

OUR OPINION, THEIR OPINION

“Do one thing every day that scares you.”
Eleanor Roosevelt

Digging Own Grave

The hunger for so called development in the guise of industrialisation and urbanisation is not only resulting in the curse of deforestation but also reducing the power of tropical rainforestss- carbon which fights against the forces of climate change and global warming. Surprising to notice that modern human being are not only empowering the causes of climate change but also weakening the natural elements that fight against climate change.New research has found that tropical rainforests - carbon sinks that mitigate the impact of emissions and are considered bulwarks against climate change - are turning into net emitters. A study published in Nature by scientists in Australia has reported that trees have started to become a net source of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. This shift, which has been traced to climate change, shows that the capacity of woody biomass to absorb carbon is at risk. Rising tree mortality caused by extreme temperatures and atmospheric dryness appears to be driving this change. More trees die in the forests because of climate change than are born. These findings carry global import because they indicate that forests, unable to cope with the warming, are becoming ineffective as shields against climate change. Tropical rainforests are diverse ecosystems that exist across continents. They have played a significant role in countering climate change and helped regulate weather in proximate areas, apart from functioning as a critical environmental safeguard. The physical extent of forests and their quality have been declining. In the recently released 2025 Forest Declaration Assessment report, it has been noted that 8.1 million hectares of forest were lost in 2024. According to the report, the level of destruction is 63% higher than the trajectory required to halt deforestation by 2030, a target set during the COP26 climate negotiations in Glasgow, four years ago. The expansion of commercial agriculture has been cited as one of the main reasons for this high level of destruction. Major targets have been set for forest restoration. If reports on progress made are any indication, the pledges made by many countries, including India, to restore large tracts of forests will not be fulfilled. The findings from Australia show that the situation is worse than predicted. The researchers have found that the current models may have overestimated the capacity of tropical rainforests to help offset fossil fuel emissions. They have noted that cyclones suppress the carbon sink capacity of woody biomass in these forests and that is a cause for concern because cyclones are expected to become more severe under climate change. The study is based on five decades of data collected from Australian forests and the scientists have said that the findings could be "a sort of canary in the coal mine". While research on forests in other parts of the world needs to draw on this fresh perspective, the findings certainly make a case for stronger and more focused efforts to counter climate change.

A new era of strongman rulers is upon us

As Presidents Trump and Xi meet in South Korea, the world hopes for calm between the two powers. But their shared strongman style — unchecked, impulsive, and personal — may deepen global volatility instead of easing it

When President Trump and President Xi Jinping of China meet this week, the world will be watching to see if they can lock in a framework trade agreement and finally restore a sense of lasting stability and predictability to the world’s most consequential relationship.

Don’t count on it. Whatever rhetoric or handshake deals come out of their planned encounter at a regional summit in South Korea, they are unlikely to signify more than a momentary truce between two leaders unchecked by domestic or institutional constraints and free to change course on a whim.

Welcome to the new strongman era.

If the world seems on edge these days, with alliances fraying, violent conflicts emerging, and volatility as the order of the day, there’s a reason. These are the early shocks of a world being shaped by leaders who govern by personal will instead of rules and consensus.

Leaders like these are rising all over the globe — Nayib Bukele in El Salvador, Kais Saied in Tunisia and Viktor Orban in Hungary, along with well-established authoritarians such as Vladimir Putin of Russia and Kim Jong-un of North Korea.

And now, for the first time in the US-China relationship, the two countries are being led by men with similar political styles. The consequences, at least for the next four years, are likely to be profound: more risk-taking, volatility and potential for miscalculation and conflict.

Trump and Xi, and the nations they lead, differ in myriad ways. Yet both men have sought to bend their political systems to their will. Trump has hijacked the Republican Party and made it into a personal political vehicle. Xi asserts a degree of control over China that Mao would have envied.

Their lack of domestic constraints gives them great latitude for deal-making, but it also makes any potential agreements flimsy and subject to change. Strongmen can be unreliable international partners. Surrounded by loyalists and weakened restraints on their power, they face few domestic consequences for renegeing on promises or abruptly changing

course. We’ve seen this already from the two presidents: The Trump administration accuses China of failing to honor trade pledges made during Trump’s first term; and Trump himself has repeatedly announced tariffs on trade partners this year, only to reverse himself soon after.

