

## OUR OPINION, THEIR OPINION

"Do one thing every day that scares you."  
Eleanor Roosevelt

## US CAN WAIT, INDIA SIGNS TRADE DEAL WITH BRITAIN



India reached a timely and strategic "landmark" trade deal with the United Kingdom. After years of negotiations, both nations have arrived at an agreement that promises mutual gains—India secures greater access for its goods and services, while the UK eyes new investment opportunities and a foothold in a fast-growing economy. Among other things, the agreement means cheaper British cars and whisky in India and easy access for Indian professionals. This deal is particularly significant as it reflects India's focus on diversifying economic partnerships. While the much-anticipated trade pact with the United States remains elusive, New Delhi has rightly moved ahead where progress is possible. India cannot afford to let its economic interests be stalled by geopolitics or slow-moving negotiations with Washington. Instead, the UK deal sets a precedent for pragmatic diplomacy. It underscores India's growing confidence on the global stage and its ability to strike balanced agreements with major economies. The US remains important—but, as India shows, it can wait.

## The political tariff trap for Republicans

Republican leaders face a problem: They have staked it all on passing the tax bill — hoping that it can blunt the economic damage caused by the tariff revisions — but that bill makes it more difficult to criticise President Trump's tariffs

After more than 100 days of President Trump marked by overreach and economic self-immolation, congressional Republicans need a reset to save their political fortunes. Representative Mike Johnson, the House speaker, is banking on a spending and tax cut package to provide that jolt, and numerous House committees are now working quickly to stitch together a bill he has pledged to deliver to Trump before Independence Day.

This "one big, beautiful bill," as Trump has called it, contains most of the president's legislative agenda. Indeed, the strategy is making the bill too big to fail, betting that wavering members will not be willing to vote against it and deliver the leader of their party such a stinging defeat. But what if it does pass and voters barely take notice?

The details are still being worked out, but the bill could include cuts to Medicaid, as well as funding increases for immigration enforcement and the military. But the heart of the bill is extending the 2017 tax law, primarily the reduced personal income tax rates. With the economy teetering on the president's foolhardy use of tariffs, the administration has said extending the law is an urgent imperative that will calm markets and provide an economic boost.

The Republican congressional leaders, Senator John Thune and Johnson, should not talk themselves into believing that this bill will deliver Republicans from the effects of Trump's tariffs. The leaders face converging political problems right now: All the party's energy is directed toward passing this one bill, for which voters may not reward them, and the effort is likely keeping them from putting more pressure on Trump to stop the tariffs.

Many Republicans are hoping that the tax bill can blunt the economic damage caused by the Trump tariffs, but that is highly unlikely. The way Trump, in particular, is talking about the legislative package is doing them no favours. He and Republican leaders have sold the extension of the tax law as tax cuts "for everybody." It will be "the biggest bill in the history of our country, in terms of tax cuts and

regulation cuts and other things," Trump said last month. But the reality is it's no cut at all for most people. The rates they are preserving have been in place for more than seven years now.

In 2017, as a counsellor to House Speaker Paul Ryan, I helped pass the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. It was a significant achievement. I remain proud of it and I've worked with groups that want to extend it. The law made American businesses more competitive by permanently lowering the corporate tax rate and eliminating scores of unproductive carve-outs for businesses. It simplified the individual tax code and brought meaningful relief to families in almost every tax bracket. The scale of its ultimate economic impact was muddled by COVID, but I have no doubt it contributed to the robust economy that preceded the pandemic.

Today, allowing the expiring provisions of the law to lapse would significantly raise taxes on families at a moment of cratering economic confidence. Congress should absolutely extend the law and prevent a tax increase on working Americans. The political problem is that there is little new here for voters. Despite Trump's blitz of sweeping executive actions, there is a peculiar smallness to his legislative program. Congress has not been asked to enact a DOGE-like reorganisation of the federal government or a new workforce development initiative to prepare us for the reshoring of American manufacturing. The president has proposed a handful of new tax breaks, like on tips, overtime pay and for those on Social Security. But those policies are likely to be narrow.

Even if making the income tax rates permanent provides a degree of economic certainty and encourages investment, that is simply no match for the blowtorch the president is taking to the economy with his tariff regime. And Democrats have made clear that they will try to make Republicans pay a price for cutting Medicaid — perhaps the most tangible policy change that those Americans will feel. In 2018, voters largely overlooked the tax cuts Republicans had just passed; Democrats retook the House majority in the congressional midterms that

year. With only a slim majority today, Republicans face a challenge holding the House and maintaining unified GOP control. History is not on their side. Every president since Bill Clinton, except George W. Bush after 9/11, saw his party lose control of the House in the first midterm of his presidency. To defy history and keep control of the House, Republicans will need to persuade voters they are working on the cost of living and creating a humming economy.

The President, of course, is moving us in the other direction, raising costs and battering markets with tariffs. And many economists warn that the worst impacts of the tariffs, higher prices and empty shelves, won't arrive until this summer — just in time to further overshadow the potential passage of the president's tax cuts.

