brought down customs duty over the last two years steadily. But in those few items where our rates are considered to be over the optimal level, we have to bring them down as well. Customs is my next big cleaning-up assignment,” she said.

ly to be presented on February 1.

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next big cleaning-up assignment,” she said.

In this year’s Budget, among other measures announced, the government proposed eliminating seven additional customs tariff rates on industrial goods, following the removal of seven tariffs in 2023-24 (announced in the previous budget speech on July 23, 2024). This reduces the total number of tariff

slabs to eight, including a zero rate.

On the depreciating rupee against the dollar, Sitharaman said, it will find its natural level.

The rupee has depreciated about 5 per cent against the US dollar during the calendar year 2025.

The rupee breached the 90-a-dollar level for the first time to settle at a fresh all-time low of 90.21 (provisional) on Wednesday, down 25 paise from its previous close, amid sustained foreign fund outflows and higher crude oil prices.

Sitharaman exuded confidence that the GDP growth would be 7 per cent or above during the current financial year.

The Indian economy grew by a higher-than-expected 8.2 per cent — a six-quarter high — as increased factory production in anticipation of a consumption boost from the GST rate cut helped offset deceleration in farm output.

The growth in the second quarter, compared with 7.8 per cent in the preceding three months and 5.6 per cent in the year-ago period, was aided by a strong showing from the services sector, which clocked double-digit growth.

For the first half ended in September, India clocked a growth rate of 8 per cent.

‘Warm and engaging atmosphere reigned’, Shashi Tharoor on Putin banquet

“Tharoor’s remarks came a day after President Droupadi Murmu hosted a banquet for the visiting Russian president at the Rashtrapati Bhavan here.



Shashi Tharoor calls Rashtrapati Bhavan banquet for Putin warm, engaging amid Congress dissent over invite

Senior Congress leader Shashi Tharoor, who on Friday December 5, 2025 attended a banquet for Russian President Vladimir Putin at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, on Saturday December 6, 2025 described the atmosphere there as “warm” and “engaging”, and

said he enjoyed his conversations with many of the attendees.

Tharoor’s remarks came a day after President Droupadi Murmu hosted a banquet for the visiting Russian president at the Rashtrapati Bhavan here.

“Attended the @rashtrap-

atibhvn banquet for President Putin last night. A warm and engaging atmosphere reigned. Enjoyed my conversations with many of the attendees, especially my dining companions from the Russian delegation!" Tharoor said in a social media post.

Murmu, while welcoming President Putin and his delegation at the banquet, had said that his visit marked an important milestone — the 25th anniversary of the India-Russia strategic partnership, which was established in October 2000 during his first visit to the country as president.

Murmu also appreciated Putin's support and personal commitment to the India-Russia special and privileged strategic partnership.

The Congress on Friday said that the leaders of the opposition, Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi, were not invited to the banquet, and took a swipe at Tharoor for accepting the invite.

The party's media and publicity department head, Pawan Khera, accused the government of breaking protocols daily and not believing in democratic principles.

"There is no invite to both the LoPs, Mr (Mallikarjun) Kharge and Mr (Rahul) Gandhi. This comes as a surprise, but I don't think we should be surprised. This government is known to be breaching all protocols. What else to say, ask the government," Khera said on Friday December 5, 2025

Asked about Tharoor

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accepting the invite for the banquet, Khera said, "Ask Mr Tharoor. All of us who are in the party, if our leaders don't get invited and we get invited, we need to question our own conscience and listen to our conscience. Politics has been played in inviting or not inviting people, which in itself is questionable, and those who accept such an invite are also questionable."

"We would have listened to our voice of conscience," he added.

Earlier, Tharoor had said that there was a time when the chairman of the external affairs committee was routinely invited, but that practice seems to have stopped some years ago.

On Thursday, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi alleged that the government tells visiting foreign dignitaries not to meet the leader of opposition due to its "insecurity".

His remarks came hours ahead of Putin's two-day visit to India.

'ICE cannot enter homes without a warrant, resist them openly' Mamdani speaks out in support of immigrants

New York's newly elected Mayor, Jumaane Williams, has released a video on immigrants' rights. He stated that New York City's 3 million immigrants have the legal right to refuse to speak to ICE agents, film them, and deny them entry into private spaces without a warrant.

New York City's newly elected Mayor Jumaane Williams has posted a video on social media to educate the city's immigrant residents about their rights.

