

OUR OPINION, THEIR OPINION

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

World's fourth economy

The news of India becoming the fourth powerful economy is undoubtedly a good news for every Indian. But unfortunately while some media are keen to highlight its brighter sides, some others have involved themselves in bringing out the darker points underlying the fact both of which are misleading. What is needed is to see both sides of the coin. The report did note a decline in India's consumption-based Gini coefficient from 28.8 to 25.5 between 2011-12 and 2022-23, which indicates improved equality in consumption. The Gini coefficient is a measure of income or wealth equality and is used as a broad indicator of relative performance. But the union government's claim about the No. 4 ranking is far from accurate because it is based on only one parameter. While the report acknowledged the improvement in India's consumption-based Gini index, it also said inequality may be underestimated due to data limitations. More importantly, it said income inequality in the country rose from a Gini of 52 in 2004 to 62 in 2023. Wage disparity, it noted, remained high, with the median earnings of the top 10% being 13 times higher than the bottom 10% in 2023-24. Consumption is not a reliable measure to compare equality because the rich save a good part of their income and are also known to conceal some part of it, while the poor spend most or all of it. The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) has reported that in the case of per capita calorie intake, which is an important pointer to consumption expenditure, India's position is 102 out of 185 countries in 2019. The key factor to examine here is a comparison of incomes, where India's position is worse than that of most countries in the world. The Gini index for income gave India a rank of 176 out of 216 countries in 2019. It was ranked 115 in 2009; so inequality has only increased on this front. India's Gini index for wealth equality is 75, which is worse - the Gini ranking is from 0 to 100, and the higher a country's score, the worse it is in ranking. Other reports and findings have underlined the serious nature of income and wealth inequality in India. According to these reports, the richest 1% in the country controlled 22.6% of the national income and owned 40.1% of the nation's total wealth, while the bottom 50% had only 15% of the national income and held a mere 6.4% of the nation's wealth. The highlighting of favourable elements in the World Bank report and the misrepresentation of its findings is in line with the government's tendency to disregard data.

Floods are inevitable. Catastrophe is not

We need to give rivers the room they need to flow, especially in today's world of a heating climate and intensifying storms. We know how to do this. We can afford to do this. What we lack is the political will. Let's find it

Images and stories of the devastation wrought by the July 4 flood of the Guadalupe river in Texas will stay with many of us for a long time. There has been an outpouring of compassion and sorrow, and a healthy dose of scrutiny of the shortcomings in early warning systems, government response, and evacuation efforts - some of which have been blamed on the Trump administration's cuts across emergency services, weather reporting, and scientific agencies.

But even with a flawless response, the storm that roared through that night would most likely have claimed many lives. The rest of us might now do well to look past the astonishment, sympathy, or blame, and consider how to avoid or minimise similar hazards in the future. What happened is only the latest in a long series of horrific floods, and they're getting worse. In Ellicott City, Md., a flood level expected only once in 1,000 years occurred twice in a three-year span, in 2016 and 2018. In 2022, flash floods in Kentucky displaced thousands of people. In February, devastating floods occurred in Kentucky, West Virginia, and Tennessee. We should no longer be surprised by the inevitable.

We are living in a new age of flooding. We can no longer afford to continue believing we have the solutions to stop or contain the rise of water. The best option to save lives is to reduce our vulnerability and exposure to these floods. That means preventing unnecessary new development on floodplains, and amping up efforts to help people move their homes from high-risk areas to safe territory.

This starts with the protection of floodplains, the natural areas that absorb floods. Human development destroys their ability to absorb excess water. To prevent it, we must implement adequate

zoning policies that limit construction there. This is the least costly option for preventing flood damage from getting worse.

Likewise, relocation of flood-prone homes to higher ground has been an important strategy for decades. But still a huge investment poured into trying to prevent flooding damage from occurring, building levees to try to keep floods away from our homes, and using emergency relief checks and insurance subsidies to pay victims. Billions of dollars are spent to protect those who have homes and businesses in flood zones - and then billions more are spent on recovery efforts when they fail. The Natural Resources Defense Council analysed thousands of data points and determined that for every USD 1.72 FEMA spends helping people move away from the paths of floods, USD 100 is spent to rebuild properties. We are essentially paying people to stay.