One obvious answer to this developing problem would be for congressional leaders to pressure Trump to back down from his trade policy or, God forbid, take back Congress's constitutional authority over tariffs.

Here, Thune and Johnson face a political dilemma, verging on a trap. They have shied away from criticising Trump's trade policy, likely because they will require his political muscle to get the tax extension through Congress. But this has allowed the president to continue down a destructive path for the economy and for their majorities in Congress. The economy is not the only thing that matters in politics, but it's the first thing that matters. Without a stable economic footing to run on, House members in battleground districts face a perilous path to re-election.

It may seem early to be worrying about midterm elections, but the coming weeks will determine what, if anything, Republicans will have to show voters for granting them unified control of Washington. Passing a bill to prevent tax rates from going up is a necessary action. But congressional leaders should not kid themselves. Unless they — or the markets — can convince the president to back down on tariffs, this "one big beautiful bill" may feel more like thin gruel to voters.

BY-BRENDAN BUCK

## Lighthouses of Learning

The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) department and anganwadi workers have a critical role to play in the nation's development. Beyond just being a centre for gathering children, an anganwadi centre is a place where large-scale issues like malnourishment and pre-school education are addressed. As the country heads towards reaping the fruits of the demographic dividend, investment in children's future becomes even more critical. A number of researches have revealed that the initial six years of a child's life are crucial for both mental and physical development. This has also been recognised in the National Education Policy.

With the spirit of transforming anganwadis into advanced learning centres, an attempt is being made in Varanasi to equip them with both basic necessities and advanced learning infrastructure, such as smart TVs, Business and Learning Aid (BaLa) structural design, rooftop rainwater harvesting systems, solar panels, furniture for children, toys, learning materials, etc. Mission Parivartan has been launched in Varanasi with this objective. This approach is not limited to a few centres; the attempt is to provide scalable and district-wide solutions to the problem, to be implemented across all 3,000 anganwadi centres in Varanasi. Also Read - Essential Antidote to Terror The Mission Parivartan initiative has achieved a remarkable milestone in transforming anganwadi centres across the district over the last three years. As part of the initiative, a total of 2,382 anganwadi buildings have been rejuvenated,

with an impressive 96 per cent saturation. Additionally, 692 new anganwadi centres have been constructed, bringing the total to 3,074. This transformation aims to provide a conducive learning environment for young children, promoting their overall development and well-being. Over 3.5 lakh children aged six months to six years have benefitted from this intervention in the district over the last two and a half years.

The upgraded anganwadi centres boast several key features, including the saturation of all 18 basic parameters of Kayakalp, such as baby-friendly toilets, hand-washing units, BaLa-based painting, and LED TVs to support learning and make education more engaging for children. This is also ensuring a comfortable and interactive environment. Furthermore, these centres are now solar-powered, enabling a round-the-clock electricity supply. Other notable features include Poshan Vatika to promote health, hygiene, and sustainability. Outdoor play equipment has also been installed to encourage physical activity and development. The design of these anganwadi centres has been kept in consonance with the idea of learning and mental growth, ensuring that every part of the centre serves as a source of education. Features such as writable floors, low wall greenboards, low-hanging paintings, and wall displays ensure that each activity comes with learning, and the building's architecture itself acts as a source of learning to the kid.

Beyond just the infrastructure, simple things like furniture, kitchen items, storage

boxes, utensils, toys, first-aid kits, and utility kits with mirror, towel, and nail cutter have also been provided at all centres so that these centres function on a learning-by-doing model. In urban areas, Mission Parivartan has made significant strides in addressing the challenge of space and land availability.

Very rarely has any solution to the urban anganwadi centre problem been attempted in the past. In city-based districts and with the ever-growing size of cities, this problem is expected to become even more severe in the future. This problem existed in 991 urban anganwadi centres in Varanasi, which were functioning in dingy streets and corridors. To address this, a total of 750 new rented buildings have been provided to accommodate anganwadi centres with new rent agreements, while 65 old and unused buildings have been repurposed into anganwadi centres. Additionally, 25 Porta Cabins and recycled bus compartment-based anganwadi centres have been set up in congested areas, ensuring accessibility and convenience. These Porta Cabins have been particularly effective in solving the issue of space constraints, allowing anganwadi centres to operate in parks and playgrounds. The centres now exist in beautiful, air-conditioned rooms with smart classes for learning. The once-deserted anganwadi centres now have over 1 lakh children proudly attending them daily. Assistance came from engineering departments, CSR partners, and NGOs, who devised standard guidelines and evolved models to address local issues. Subsequently, all field staff were trained to use these



guidelines and models. Supervisors and anganwadi workers also played a pivotal role in adopting new and upgraded tools of learning, like tablets, smart TVs, and various learning materials for children.

A huge challenge was to ensure land for new centres, identifying rented buildings in urban areas, and planning the priority and locations in a manner that benefitted the whole district in a phased manner. Weekly meetings were held with Supervisors, CDPOs, and BDOs to coordinate these efforts. Standardised new rent agreements were drafted. Within a month of these interventions, results started coming up. For monitoring different components, a control room was set up at the ICDS office, and Google Forms were used for daily reporting on various indicators. CSR funds came in handy for rolling out the programme.

