

OUR OPINION, THEIR OPINION

"The goal of social justice and all round development can't be achieved through ideas but actions."
Mchiel Albert

The golden story

If the economic development rolls down years after years the publicity of getting developed sounds hollow. This is exactly seem to happen with India as the latest industrial growth chart shows. At 4%, India's fiscal 2025 average of Index of Industrial Production (IIP) is at its lowest in the past four years, marking a slowdown in industrial activity. This could be attributed to uncertainties in the global economic outlook leading to tepid goods exports growth, lower than expected consumption demand growth, and a dip in private capital expenditure. While the monthly barometer of the nation's industrial output, the IIP, grew in March to 3% from February's 2.7%, this has been mainly on account of a rise in power production, which cyclically peaks in summer. Power output growth almost doubled between February (3.6%) and March (6.3%). But the fall in the IIP, from 5.9% (2023-24) to 4% (2024-25), warrants a closer look at the sectors that have lagged. While mining steeply declined from 7.5% (FY24) to 2.9% (FY25), manufacturing followed with 5.5% (FY24) and 4% (FY25) and electricity at 7% (FY24) and 5.1% (FY25). What is more significant is the degrowth of -1.6% in fiscal 25 witnessed in consumer non-durables from 4.1% in the previous year. Contrasting this with the growth almost doubling in consumer durables from 3.6% (FY24) to 8% (FY25) likely indicates an uptick in urban private consumption, while lingering effects of high food inflation in the October to December quarter of the last fiscal continue to strain rural consumption. Sure, retail inflation was at its lowest in six years at 4.6% in FY25, aided by steep falls in vegetable prices in the last quarter, but this also heavily impacted farm incomes, further straining rural consumption. While a decrease in the RBI's bank lending rate to 6% in April from 6.5% in January has led to lower capex lending rates across banks, an uncertain economic and trade environment is unlikely to encourage the private sector to raise investment, without substantial domestic consumption impetus from the government. The flat growth in goods exports in FY25 is another area that must concern policymakers as it indicates considerable strain on India's sprawling small businesses, the MSME sector, that contributes about 45.8% in exports. This sector has witnessed remarkable growth over the past five years, quadrupling in size from about ₹4 lakh crore in FY21 to ₹12 lakh crore in FY25. However, given strained trade relations with the country's largest trading partner, the United States, India must ensure that the Bilateral Trade Agreement that is under negotiation fortifies India's nearly 60 million MSMEs, the vast majority of which are classified as micro industries. Consequently, this will protect the over 250 million jobs that the sector provides.

EU's climate goals need green power grid

Without significant upgrades to its electricity grids, the European Union's climate ambitions will remain out of reach. Much needs to be done to drive sustained investment, streamline permissions, and leverage innovation

For Europe, this is a pivotal moment in the fight against climate change. With extreme weather events becoming more frequent as temperatures continue to rise, the need to act is undeniable. Last year was the hottest on record and the first in which global warming exceeded (temporarily) the 1.5°C Celsius threshold established by the Paris climate agreement. In response, the European Union has set ambitious renewable energy targets to wean itself from fossil fuels. Since electrification is needed to drive the shift from coal, oil, and gas, it is a key pillar of the energy transition. But while there has been considerable progress in scaling up renewable energy as a share of the EU's energy mix, which accounted for nearly half of all power generation in 2024, electricity demand is also rising rapidly. Electric-vehicle (EV) adoption and the electrification of heating and cooling systems in buildings mean that more electricity is required. Moreover, data centres in Europe now consume around 3% of electricity supplies, and that figure is projected to almost double by 2030, owing to rising data processing and storage demands. In Ireland alone, data centres consumed 21% of the country's total metered electricity in 2023, surpassing urban households (18%). This surge in usage has placed immense pressure on Ireland's grid, foreshadowing similar energy challenges across Europe. Meeting the EU's ambitious clean-energy goals requires modernising the continent's ageing electricity grid, which is ill-equipped to handle the rapid growth in demand. The bloc's power grid is the world's oldest, at 45-50 years, on average. Grid congestion – when an overload prevents electricity from reaching the consumer – already results in renewable energy being wasted, and thousands of gigawatts of renewable projects remain stuck in connection queues. Without significant upgrades, Europe's climate ambi-