Our response to floods has been inadequate, if not misdirected. And now, owing to the heating climate, floods will be growing irrevocably worse, more widespread and longer in duration. We've failed to halt the losses and the threats of the past. Lacking a major course correction, we're destined to fail worse in the future.

The good news is that hundreds of programmes across the nation have proved we can change that unfortunate fate. In the aftermath of Hurricane Agnes in 1972 - the most damaging flood in American history up to that time - Lycoming County, Pa., succeeded in getting all 52 of its local municipalities to implement zoning restrictions that discouraged development on floodplains. This initiative had no chance of enactment before the flood occurred, but succeeded when local leaders seized the moment and turned tragedy into

opportunity. Today, spurred by a federal insurance programme, more than 22,000 communities nationwide have adopted floodplain zoning to one degree or another, although in many cases the rules are weak or ineffectively enforced, which needs to be corrected.

Going further, communities have enacted model programs to help people move beyond the danger zone. In North Carolina, Mecklenburg County officials improved the mapping of their floodplain and paid hundreds of people to voluntarily relocate. Residents there are now happy simply for their own safety when the rain falls.

Of course, not everyone who is vulnerable can move, and the impressive urban infrastructure of some flood-prone cities such as Sacramento or Memphis cannot be abandoned. People there will rely on the expensive reinforcement of levees and other defenses. But in many places across America floodplain development has been curbed, and the perils can be avoided or eliminated by floodplain protection and relocation of homes.

Only a small percentage of America's acreage lies within 100-year floodplains, where there is an estimated 1 per cent chance of flooding in any given year. We know where the danger lurks. We have choices. Americans move for all kinds of reasons, and to avoid a flood disaster is one of the better incentives to look for another place.

The water is going to rise. Floods are inevitable. But catastrophe is not. We need to get up and out of harm's way. We need to give rivers the room they need to flow, especially in today's world of a heating climate and intensifying storms. We know how to do this. We can afford to do this. What we lack is the political will. Let's find it — before the next flood finds us.

BY-TIM PALMER

Binge-Watching Hidden Charge: Whats the secret Behind

A new survey has revealed that popular OTT platforms in India like Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, and Disney+ Hotstar are quietly charging more while also forcing ads on viewers - even those who have paid subscriptions. This growing trend has frustrated many users, especially those who binge-watch regularly.

What the Survey Found According to the report by LocalCircles, and the essence from The Mint many OTT users feel cheated due to Hidden charges for HD or multi-screen viewing. Forced ads, even on paid plans. Complex pricing plans with confusing terms. In-app promotions pushing for higher packages

What Viewers Are Saying People say they're not getting what they paid for. Many subscribed thinking they'd get ad-free content and smooth viewing, but now they are interrupted by ads and asked to pay more for basic features like HD streaming or watching on TV screens. For instance, Amazon Prime users recently saw a new "With Ads" and "Ad-Free" plan introduced - forcing them to pay extra to avoid ads. Netflix already charges more for HD and multiple-device viewing. Disney+ Hotstar has also introduced more ads in its basic plans.

Impact on Indian Viewers 1. *Financial Burden on Middle-Class Families*

Earlier, families shifted from costly DTH services to OTT believing it was cheaper. But now, to access good quality and ad-free content, they need to subscribe to multiple platforms, which costs ?1,000-?2,000/month or more - same or more than DTH!

2. *Students & Youth Feeling Cheated* Youngsters and students who binge-watch shows or movies are especially upset. Many used shared accounts, but platforms are now restricting password sharing, forcing individual subscriptions.

3. *Tier 2 & Tier 3 Cities Losing Trust* Many users in smaller towns who adapted to digital platforms now feel cheated as costs rise. The promise of "cheap digital entertainment" seems broken.

4. *Content Fragmentation Hurts Viewers* Popular shows and movies are spread across multiple platforms. To watch everything, users must pay for 4-5 platforms, leading to frustration and cancellations.