The lack of constraints can work against global security. Because strongmen are not held accountable, they do not have to make good on their word, so their threats lack credibility. Amid the bluster, their counterparts find it difficult to gauge where the red lines truly are — Trump delivered multiple ultimatums to Putin for a cease-fire in Ukraine that he has systematically ignored.

In such an environment, guardrails for international behaviour fade away, increasing the likelihood for conflict. A growing body of research shows that authoritarian leaders — surrounded by yes men who feed their egos and policy convictions — are more likely to take risks, start wars and escalate conflicts.

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is a prime example. Surrounded by his own set of sycophants, Putin gravely misjudged Ukraine, starting a war that has rattled the world. Trump’s apparent extrajudicial killings of alleged drug smugglers in the Caribbean and his threats to attack Venezuela are in the same risk-taking vein, as are China’s brazen military actions in the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait under Xi. Interstate conflict is already on the rise. That may continue with leaders like these in charge.

The consequences of strongman rule also seep into the fabric of economies and everyday life.

Such leaders are more likely to attack independent domestic institutions like their central banks, as Trump is doing with the US Federal Reserve, which threatens to stoke inflation and make it less predictable. Economic growth and equality often suffer under personalist autocracies, which tend to concentrate wealth among elites, suppress private investment that depends on consistent policies and neglect essential public goods such as education, health care and infrastructure. The trade war that Trump initiated with China and other trading partners is already leading to economic disruption

and predictions of slower global growth.

Strongmen often pad their pockets and those of their loyalists and undermine their own economies by shifting assets offshore. Xi’s family, for example, has reportedly amassed over \$1 billion in assets, even as he has used an anti-corruption campaign to purge his rivals. Trump’s unrestrained second term has coincided with a spike in his family’s participation in deals involving Middle East real estate, cryptocurrency and licensing fees.

Repression also rises as authoritarians fabricate fears about “enemies within.” Xi’s regime has jailed or silenced dissenting journalists and human rights lawyers, exaggerated an Islamist terrorism threat in Xinjiang to justify extreme repression there and eliminated Hong Kong’s former freedoms in the name of “national security.” Trump’s administration has launched immigration raids and deployed National Guard troops to Democratic Party strongholds, destroying private property and detaining US citizens. He has started politically motivated prosecutions of perceived enemies and sought to impose control over independent US government agencies.

The damage inflicted on political institutions and norms can be severe and difficult to undo. Poland, for example, faces challenges in restoring the independence of its judiciary, which was undermined from 2015 to 2023 during the rule of the Law and Justice Party and its leader, Jaroslaw Kaczynski.

What we’re experiencing today has, in fact, been the norm for much of history. Only in the last century or so did governance become more collegial, especially in the postwar period, when solid institutions, alliances, and rules led to an unprecedented era of global peace and prosperity.

That era is fading. And rather than provide reassurance about the relationship between the US and China, this week’s meeting between Trump and Xi might represent something else: confirmation that the unpredictability and volatility of strongman rule is back.

BY-ERICA FRANTZ,
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A trial on a distant island: The Oude charge and the spectacle of British Justice

From a distant island, the members of the British Parliament gathered in the summer of 1806 to deliberate the fate of Oude (Awadh), a kingdom whose very existence and sovereignty were subjects of their heated discussion. These were not the voices of our people or our princes; they were the pronouncements of foreign rulers, wielding increasing and unaccountable power over our destinies.

The formal proceedings against Marquis Wellesley, the former Governor-General, concerning his conduct in Oude, serve as a powerful historical mirror. Viewed through an Indian lens, this parliamentary theatre was not merely a trial of one man but a stark exhibition of the imperial machinery in motion—a process where our rights were debated, our territories were bargained, and our voices were conspicuously absent. The charge itself, accusing the Marquis of criminal interference, territorial seizure, and the incitement of rebellion, was a sanitised parliamentary summary of what was, for the people of Oude, a story of subjugation and loss.

The Substance of the Accusation: From Ally to Annexation

The case against Lord Wellesley, meticulously prepared and presented by Mr Paull, depicted a pattern of systematic aggression that transformed a longstanding ally into a plundered vassal state. The charge sheets laid before the House of Commons detailed a policy that “commenced in injustice, and terminated in oppression”. From the perspective of Oude, this was a painful reality.

The kingdom, once bound by treaty to the East India Company for protection, found that very protection became the pretext for its ruin. Under the guise of defending against external threats and improving governance, Lord Wellesley forced the Nabob of Oude (Nawab of Awadh) to disband his own troops and accept a larger, more expensive British force. This was followed by the seizure of one-half of his territory to pay for this new garrison, a move justified in London as a strategic necessity but experienced in Oude as a flagrant violation of sovereignty.