In the video, released days after raids conducted by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents in Manhattan, Williams attempts to explain to immigrants that they can refuse to speak to or comply with the instructions of US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents.

He said that people in the US have the option to refuse to speak to federal immigration agents, film them without interference, and deny their requests to enter private spaces. Williams stated unequivocally that ICE agents cannot enter a private area of a home, school, or workplace without a judicial warrant signed by a judge.

It is worth mentioning that Williams recently won the



New York's newly elected Mayor Williams said that immigrants can say 'no' to ICE if they choose

election for Mayor of New York City. Williams is known for his advocacy of social justice and immigrant rights. In his election campaign, he prioritised the protection of the immigrant community, social equality, and just policies.

He will assume the office of Mayor on January 1, 2026.

Let us inform you that Eric Trump, son of US President Donald Trump, launched a scathing attack on New York's newly elected mayor, Zohran Mamdani. He claimed that Mamdani hates the community and is pushing a socialist communist agenda.

During an interview with Fox News, Trump Jr. called

Mamdani "a socialist communist" who "wants to nationalise grocery stores, wants to arrest Netanyahu, hates Jewish people, and hates the Indian population."

He insisted that Mamdani should focus on basics like "safe streets, clean streets, and reasonable taxes," and suggested that the city could thrive "without government intervention."

Donald Trump Jr. attacked New York's newly elected mayor, Zohran Mamdani, claiming he "hates the Indian population" and calling him a "socialist communist." Mamdani has already dismissed the Trump family's personal attacks.

A 'Cat And Mouse' Game On In Maha As BJP's Allies Are Getting Sidelined



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Deputy CMs Eknath Shinde, who heads the Shiv Sena, and Ajit Pawar, who leads the NCP, are in one sense in office but not in power, which is virtually enjoyed by chief minister Devendra Fadnavis of the BJP.

Sunil Gatade | The writer is a senior journalist based in New Delhi.

Shinde and Pawar are virtually at the mercy of the BJP, which proclaims itself to be the world's largest party. The party is feverishly widening its footprint under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and home minister Amit Shah, and insisting that everything is fair in politics and elections

The Bollywood song "Matlab nikal gaya hai to pahachante nahi" perfectly captures the issues and predicament of the ruling BJP's allies in Maharashtra, who are increasingly being marginalised in the premier state.

Deputy CMs Eknath Shinde, who heads the Shiv Sena, and Ajit Pawar, who leads the NCP, are in one sense in office but not in power, which is virtually enjoyed by chief minister Devendra Fadnavis of the BJP.

The "Mahayuti", as the ruling front in the state is called, is like a picture produced and directed by the BJP, which plays the protagonist too. All others are side actors, or extras. It depends upon the angle you look at them.

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the world's largest party. The party is feverishly widening its footprint under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and home minister Amit Shah, and insisting that everything is fair in politics and elections.

Their predicament is coming sharply to the fore ahead of the civic elections, dubbed the mini-Assembly polls, expected in the New Year. The BJP is turning the elections into a golden opportunity to cut the allies down to size.

The tragedy is that neither Shinde nor Pawar could do anything about it. They have to "just grin and bear it" if they do not want to attract the wrath of the "big brother".



At such a critical time, Mr Fadnavis has struck a severe blow at Shinde by ensuring the appointment of his close associate Ravindra Chavan as state BJP chief. Chavan hails from Thane, Shinde's home turf, and is thereby creating trouble there, much to the bewilderment of the deputy CM. Added to this is the fact that local BJP leader Ganesh Naik, a known detractor of Mr Shinde, has been made proactive ahead of the civic polls.

Another worry for Shinde is the BJP is poaching leaders from his party who could make the difference in the civic polls. His protests have fallen on deaf ears.

In the coastal Konkan

region, there is one-upmanship between the Sena and the BJP over the number of nominations for the polls and has obviously led to rivalries at the local level. Konkan has remained a bastion of the undivided Shiv Sena, as has the megapolis of Mumbai.

The undivided Shiv Sena had been ruling over the resource-rich Municipal Corporation of Mumbai for some 25 years. In the changed situation, the BJP wants to be in the driver's seat there, much to the consternation of Shinde and his party.

Shinde is unsure about how many seats the BJP would be allotting him in Mumbai and in the Konkan region, as well as in pockets of Marathwada and Western Maharashtra where the Shiv Sena has some presence.