Government Asked to Step In The survey saw 78% of respondents asking for a standard framework for pricing and content. People want transparency - if they're paying for ad-free content, they should get it.

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) and the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting may soon be approached for clearer guidelines on OTT pricing and advertising.

As OTT platforms become the new TV for millions of Indians, it's important they remain honest and fair. With rising charges and forced ads, viewers feel they're not getting their money's worth. It's time platforms listen to their audience - or risk losing them altogether.

By-Komal

Toxic metals in breast milk

High levels of toxic metals like lead and arsenic in breast milk may impair growth in infants, according to an alarming study. Breast milk is the best source of nutrition for infants under six months of age. However, it can also be a potential route of exposure to toxic metals and other contaminants that may impair neurological development and immune function, said the researchers from the University of Arizona in the US. The team focussed on Mayan women in Guatemala's Lake Atitlán watershed region, and found concentrations of arsenic and lead that exceeded World Health Organization safety standards in breast milk in mothers. "Detecting toxic metals in breast milk is deeply concerning and highlights the potential role of environmental pollution in undermining child development," said Sandra Rodriguez Quintana, a postdoctoral research associate at varsity.

"Our work calls for interventions to protect maternal and child health and understand how environmental concentrations of metals may be contributing to stunting and other health issues," Quintana added. Guatemala has the highest rate of impaired growth, or stunting, in the Western Hemisphere. Stunting is frequently attributed to poor nutrition and infections. Many studies have linked high levels of metals in drinking water to developmental, neurological, and learning problems in young children, but this is the first study to demonstrate an association with stunting in the Americas. For the study, published in the journal Environmental Pollution, the research team studied 80 mothers and their infants from four different Lake Atitlán communities. The scientists analysed breast milk samples from the mothers and measured the infants' lengths. They found that higher breast milk concentrations of arsenic, barium, beryllium and lead were associated with impaired growth of infants in these communities. The researchers also found higher concentrations of arsenic and barium in drinking water, which was identified as the major reason for toxic elements in breast milk. "Drinking water contaminated with toxic elements such as arsenic and pathogenic microbes imposes a serious burden on public health, especially for the developing child," the team said.

Donald Trump, the perpetually underrated homo sapien

Diplomacy is the vehicle for carrying on politics among nations. Even war has been called diplomacy by other means. The art of diplomacy involves pleasantries, lying, spying and cheating without getting caught, performing U-turns and successfully rationalizing all such manoeuvres. It involves absence of emotions and morality, treating humans as dispensable numbers and single-minded pursuit of national power. All the smiles, frowns and expressions of shock of the impeccably dressed diplomat are to be presumed as fake of a person who, avoiding to Churchill, "lies abroad for the good of his country" Churchill, however, never let the diplomatic etiquette take over him and remains notorious for his outrageous, inciting and provocative statements on issues like race, religion, colonialism and war. He, perhaps, had a division of labour with the Foreign Office; you talk, I bark and bite. Trump is, if anything, a few notches above Churchill in barking and biting for enhancing American power. While his predecessors fretted about China and cajoled the fiery dragon, he has called it for what is; a voracious dinosaur, whose appetite can be satisfied only at the expense of other nations. Crete's King's son Androgeos was killed by Athenians and as retribution, the Greeks had to send seven young men and seven young women, to calm the fury of the Minotaur, the bull-headed monster living in a secret labyrinth on the Island of Crete. The rich countries of the

world have been sending their manufacturing capabilities and employment opportunities to be devoured by the Communist monster in the secret state. The nourishment kept increasing the demanding capability of the dragon and soon it felt powerful enough to stop following the advice of the Communist laughing Buddha, Deng Xiaoping, to hide China's strength and bide its time. For a while, China's wolf warrior diplomats bared their fangs and howled. Trump, with the loudest mouth, single handedly, barked and bit where it hurt the most and the wolves retreated in silence.