The parliamentary records show Mr Paull and other critics highlighting this relentless encroachment. They pointed out how, under the “all-grasping” system of conquest, Oude became another casualty in a long line of Indian states—including the Carnatic, Surat, and Ferruckabad—that were swallowed up by an insatiable thirst for dominion. This policy was a direct contravention of Parliament’s own resolutions of 1782 and 1793, which explicitly forbade territorial expansion in India. However, such legal niceties debated in London provided little solace to a ruler whose authority was dismantled and whose lands were stripped away under “vague pretences”.

The Theatre of Deliberation: A Proceeding Devoid of Indian Voices

The debates on the Oude charge in June and July 1806 presented a surreal spectacle. Within the committee of the whole house, British members of parliament cross-examined British witnesses—former officials like Lord Teignmouth and military commanders like Sir Alured Clarke—about the revenues, military capacity, and political affairs of Oude. The entire process was an internal conversation among the colonisers. The people of Oude, the Nabob (Nawab of Awadh), and his ministers had no representation, no voice to challenge the testimony or offer their own narrative of events. The proceedings were frequently mired in procedural arguments that, from an Indian viewpoint, would appear tragically absurd. Lengthy debates erupted over whether a witness could be asked for his opinion on the interpretation of a treaty or the justice of a particular action. While members of parliament meticulously debated the rules of evidence, they seemed oblivious to the fundamental injustice of a process where the subject of the inquiry was voiceless. The immense difficulty in obtaining documents, a constant complaint of the accuser, Mr Paull, further underscored the opaqueness of the system. He noted that it took nine months for some papers to be produced, highlighting a process that seemed designed less to facilitate justice and more to manage political inconvenience in Britain.

Justifications of Empire: Morality Redefined by Geography

The defence of Lord Wellesley, led by his relatives Lord Temple and Sir Arthur Wellesley, provided a clear window into the prevailing imperial mindset. One of the most shocking allegations within the broader Oude charge was that of “foul, deliberate, and cruel murder”. Sir Arthur Wellesley’s clarification of this point was chillingly revealing. He explained that certain local rulers, the Zemindars of Oude, had resisted the Company’s authority and refused to pay the newly imposed land tribute. In response, the Governor-General dispatched the Bengal army to “reduce those men by force,” resulting in armed conflict, the storming of their forts, and the spilling of blood. This, he argued, was not murder but a legitimate “act of public power, done in support of the laws of the country”.

By-Santosh Kumar Verma

Patents, Intellectual property, and public health in international law

Pharmaceutical patents sit at the fault line between innovation incentives and public health. Recent disputes underscore the stakes: Novo Nordisk has struggled to police exclusivity over glucagon-like peptide-1 (GLP-1) drugs as United States compounding pharmacies filled shortage gaps under Food and Drug Administration (FDA) exemptions, while a lapsed Canadian patent opens the door to generics by 2026. GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) and CureVac’s 500 million U.S. dollar settlement with Pfizer-BioNTech over messenger ribonucleic acid (mRNA) technology illustrates the complexity and market consequences of vaccine intellectual property (IP). Policy currents are equally salient.

India has renewed calls for compulsory licensing to expand affordable access to cancer and Human Immunodeficiency Virus / Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) therapies, reflecting its dual identity as a major generic supplier and a proponent of broader Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) flexibilities. The European Union’s (EU) 2023 Pharmaceutical Strategy aims to balance innovation with public interest through pricing transparency and incentives for orphan drugs and antibiotics, including efforts against antimicrobial resistance (AMR). Meanwhile, the Global South increasingly links intellectual property (IP) reform to equitable access for health and climate technologies. Against this backdrop and sharpened by Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)’s exposure of vaccine inequity this paper traces

the historical evolution and international legal architecture of pharmaceutical patents, assessing how contemporary reforms can better reconcile research and development (R&D) incentives with timely, affordable access, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). AMR poses another global challenge. Limited commercial incentives discourage antibiotic R&D. New models—such as innovation funds and delinking R&D costs from sales—seek to foster antibiotic development while ensuring equitable access. India has led efforts to prioritize health over monopoly rights. The Supreme Court’s Novartis v. Union of India (2013) upheld strict patentability standards, rejecting a patent on imatinib. In 2023, India renewed its advocacy for compulsory licensing of cancer and HIV/AIDS drugs, affirming its role as both a major generic producer and a champion of TRIPS flexibilities, despite pushback from pharmaceutical multinationals and Western governments.