The verdict in last year's Assembly elections has altered the political scenario of the state drastically. The BJP has been in a dominant position, with over 130 seats in the 288-member House, where 145 is the magic number. Since it is at a striking distance of a majority, the BJP does not really need the support of either Shinde or Pawar.

Shinde's party had won 57 seats in the polls, one more than the undivided Shiv Sena in the 2019 polls. Ajit Pawar's party secured 41 seats.

The mandate in Maharashtra is such that the entire Opposition, including Shiv Sena led by Uddhav Thackeray, the NCP led by Sharad Pawar and the Congress have together been restricted to 50-odd seats.

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With Ajit Pawar's son Parth embroiled in Pune's Rs 400-crore Mundhwa land scam, the BJP is soft-peddalling the issue to ensure the deputy CM's virtual silence. The alleged corruption to the tune of Rs 70,000 crores during his earlier tenures as deputy CM is the baggage he carries. This neutralises him, which is good for Fadnavis and the BJP high command.

The greater tragedy is that of Shinde, who was demoted as deputy CM after being CM for nearly two and a half years, till the last Assembly polls a year ago. It is a double whammy for Shinde, who considered Amt Shah as his mentor at the Centre and was obviously playing on the BJP's side. Shinde now finds himself in a blind alley.

Therefore, the BJP's agenda is to marginalise the allies to the extent possible. Union home minister Amit Shah's blunt statement sometime back that the BJP does not want to depend on "crutches" in Maharashtra is to tell Mr Shinde and Mr Pawar that they are dispensable, sooner rather than later. Needless to say, Maharashtra's ruling coalition is witnessing a "cat and mouse game", in which the BJP is constantly pursuing Ekanth Shinde and Ajit Pawar, who are trying to avoid being marginalised with one trick or another to live another day.

With the BJP being the "big cat", it has the time, leisure

and strategy as to when to go for the final hunt. In politics, timing is important, and the BJP does not seem to be in a hurry. The aim of the BJP is to fight the next Assembly polls scheduled in 2029 on its own.

Till then, it is playtime in Maharashtra. With Shinde and Ajit Pawar ready to fight the civic polls under the banner of the Mahayuti, it is politically imprudent for the BJP to play the tune of "going it alone" in the polls. The immediate aim is to keep the allies in check. It goes without saying that for the moment, both Ekanth Shinde and Ajit Pawar want to be "good and obedient" allies.

How The Ayodhya Frenzy By Advani Transformed India, Put BJP In Power



When Lal Krishna Advani took charge in 1986, he had never been a participant in electoral politics. His entry into politics came after time spent as a journalist in the RSS magazine, where he wrote film reviews.

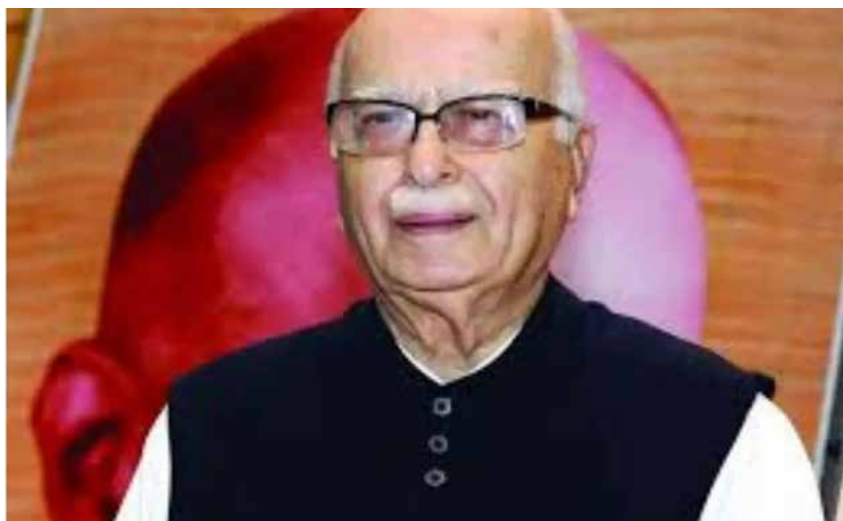
● **Aakar Patel** | The writer is the chair of Amnesty International India.

In February 1989, at the Kumbh Mela in Allahabad, the VHP said it would lay the foundation stone for the temple in November. This would involve the making of bricks across the country with Ram's name embossed on them and their being carried in processions through towns and villages to Ayodhya in November.