Help came from companies like Vedanta and Reliance Foundation. Besides CSR, MGNREGA funds, Gram Panchayat funds, and Critical Gap funds were also utilised to bridge small gaps in the campaign—such as for Poshan Vatika, electrification,

boundary walls, etc.

There was enormous support from political leadership. The impact of Mission Parivartan has been profound. Attendance at anganwadi centres has increased significantly—from 35 per cent to 80 per cent—indicating improved engagement and enthusiasm among children. Moreover, severe malnourishment has decreased dramatically, from 7.7 per cent to 0.12 per cent, reflecting the effectiveness of the programme. Learning outcomes have improved drastically.

NIPUN assessment results show a remarkable improvement from 40 per cent to over 90 per cent for Class 1 students in government primary schools. Parents are now sending their children to anganwadi centres instead of private play schools, highlighting the success of the initiative.

What has been achieved in Varanasi under the inspired leadership of this young IAS officer, Himanshu Nagpal, is amazing. Here is a model that can be replicated and scaled through public-private partnership in the true spirit of Nexus of Good.

By-Anil Swarup

## Retire with Purpose - The Power of Silence, Solitude, and Nature

After exploring thoughts, emotions, and energy, I was drawn toward something more subtle—something not discussed often in the corporate world but deeply transformative: silence, solitude, and our relationship with nature.

In a world of constant stimulation, silence is becoming a rare commodity. Yet it is in silence that our inner world becomes clearer. I don't mean just the absence of sound, but an internal stillness that allows us to listen deeply—not only to ourselves, but to life itself.

## 1. Silence as a Gateway to Inner Clarity

In my working years, I equated silence with passivity. Now I see it as active listening—to myself, to others, to something greater. I began setting aside even five or ten minutes a day to simply sit in silence. No agenda. Just being. In that quiet space, I often found answers to questions I hadn't yet asked.

Silence helps declutter the mind. It gives our thoughts time to settle, like muddy water clearing up when left undisturbed. With regular practice, I began to differentiate between the noise of the mind and the whisper of intuition.

Thich Nhat Hanh's gentle reminder echoes here: "Silence is essential. We need silence just as much as we need air, just as much as plants need light." In silence, we are not escaping life—we are returning to it. He teaches that mindful silence is not empty, but full of presence. It is in this presence that deep healing and insight emerge.

## 2. The Strength in Solitude

Solitude isn't loneliness. It's the ability to enjoy your own company and befriend your inner world. I found that moments of solitude—whether on long walks, in quiet corners of my home, or just sitting with a cup of tea—helped me reflect more honestly.

In solitude, I began to see patterns in my thinking and behaviours. I noticed where I was reactive, what truly gave me joy, and where I needed healing. Solitude became a mirror, not a prison.

There is wisdom in slowing down and being alone with our thoughts. As Thich Nhat Hanh wrote, "Sometimes we need to be alone to hear our own voice." These simple yet profound moments of solitude allowed me to drop roles and expectations—and meet myself as I truly was.

## 3. Reconnecting with Nature's Rhythms

There is something deeply grounding about being in nature. But it doesn't always require grand landscapes or mountain retreats. I found joy in watching the sunrise from my balcony and witnessing the beauty of sunsets in the evening. Feeling the gentle breeze, listening to birdsong, and soaking in the golden light of early morning became sacred rituals. These moments connected me to something timeless and expansive.

Nature, in its gentle and unhurried way, reminded me to slow down, breathe, and be present. Watching the sky change colours or clouds float across reminded me that everything, including my thoughts and emotions, passes. Nature doesn't judge. It simply is. And in its stillness, I began to mirror that presence.

Key Takeaways from the Mental Well-Being Series:

Awareness of how thoughts, emotions, and energy are intricately linked helps us better understand ourselves and others.

Breathwork, meditation, and visualisation are simple yet powerful tools to calm the mind and centre the self.

Emotional agility allows us to respond wisely rather than react impulsively, creating space for growth.

Observing and transforming our inner dialogue helps build a more compassionate relationship with ourselves.

Conversations with mentors and reflective peers are invaluable in nurturing our inner world.

Absorbing silence, seeking solitude, and immersing in nature offer us depth, clarity, and grounding that modern life often lacks.

These are not just good practices—they are essential ingredients for living a more conscious, connected life.

## Bridging Toward Spiritual Well-Being

As we move forward into exploring spiritual well-being, it becomes clear that all these practices—mental clarity, emotional intelligence, and inner calm—are stepping stones. They prepare the ground for a deeper connection with life, a journey inward that many of us feel called to at this stage.

Silence sharpens our spiritual receptivity. Solitude allows us to turn within and reflect on the deeper questions. And nature, in all its still beauty, reminds us of our place in the larger web of existence. The next chapter in this journey will explore how spiritual grounding, through practices like Simran, prayer, surrender, and service, can offer us a sense of meaning, belonging, and unshakable steadiness.

By-Maninder sood