The European Union’s 2023 Pharmaceutical Strategy seeks to reconcile IP protection with public health by promoting price transparency, incentivizing innovation in orphan drugs and antibiotics, and supporting global AMR initiatives. Countries in the Global South increasingly connect IP reform with broader equity agendas, including access to health and climate technologies. At the United Nations General Assembly, LMICs demanded a framework to prevent monopolization of critical technologies, arguing that current IP structures disproportionately benefit high-income states. The first medicinal patent in the United States was issued in

1796, provoking criticism from physicians who opposed monopolies in medicine. Despite initial resistance, pharmaceutical companies grew into powerful monopolies by the mid-20th century, aided by patent protections. Patents are premised on reciprocity: inventors disclose knowledge in return for exclusive rights. Eligibility requires novelty, non-obviousness, and industrial applicability. In pharmaceuticals, high R&D costs justify patent protection, yet public health advocates stress that access to medicines is a human right. Mechanisms such as compulsory licensing reflect the recognition that patent rights cannot be absolute. Expansion of corporate IP rights, however, has tilted the balance toward private profit, sparking criticism for undermining social welfare. Pharmaceutical patents have long stood at the intersection of innovation and public health. By granting inventors exclusive rights for a fixed period, the patent system seeks to encourage research and development (R&D) while eventually allowing society to benefit from broader access. Yet the monopolistic nature of patents often results in high drug prices and restricted access, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). The COVID-19 pandemic underscored these tensions, exposing limitations of the intellectual property (IP) regime in ensuring equitable access to vaccines, treatments, and diagnostics. This paper examines the historical evolution of pharmaceutical patents, the international legal framework that governs them, and recent developments highlighting the ongoing conflict between innovation incentives and public health imperatives.

Pharmaceutical patents are governed by overlapping regimes of human rights, trade, investment, and health law. The International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights recognizes the right to health, but the lack of judicial enforcement limits its effect. The Paris Convention of the 19th century harmonized patent rules. More significantly, the World Trade Organization’s Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS, 1994) mandated pharmaceutical patents with 20-year protection. Critics argue that TRIPS reflected corporate influence, reframing IP as a tradable commodity and intensifying monopolies. Developing countries resisted TRIPS, citing threats to medicine access. The Doha Declaration (2001) affirmed states’ right to protect public health, but implementation has been uneven. Bilateral “TRIPS-plus” agreements often require stricter protection, narrowing the ability of LMICs to use flexibilities. International health law is far weaker than IP law. The World Health Organization (WHO), established in 1948, has generally relied on non-binding guidelines rather than legal instruments. Its limited involvement in trade and IP negotiations leaves health concerns overshadowed by commercial priorities. This asymmetry means disputes over access to medicines are often settled in trade or investment tribunals, where economic interests prevail over health. The pandemic underscored inequities in the IP system. Wealthy states secured most vaccine supplies, while LMICs struggled despite TRIPS waiver debates. Initiatives like the WHO’s COVID-19 Technology Access

Pool aimed to encourage licensing and technology transfer, but participation by pharmaceutical companies was limited. Litigation between Moderna and Pfizer/BioNTech over mRNA patents revealed the conflict between proprietary claims and global health needs.

New models aim to balance innovation and access. The Medicines Patent Pool aggregates patents and licenses them to generic producers, lowering costs and expanding availability. Open science pledges, such as the Open COVID Pledge, encourage voluntary knowledge sharing, though long-term sustainability is uncertain. Delinking R&D costs from prices, as pursued by the Global Antibiotic Research and Development Partnership, offers an alternative by publicly funding innovation while ensuring affordability.

Pharmaceutical patents embody the dual nature of IP: incentivizing innovation while restricting access. Historical experience, international frameworks, and recent developments demonstrate that unbalanced regimes risk undermining both human rights and public health. COVID-19 vaccine inequity, antimicrobial resistance, and ongoing disputes over compulsory licensing all point to the urgent need for reform. Achieving equity requires strengthening TRIPS flexibilities, enhancing the WHO’s legal authority, and adopting alternative innovation models. In a world facing recurring health crises, aligning patent regimes with public health is not only a legal necessity but a moral imperative.

By-Nehaluddin Ahmad