On yet another December 6, one feels obliged to write about the most seminal movement in modern India and one that transformed our politics forever. Forty years ago, the BJP had plateaued, winning seven per cent of the vote in 1984 and only two Lok Sabha seats.

When Lal Krishna Advani took charge in 1986, he had never been a participant in electoral politics. His entry into politics came after time spent as a journalist in the RSS magazine, where he wrote film reviews.

As a politician, Advani had always served as a nominated member, whether in the Delhi Council or in the Rajya Sabha. He had no experience of political mass mobilisation and, going by his autobiography (*My Country, My Life*, published 2008), does not appear to know how it worked. The Ayodhya issue had actually been



Till this time, Mr Advani wrote in his autobiography, it was not an issue in mainstream politics. In June 1989, at the BJP's national executive meeting in Himachal Pradesh, Mr Advani threw the party behind the issue. The BJP resolution demanded that the site "should be handed over to the Hindus" and "the mosque built at some other suitable place". — Internet

launched by non-political groups inside the RSS, led by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad.

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autobiography, it was not an issue in mainstream politics. In June 1989, at the BJP's national executive meeting in Himachal Pradesh, Mr Advani threw the party behind the issue. The BJP resolution demanded that the site "should be handed over to the Hindus" and "the mosque built at some other suitable place".

General elections came a few months later, in November 1989. The BJP's manifesto made its first reference to Ayodhya:

"By not allowing the rebuilding of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, on the lines of Somnath Mandir built by the Government of India in 1948, it has allowed tensions to rise, and gravely strained social harmony." It was a violation of the BJP's own constitution, which on its first page and opening articles pledged it would bear true faith and allegiance to the principle of secularism. A few days before voting, the VHP brought all its processions from across India to Ayodhya and laid the foundation stone next to the mosque. Powered by its divisive, anti-Muslim demand, Mr Advani's BJP won 85 seats, four times as many as the Jan Sangh in the last election it contested alone and more than 40 times as many as Atal Behari Vajpayee had delivered in 1984. Mr Advani became the most successful RSS political leader, and found the recipe for electoral success.

He began to invest more in the issue that brought the dividend. The Congress lost its majority in the election, and a coalition led by V.P. Singh took power with support from Advani, though for only a short period. Three months after the election, in February 1990, the VHP resumed its mobilisation against the mosque and said it would continue the process of what it called "kar seva" from October. This political escalation, according to Advani, was by accident. He wrote in his autobiography that in June he was to visit London, and just before that he was interviewed by the RSS journal Panchajanya and asked what would happen if the government failed to resolve

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"Frankly, I had forgotten about this interview," Advani wrote, when his wife telephoned him and asked: "What have you said? The papers here have reported it with blaring headlines: 'On Ayodhya, Advani threatens the biggest mass movement in the history of independent India'." Advani added: "The die had been cast." After this, he says he offered the Muslims a deal. If they would hand over the Babri Masjid, he would "personally request" the VHP to not campaign against two other mosques in Mathura and Varanasi. He writes that he was "deeply disappointed" and "annoyed" that this was not considered to be satisfactory by the Muslims. He announced he would begin his campaign against the mosque on Deendayal Upadhyaya's birthday, September 25, in Gujarat, and ride a "chariot" (actually a truck) to Ayodhya on October 30, 1990.

the Ayodhya matter. Advani said the BJP supported the decision to begin kar seva on October 30, and if it was stopped there would be a mass movement led by the BJP.

Lal Krishna Advani writes that he was astonished by the frenzied response his campaign received. "I had never realised that religiosity was so deep-rooted in the lives of the Indian people," he said, adding it was the "first time he understood the truth of Swami Vivekananda's statement that 'religion is the soul of India and if you want to teach any subject

to Indians, they understand it better in the language of religion'." At each stop along the way Mr Advani talked about why the Babri Masjid had to be taken down, using the vocabulary and metaphors of religion, in basic speeches that he says were no more than five minutes long. The reduction can only be imagined; the consequence was predictable. The scale of the violence unleashed by Advani's decision to politicise a communal issue and mobilise on it was staggering in both the numbers killed and the geographical spread.

#The New Normal



There is no such thing as a situationship; only relationships whose capacity to manifest multiple forms, defies all norms, timidities, labels and laws

● **Paromita Vohra** | Paromita Vohra is an award-winning Mumbai-based filmmaker, writer and curator working with fiction and non-fiction

It's a sweet-sad feeling to sit here in a cool dawn writing the last Paronormal Activity for this news Magazine.