tions will remain far out of reach. Although the EU has implemented an Action Plan for Grids, this is only a first step. 7KH EORF FXUUHQWO\ LQYHVWV ELOOLRQ billion) annually in electricity distribution networks, but experts estimate that modernising and expanding the grid will require at OHDVW ELOOLRQ E\ (XURSH WKHUHIRUH PXVW GRX-EOH LWV DQQXDO LQY-HVWPHQW WR ELOLion, starting this year. Additional funds are essential to ensure that renewable energy can be transmitted to where it's needed most, and to prevent the bottlenecks that are holding up electrification projects. Fortunately, Europe can take inspiration from its peers. In December, the United Kingdom unveiled a Clean Power Action Plan that aims to achieve 100% clean power by 2030, by XQORFNLOQJ ? ELOOLRQ ELOOLRQ LQ DQQXDO investment. As part of this effort, the UK's National Grid pledged £35 billion for electricity transmission, including £15 billion to increase grid capacity. Similarly, last year, the United States launched the Federal-State Modern Grid Deployment Initiative, which focuses on advanced transmission technologies to expand grid capacity. As these initiatives demonstrate, the problem is one of policy, not technology. Europe's grid permitting and planning processes are notoriously slow. Transmission deployment can take up to ten years, even though construction itself takes just one or two. And with recent estimates indicating that Europe will need to double its current interconnection capacity over the next 10-15 years to meet its climate and energy targets, accelerating permitting has become an energy security issue. To address it, policymakers should streamline permitting processes and adopt a coordinated approach to grid planning across the entire EU. Legislated targets are critical to providing visibility for investors and avoiding supply-chain bottle-

necks. Another key area for improvement is grid optimisation and allocation. EU policymakers should give top priority to grid connection requests from the most mature projects, and offer clear guidance and timelines for system operators. Requiring financial commitments to reserve allocated grid capacity would prevent speculation and ensure timely deployment. Following the UK's example, the European Commission should replace the outdated "first come, first serve" grid allocation model with a balanced allocation of capacity. Beyond policy changes and increased financing, Europe must embrace innovation. Traditional solutions – like dynamic line ratings (usage optimisation technologies) and building new transmission lines – are no longer sufficient.

The future lies in "smart" grid technologies such as AI applications that can help address congestion, and in long-duration energy storage (batteries) that can overcome the intermittency of renewables. AI could also enhance existing grid infrastructure, alleviating the need for time-consuming construction in some cases. But unlocking the technology's potential will still require substantial investment in research and development, as well as incentives for start-ups in the sector.

Without a major upgrade to its grid, Europe risks squandering its renewable energy potential and undermining its climate goals. The time for half-measures has passed.

The EU's Clean Industrial Deal and its Affordable Energy Action Plan both highlighted the need for major investments in the grid. To transform its energy infrastructure, Europe must double its financing, streamline its permitting processes, and embrace innovation.

BY-EMILY NIXON
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Selfless unsung heroes take centre stage in Padma Awards 2025

The word 'Padma' in Sanskrit means 'lotus,' symbolizing purity and beauty that thrives in murky waters. This imagery is central to the Padma Awards, established in 1954 to recognize exceptional contributions in fields like art, literature, science, medicine, and public affairs. However, for years, the awards were often dominated by high-profile, privileged individuals, overshadowing true grassroots change-makers. Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, the process has undergone a positive transformation, prioritizing deserving recipients. Recognition for 'Unsung Heroes' In 2016, the Modi government democratized the Padma Awards by opening nominations to all citizens, unlike the past practice where only Union ministers, Chief Ministers, Governors, MPs, previous recipients, and key figures could nominate. This move democratized the process and enhanced the awards' prestige, recognizing ordinary individuals making extraordinary contributions to society. Additionally, a new "unsung heroes" category was introduced to honor those who've served the poor or excelled despite challenges. The 2025 Padma list of 139 awards highlights such unsung heroes, from doctors and folk singers to farmers and social workers, who have selflessly advanced society without seeking recognition. The Padma Awards now embody India's democratic spirit, honoring individuals from all walks of life based on merit and service, free from elitism or favoritism. No surprise, while only a few states accounted for most of the awardees in the past, as many as 33 States and Union Territories have got representation in this year's Padma Awards. In 2025, over 50,000 nominations were received annually, an increase over 20 times from the 2,200 nominations in 2014 which shows the prestige, credibility

and respect for Padma Awards is on the rise now. Record Padma Awards for Minority Communities As Padma Awards have seen a historic shift under PM Modi's leadership, a record 18 individuals from minority communities have been named for the Padma Awards for 2025, reflecting the Modi government's focus on merit over religion. The list includes 7 Sikhs, 4 Muslims, 4 Christians, 2 Buddhists, and 1 Jain. Members of minority communities include Dr Budhendra Kumar Jain, 76, founder of an eye hospital in Chitrakoot, performing over 1 lakh surgeries annually for rural communities, Farooq Ahmad Mir, 73, who is revitalising Kashmir's Kani shawl tradition for six decades and Harjinder Singh, a key figure in Punjabi and Sikh music, preserving Sikh spirituality and inspiring youth. Other named for Padma Award include Harvinder Singh is India's first Paralympic gold medalist in archery from Kaithal (Haryana), Jumde Yomgam Gamlin, 59, a social worker in Arunachal Pradesh, committed to de-addiction and social reform for over 30 years, Libia Lobo Sardesai, 100, a Goan freedom fighter who ran an underground radio station and announced Goa's liberation, also Goa's first woman lawyer. Sheikh Shaikha Ali Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, a Kuwaiti yoga pioneer who established Kuwait's first licensed yoga studio and promoting yoga across the region. Other minority community honorees include Begum Batool, a Muslim folk singer specializing in Maand and Bhajan whose music promotes communal harmony blending Maand tradition with Hindu devotional songs. She is the only Rajasthani female artist to have performed at Paris's Town Hall. Justice Khehar, the first Sikh CJI. Barry Godfrey John, 78, a British-born theater and arts contributor. Onkar Singh Pahwa, MD of Avon Cycles, producing 2.5 million bikes annually,

exported to over 50 countries. Satyapal Singh, a renowned para-athletics coach. Stephen Knapp (Sri Nandanandana Das), promoting Indian culture, Hinduism, and Vedic wisdom globally. Prof. Syed Ainul Hasan, a distinguished Persian scholar and Vice-Chancellor of Maulana Azad National Urdu University. The late Buddhist Monk Lama Lobzang (posthumous) has been honored for his dedication to Buddhist values, education, and social welfare in the Himalayan region. Women's Empowerment with Increased Representation Under the Modi government, the representation of women among Padma Awardees has increased significantly. While 209 Padma awards were given to women between 2004 and 2014 under the previous regime, as many as 258 women have received this one of the highest civilian Awards of the country during the past 10 years between 2015 and 2025 under PM Modi's leadership. This underscores the Modi government's commitment to women's empowerment and equal opportunities for recognition, with the Padma Awards serving as a platform to celebrate women's contributions across all fields. These year's female awardees include Dr Neerja Bhatla, a leading gynaecologist from Delhi specializing in cervical cancer prevention and management. She played a crucial role in developing guidelines for cervical cancer screening and HPV (Human papillomavirus) vaccination, and led significant research on affordable HPV testing. Dr Vijayalakshmi Deshamane is a pioneering oncologist who advanced cancer care and awareness, particularly in breast cancer research. Daughter of a labourer father and a vegetable seller mother, Dr Deshamane, - who belongs to the cobbler community, has dedicated her life to providing free treatment and support to economically disadvantaged cancer patients.

A 96-year-old puppeteer from Karnataka's Koppal district, Bhimavva Doddabalappa Shillekyathara, has been honored with the Padma Award for her over 70-year dedication to Togalu Gombeyata, a traditional form of shadow puppetry. Sally Holkar (82), a social entrepreneur from Madhya Pradesh has revitalised the Maheshwari handloom industry, empowering over 250 women and creating sustainable livelihoods through traditional craftsmanship and modern design. Agricultural Pioneers One of the most notable changes is the broadening of the criteria and focus to include individuals from marginalized communities, rural backgrounds, and fields that had often been overlooked in the past. No surprise, this year's Padma Awards recognize three agricultural pioneers: Hariman Sharma from Himachal Pradesh, L. Hangthing from Nagaland, and Subhash Khetulal Sharma from Maharashtra. Hariman Sharma developed the HRMN-99 apple variety, capable of thriving at lower altitudes and withstanding temperatures up to 45°C. L. Hangthing, a 58-year-old fruit farmer from Noklak, has introduced non-native fruits like litchi and oranges to Nagaland, benefiting over 200 farmers across 40 villages by enhancing agricultural practices and income. Subhash Khetulal Sharma, a leading advocate for sustainable farming in Maharashtra, has championed organic agriculture by adopting eco-friendly practices like using cow dung, jaggery, and rainwater harvesting. Medical Leaders with Lifelong Service & Dedication Dr Vilas Dangre, a renowned homeopath, has been honored with the Padma Shri Award 2025 for his lifelong service. Despite losing his eyesight over a decade ago, he dedicated more than 50 years to treating economically disadvantaged patients at minimal cost. He founded the Dr. Vilas Dangre Homeopathy Clinic in Nagpur, where he has treated over 1 lakh patients. Dr. Jose Chacko Periapuram, a celebrated cardiac surgeon from Kerala, is also recognized for his dedication. He is the founder and chairman of the "Heart Care