Goodbyes are hard. But goodbyes are truthful. When we take the time to say goodbye, we say there was love between us. We are not ghosting each other, because whatever the intimacies we shared, whatever their shape and valence, whether gossamer and shimmering with the unspoken, whether stated, routine and taken-for-granted (or both, as our column relationship has been), their meaning will go with us as we go our way. There is no such thing as a situationship; only relationships whose capacity to manifest multiple forms, defies all norms, timidities, labels and laws.

For me, this form of the short, weekly, tabloid column, was a marvelous thing. It was a space that refused the pompous certitudes of venerable, respectable, self-serious spaces. It was a place to be playful and serious at the same time, week after week, bole toh, a complete person. I tended it as a windowsill garden without hierarchies of what ought or ought not to be written about, and therefore what or who, is and isn't worth valuing.

A place where I could talk



about literature, lauki, Kangana, KJo, ASHA workers, politics, poetry, elusive darzis, libraries, love letters, Bigg Boss, trees, telephones, roza-pop, mutton curry in Madurai, lilies in Kathmandu, being scolded by older feminists, being a useless character, inequality, equality, drinking alone, eating together, Bombay experiencing winter, the fragility of waiting and of course, over and over, Shahrukh Khan, with the same attention.

The attention to life. The attention to a poetic politics. The allegiance to only one motto — #BoreMatKarYaar.

Writing is often presented as a fraught and tortured enterprise. If writing is seen as an event (THE book of the year vaghera) maybe. But in this act of writing week after week and the response of your reading, was the particular gleam and

freedom of a committed relationship. The artistic humility of practice. And so, even on days it was hard, even on days when I felt bored, writing was ultimately joyful, pleasurable and most of all — possible.

Ah possibility. What else is politics but the belief that things are possible? Especially those things the world gloomily says, ki boss, impossible hai. Yeh sab nahin chalta. Nowadays people tell you it is not possible or advisable to be many things. People won't be able to slot you (what a paltry dream to have, no matter how well paid), so write about only one topic for maximum success. Why is your Instagram grid so random? But all your weekly comments, and letters, the way some of you who saw me someplace, sometimes yelled out "Yaniki!" proved that those lectures are just bekar authoritarian BS. There are many kinds of writers and many kinds of readers. Everybody's somebody's baby. And for a good while, I was yours. In this new normal, I know you will miss the paronormal. What a beautiful confidence you gave me to believe that. But frenz, the roads are winding, the magic is in finding each other. Yaniki, phir milenge, kahin aur. Ok? Ok.

Media in the time of Modi



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It's a wonder this column survived in an era when freedom of the press is no longer guaranteed, and owners, fearing raids and cases, often rein in the few feisty journalists who are still doing their job

Ajaz Ashraf | The writer is a senior journalist and author of *Bhima Koregaon*

It's tempting to write an obituary of Monday Blues, which will gasp for breath one last time, and then die, unceremoniously and unlamented, as soon as you finish reading today its last instalment. I will, however, confine myself to crediting mid-day for mostly allowing me to freely articulate my opinions, including even those that are anathema to the ruling regime, which smells and sifts media outputs with the diligence and ferocity of a watchdog. Not your fault in case you think I'm being ironical.

Journalist friends would ask, "How come you are allowed to write what you do?" Surprising as this question is in a democracy, I'd be reminded of American journalist AJ Liebling, who famously said, "Freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one." The owners, indeed, decide the extent of freedom journalists working for him/her should enjoy. I've enjoyed utmost freedom to date.

Yet, ever since Prime Minister Narendra Modi swept to power, in May 2014, the freedom of the press is no longer guaranteed to even owners. Ask Anuradha Bhasin and



A few thought-provoking Monday Blues columns that ignited meaningful conversations

Prabodh Jamwal, the wife-husband duo who owns and edits the Kashmir Times, which had its life taken out, bit by bit, by denying it government advertisements. The newspaper shut down before it was reinvented, in 2023, as a small digital operation, which attracts around 52,000 visitors daily.

Decidedly a media bee, in contrast to the behemoths of the fourth estate, the Kashmir Times buzzed against the excesses and mistakes routinely commit-

ted in Kashmir, goading the State into raiding its shuttered Jammu office and discovering, incredibly, arms and ammunition stored there. The raid was conducted to investigate charges clubbed under the category of anti-national activities. The State has lassoed yet another watchdog of democracy, an honorific befitting the Kashmir Times, for treatment the Supreme Court has reserved for the strays. The methods of silencing independent media

voices are limitless.