Foundation," a charitable trust that provides financial aid to underprivileged heart patients. Honours Across Diverse Fields The Padma Shri 2025 awards honor individuals for their significant cultural and social contributions. Joynacharan Bathari (84), a tribal musician, has dedicated six decades to preserving Dimas folk music in Assam. Gokul Chandra Dey (57), a Dhak player from West Bengal, has shattered gender stereotypes by training 150 women in this traditionally male-dominated art form. Velu Aasaan (58), a percussionist from Tamil Nadu, is working to revive and globalize the Parai Isai tradition. Chaitram Pawar, from Maharashtra, has focused on tribal development, sustainable village development, and forest conservation. Other awardees include folk artists like Venkappa Ambaji Sugatekar (Karnataka), Bhimavva Doddabalappa Shillekyathara (Karnataka), and Lavjibhai Nagjibhai (Gujarat), alongside Bheru Singh Chouhan, a Nigun folk singer from Madhya Pradesh, and Jagdish Joshila, a Nimadi and Hindi author from Khargone, who has contributed to literature for over five decades. Social Worker and Travel Pioneers Bhim Singh Bhavesh, a social worker from Bhojpur, has been honored for his work uplifting the marginalized Musahar community through his foundation, "Nayee Asha." Hugh and Colleen Gantzer, the pioneering travel blogger couple from Uttarakhand, have been recognized for their contributions to Indian tourism. With over 30 books and 3,000 articles, they shaped travel journalism for five decades. Colleen, who passed away in November 2024, will receive the award posthumously. Under PM Modi's leadership, the Padma Awards have reclaimed their true purpose: celebrating excellence, dedication, and selfless service. The Padma Awards 2025 again reflect a refreshing change. With elimination of high-connections or lobbying for getting Padma Awards, the nation is now getting new icons and role models inspiring millions.

By-Satnam Singh Sandhu

The Invisible Thread: Walking the Razor's Edge between Self-Respect and Ego

In the intricate tapestry of human relationships and personal development, the distinction between self-respect and ego often blurs, much like the subtle shift from a gentle breeze to a gusty wind. It is a line so fine, so imperceptible, that we often cross it without knowing, leaving behind either the soft fragrance of dignity or the sharp sting of pride.

As children, our sense of self begins to take root in the fertile soil of familial interactions. Consider the toddler who refuses to share a toy—not out of selfishness, but out of a budding assertion of self. In those early skirmishes with siblings over who gets the bigger slice of cake or the front seat in the car, the seeds of self-respect are sown. A child learns to speak up, to say no, and to feel slighted when treated unfairly. Yet, when that assertion turns into a pattern of dominance or entitlement, ego tiptoes in, disguised as confidence. The challenge lies in how parents and elders respond. When a child is taught that their voice matters but not at the expense of another's, they begin to cultivate the quiet strength of self-respect rather than the bluster of ego.

This distinction grows sharper in the tempest of student life, where validation is sought from peers, teachers, and report cards. A student who walks away from plagiarism despite the temptation to score high is guided by self-respect. Another who boasts about achievements, belittles classmates, or resents constructive criticism, has likely given the reins to ego. Classrooms, with their invisible pecking orders and social cliques, become theatres for this tug-of-war. The respectful student does not need to be the loudest voice; their presence speaks through their consistency, compassion, and quiet confidence. Meanwhile, ego craves applause, not authenticity.

As we move into the adult world of cubicles and conference rooms, the line thins further. Here, ambition can be the greatest ally of self-respect or the deadliest weapon of ego. The colleague who defends their idea in a meeting, but listens when overruled, walks the tightrope with grace. Another, who clings to credit and recoils at feedback, slips into the quicksand of ego. It's not the disagreement that defines one's character, but the manner of dissent. Self-respect bows to fairness, while ego demands superiority. In marriage, the line between self-respect and ego is where love meets pride. Self-respect means knowing your worth, setting healthy boundaries, and communicating needs with empathy. It fosters trust and dignity. Ego, however, seeks to win, avoids compromise, and puts self above the relationship. Expressing hurt with honesty reflects self-respect; using silence or blame reflects ego. While self-respect nurtures growth and safety, unchecked ego can erode intimacy and damage the foundation of love.

Friendships too offer revealing mirrors. A true friend sets boundaries, honors differences, and speaks uncomfortable truths with kindness—nurtured by self-respect. But when one insists on always being right, demands loyalty without reciprocity, or walks away at the first sign of conflict, ego casts its shadow. The invisible thread frays where self-worth becomes self-importance. Our relationship with society at large is the final crucible. The citizen, who stands up against injustice, even when alone, is moved by self-respect. The same act, if rooted in a desire for recognition or moral superiority, may be ego in disguise. Social media today, with its seductive spotlight, often blurs the two. A voice raised in solidarity can become a megaphone for self-promotion if intent is lost.

In essence, self-respect is the internal compass that guides individuals to act with integrity, humility, and empathy. It fosters personal growth and harmonious relationships. Ego, when unchecked, can derail this journey, leading to conflict and isolation. Recognizing and nurturing self-respect while keeping ego in check is pivotal for a fulfilling and balanced life. The thread is invisible—but its impact is unmistakable.

By-Padam Parkash Bhojvaid