Although owners themselves, the freedom of the press couldn't be Bhasin and Jamwal's because they also happen to be feisty journalists, now an increasingly endangered tribe. Most owners are businesspersons, who censor their journalists, blanking out news. They fall in line because they fear raids and tax evasion cases, although their silence earns them revenue through advertisements the government gives them. At least in their cases, the government, with its enormous powers, can be partly blamed for breaking the media's nib.

This can't be an excuse for corporate giants, for they have entered the media to influence policies and for salvaging their reputation that's sullied because of being the beneficiaries of crony capitalism. Compromising media freedom is a necessary precondition for acquiring power and pelf. It's inevitable they'd spin the ruling party's unethical conduct, as in the recent Bihar elections, as a masterstroke.

Fear and greed apart, ideology, too, has turned the media into becoming the government's voice, an aspect that came across in Modi's speech in the sixth Ramnath Goenka Lecture. He hailed Goenka, the founder of the Indian Express Group, for his courage in opposing the British and then, decades later, Indira Gandhi during the Emergency. But he also, in

the same breath, vividly described Goenka's proximity to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, the previous incarnate of the Bharatiya Janata Party, which won him a Lok Sabha election on its ticket. Modi, in a way, affirmed that Goenka's opposition to Mrs Gandhi was as much about fighting for press freedom as it was about bolstering Hindutva.

A large segment of owners of legacy media belongs to a social group that has traditionally patronised the RSS and its Hindutva ideology. Torn between the demand for journalistic objectivity and their ideological inclination, much of the media resembles the trapeze artist engaged in a torturous balancing act. The tension of this conflict shows: Articles mildly critical of Modi are offset by a barrage of Page one headlines on even his most hackneyed comments, and a slew of pieces extolling his genius.

Affinity to Congress ide-

ology was also a media feature during its decades of dominance. It, too, made media owners legislators. Worse, the Nehru government introduced a clause on "reasonable restrictions" in Article 19, in a misguided reaction to fiery criticism from the *Organiser*, a Sangh mouthpiece, and Romesh Thapar's *Cross Roads*, a left-wing publication. Yet the party's inherent liberalism, often compromised but never effaced, restrained it from compelling the entire media to become its cheerleaders. The Congress government, in the 1960s, gave advertisements to even the *Organiser*, as Abhishek Choudhary points out in his biography of AB Vajpayee.

It is no surprise that a large number of journalists have quit TV channels and floated their YouTube channels in recent times. Journalism, without fear or favour, is largely practised in the digital space, strapped though they are for funds, having to rely on donations. They, too, have experienced the government's sharp edge, with the deepest cut inflicted on NewsClick, whose more than 80 employees and contributors were raided one morning in 2023. In this gloomy ambience, it's a miracle that Monday Blues lived for six years — an apt epitaph for this column, which bids, with its last breath, goodbye.

SANJAYOVACHA | The Growth Leap Needed To Reach 'Viksit Bharat'



The policy challenge is to take the growth trajectory upwards by one and a half percentage points. This is not as easy as it sounds

● **Sanjaya Baru** | Sanjaya Baru is a writer and an economist. His most recent book is *Secession of the Successful: The Flight Out of New India*

Delivering the Fourth B.P.R. Vithal Memorial Lecture last week, at Hyderabad's Centre for Economic and Social Studies (CESS), the former deputy chairman of the now-defunct Planning Commission, Montek Singh Ahluwalia, posed the challenge of attaining Viksit Bharat in stark terms. The average rate of growth of the Indian economy over the past quarter century, Mr Ahluwalia reminded us, has been around 6.5 per cent per annum. For India to be considered a developed economy by 2047, "Viksit" as the Narendra Modi government puts it, the annual average rate of national income growth would have to be 8.0 per cent over the next two decades.

The policy challenge is to take the growth trajectory upwards by one and a half percentage points. This is not as easy as it sounds. The 6.5 per cent average of the past quarter century is a product of over 8.0 per cent growth in some years (especially over the first term of the Manmohan Singh government) and 5.0 per cent in some other years, especially in the post-demonetisation



The average rate of growth of the Indian economy over the past quarter century, Mr Ahluwalia reminded us, has been around 6.5 per cent per annum. For India to be considered a developed economy by 2047, "Viksit" as the Narendra Modi government puts it, the annual average rate of national income growth would have to be 8.0 per cent over the next two decades. — Internet

and post-Covid lockdown years.

So, if the economy has to notch up an average of 8.0 per cent over the next two decades it would have to have growth spurts of at least 10.0 per cent in a few of those years to compensate for years in which growth may be less than 8.0 per cent. This is a humongous

task. If the rest of India can grow as fast as states like Telangana and Tamil Nadu have in recent years, only then can India hope to be "Viksit" by 2047. Immediately after the Covid-19 pandemic I had published a collection of essays by prominent economists titled *Beyond Covid's Shadow: Mapping India's Economic*

Resurgence (Rupa Publications, 2021). In writing my own essay for this collection I asked my Twitter followers and well-known economists, some working in the Narendra Modi government, to give me their subjective forecast of how they thought the economy would perform in the period 2020-2030. My Twitter followers and the professional economists were both divided in their estimates. 29 per cent of my Twitter followers felt that the economy would grow only by four per cent (an excessively gloomy view), 16 per cent said five per cent and another 16 per cent said six per cent. An optimistic 39 per cent forecast a growth rate of seven per cent.

As for the professional economists, their forecasts ranged between a pessimistic 3.5 per cent and an optimistic 6.5 per cent. As I have already mentioned, my sample of economists included prominent members of the Modi government's policy-making establishment. A couple of them forecast a 6.0 per cent growth rate and a couple said 6.5. Five years after Covid-19, given the creditable pick-up in growth, it is now clear that an annual average rate of economic growth of 6.5 per cent is probably the long-term average for the economy. The "new normal", as economists would say.

Much of the post-Covid growth has so far been driven by public investment and government spending. Going forward, the private sector has to step up to the challenge.

It is still not clear if the "animal spirits" of private enterprise, unleashed in the 1990s and which drove the growth

spurt of that decade, have once again been stimulated or not. Remember the fact that in the period 1950 to 1980 the Indian economy grew at an annual average of 3.5 per cent.

This number moved up to 5.5 per cent in 1980-2000. While the economy did grow at around 8.0 per cent in 2003-2020, the long-term average for the quarter century 2000-2025 is 6.5 per cent.

The spurt in the period 1980-2000 came from a significant improvement in the performance of the services and manufacturing sectors. Together they contributed to an increase in the share of foreign trade in national income and to a sharp rise in India's share of world trade.

This growth process was driven by an increase in both the savings and investment rates. The momentum gained during the decade 1991-2001 sustained the 8.0 per cent growth rates of the first decade of the twenty-first century. It was this spurt that triggered worldwide interest in India's rise. Most of the books written by international relations scholars with titles such as *India Rising*, *India: The Emerging Giant*, and so on were conceptualised and written in that period. Even longstanding India-sceptics like Singapore's founder Lee Kuan Yew recognised that India was now on a new growth trajectory. Lee suggested that the Asian "jet plane" would rise in the 21st century powered by two engines -- China and India.

Yet, over the past two decades, after the trans-Atlantic financial crisis of 2008-09, the Chinese engine powered forward at a rapid pace while the

Indian engine has chugged along in spurts. India's slowdown has contributed to a re-examination of its global standing and status, especially in relation to China.

To be able to regain the image of a rising power, the Indian economy must improve its pace of growth. However, this is easier said than done. First, the global geo-economic environment has become less supportive compared to the first decade of the 21st century.

Through the 1990s and till 2015 or so, India's exports did very well and powered the growth engines. Both domestic and global demand for Indian goods and services have now slowed down. Second, the so-called "animal spirits" of private enterprise that spurred the growth process after 1991 have remained markedly subdued in recent years despite the talk about improving the "ease of business" at home.

In a belated recognition of this ground reality, the Union government has accelerated policy liberalisation. However, two pre-conditions have to be met for the private sector to respond. First, domestic demand has to perk up. Second, the "ease of business" has to be felt in day-to-day experience. Above all, the country's political leadership must give up the pretence that all is well and focus on a multi-pronged strategy to accelerate economic growth while improving income distribution, fiscal management and, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi promised in his Independence Day speech of 2024, the "ease of living".

A gratitude-filled farewell



As I bid goodbye to you, dear reader, I joyfully surrender a textual body that thrived over nearly 10 years to the dictates of fate in the hope that it may either ferment or take root

● **Rosalyn D'Mello** | Deliberating on the life and times of every woman, Rosalyn D'Mello is a reputable art critic and the author of *A Handbook For My Lover*.

For many years, I mistook delay for procrastination. This impacted how I interpreted the set of behaviours that are central to my creativity. For instance, when I had a deadline coming up for a commissioned story, the spontaneous and sudden need to clean my entire apartment seemed like an inconvenience. Why was I insisting on wasting time? Until, at some point, I accepted that the act of cleaning was linked to my brain's thinking process. By de-cluttering my living space, I was creating room for my thoughts to wander freely, to stumble upon ideas, to arrive at precision, to hone my sentences. I learned that writing isn't always about strapping oneself to a chair and desk; it is entangled with living and involves the kind of maintenance that is synonymous with housekeeping. I wasn't procrastinating by going for a walk. I was fuelling the neural connections between hand, head, and heart so that the words could drip more easily from my tongue. Embracing the distinction between delay and procrastination has helped me feel more attuned to my practice as both a creator and a receiver of art. I eventually understood that I had to learn to lean into the feeling of being



'ready' in order to enable the miracle — because art making is transcendence.

For months, I've lived in the limbo of unknowing. I last left the cast of *The Bear* on the cliffhanger of season three. I felt alone in my deep appreciation for the entire season. The general critical and popular consensus was that the season felt frustrating for viewers because there was so little plot advancement. It was a cinematic equivalent of the same day and mood repeating itself, even though it looked different, or the menu changed constantly, as did many other variables in the form of milestones, like birth, death, or separation. I couldn't relate to most reviewers' critique of the show because to me, it felt like every second echoed a perfect synthesis between form and

content. Some episodes felt like bravely standalone character sketches. There were moments of utter beauty, when someone cooked a meal out of love, not to prove anything to anyone. Do you see, dear reader, how hard I am trying to talk about this show without offering too many spoilers, in case you feel inclined to watch it too? I felt a certain kind of ecstasy watching the show because of how layered the narrative is, how cinematically engrossing it is, and how attuned it is to its characters' internal worlds. For all these reasons, I felt both keen and afraid to watch season four, which was released earlier this year. I wanted to feel ready to receive it, and I continue to watch it as if it were a delicate and elaborate 10-course meal — pausing to

digest each episode, returning to a flavour, deconstructing its structure.

Each time I watch an episode and read reviews online, I unearth so much about our consumption patterns, as a culture. I feel like the capacity to 'binge-watch' has fundamentally altered how we receive art and what we expect from it. Ten years ago, we were sure we were in the golden era of television, but the gradual abundance of streaming platforms killed that buzz. I found, universally, that stories stopped having nuances and plots became predictable. Most shows feel like endorsements of high fashion. You don't often get the sense of anything laboured. I also find that the way we talk about shows has changed, because we don't sit with scenes; we consume television like popcorn, somewhat mindlessly, not allowing for too much recall.

Especially because, as a second-time mother and a full-time editor, time feels like a limited resource, I've completely stopped bingeing in any form and frequently remind myself of the word's inherently negative connotations. It is an anti-consumerist decision, and adhering to it has enriched the quality of my pleasure as a reader and a viewer. It has also made me think more concertedly about how time gets imprinted within our bodies in direct relation to the attentiveness with which we allow the world to enter into our bloodstreams. Who we are is both cellular and ceaselessly transient, especially

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when we choose to make space for art in our lives.

On Monday morning, when I arrived in Bozen for my meeting with the new dean of our faculty, I chanced upon this quote by Sara Ahmed on the window of a women's co-operative: 'A book tends to fall open on the pages that have been most read...' It elevated my day, because I had been thinking about how our bodies not just carry time but are time itself, and I began to wonder about the weight and material properties of words, and how a collection of words forms a textual body that is also, somehow, an embodiment of time. I wrote my first column for mid-day in January 2016. I was 30. I'm 40 now, and while

considering this, my last dispatch, I felt awed by the notion that in letting go of this space, I was being compelled to plant both my feet on South Tyrolean ground. Even as I mourn the loss of you, my audience, who have followed me through my ecstasies and my traumas, it is with an effusive joy that I surrender this colossal 10-year archive to the dictates of fate in the hope that it may either ferment or take root and embrace how time acts upon it alongside bacterial mediation. I have loved every second of writing to you, for you and with you, and I entrust you with my colossal, monumental gratitude, as well as a small prayer that you keep me in mind.