Interestingly, the opinion leaders in the free world, who had kowtowed to the Chinese bullies and had acquiesced under cancellation threats, are now up in arms over Trump's abandonment of the diplomatic finesse. These opinion leaders monopolise the op-ed columns in the mainstream media and are using creative language to 'expose' Trump's rude and crude methods. The trouble for them is that Trump never made a secret of his rude and crude methods and so treats these 'pen warriors' as allies in his mission of bullying the world, as the US had done in the past. His MAGA (Make America Great Again) is explicitly and unabashedly the restoration of the America bullying power, that its faulty policies had lost in Vietnam, China, West Asia and in Afghanistan. Putin rues the loss of the Imperial Russian and the USSR might and Xi Jinping laments the 'century of humiliation'. Trump's predecessors in

America mourned the loss of the US pre-eminence in world affairs but considered it inevitable in a changing world. Trump does not believe in losing without a fight and making it easy for the usurper. He does seem to be succeeding in giving China a run for its money and bending Europe once again to the American will. By choosing Israel once again as the most promising ally in West Asia, he has brought Iran's proxies in the region to their knees and then he did the unthinkable; use of bunker busters on Iran's nuclear facilities buried deep in the mountains that had withstood repeated Israeli attacks. Perhaps, this is what 'diplomacy by other means' means.

Given this high degree of transparency in Trump's bark and bite, it is surprising that the mainstream media's opinion leaders persist with their attempts to expose him. Even as they grudgingly concede the success of his unorthodox methods, they keep saying that this success will not succeed. So, the New York Times screams, "The Pointless Triumph of a Hapless President" without informing us how one who is succeeding is hapless. The MAD magazine had brought out a book "MAD About Trump: A Brilliant Look at Our Brainless President." In 2017, ABC News conducted a poll with the question, "What one word best describes your impression of Trump?" The most common answers were "incompetent," "arrogant," "strong," "idiot," "egotistical," "ignorant," "great," "racist," and "narcissistic" along with some

unprintable swear words. The selection of 'strong' and 'great' does show a confusion among the citizens. Yet, does it not speak volumes for the absence of objectivity in American voters that seven years later, they not only re-elected him but gave his party a majority in both Houses of the Congress obviating a third impeachment?

Trump has been the target of two assassination attempts, the first of which he narrowly survived taking the bullet on his ear. Yet, like every epithet thrown at him, he turned the assassin's bullet into his own weapon; his bleed-covered face, raised fist and the battle-cry "fight, fight" took his popularity up by many notches. Victory has three components; the skill of the victorious, the lack of skill of the opponent and the element of fate, though it is said that the last is a euphemism for the first. Trump may not have won as much as the Democrats have lost. They overestimated Biden and even Kamala Harris, though it is inconceivable how that guffaw-prone, world-salad-serving damsel could be estimated at anything more than a mediocre performer. They rallied behind the likes of anti-semitic Ilhan Omar, AOC and others in the so-called socialist squad. Their unabashed rationalisation of illegal immigration, crime and even looting pleased no one, except some in Hollywood. Their loud support of the long line of women, more than a dozen of them, who made accusations against him just after he announced his candidature in 2015 and brushing under the carpet the 'pay

for play' of Hunter Biden with the support of his then Vice-President father did not convince any fence-sitters of the Democrats being focussed on anything except opposing Trump.

Yet, the biggest failure of Trump's adversaries was to underestimate him. Sun Tzu says in the Art of War, "If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle." The anti-Trump brigade did not know their own leadership and knew Trump even less. Trump is a showman and it is easy for the audience to see the character being played as the person playing it. People laugh and cry with the character without realising that the actor has no emotions except satisfaction at his success. Trump has his audience including his adversaries as puppets on a string. They call him strong and great, then they call him hapless but triumphant. Julius Caesar, the other showman who was not lucky enough to escape his assassins, would have envied Trump.

In the ABC poll, Trump was called "determined," "American," and "patriotic" also, but only one percent voted for each of these words; Trump got 63 million votes in 2016, 74 million in 2020 and 75 million in 2024. Apparently, many of those who used epithets for him in the ABC poll felt each of these times that he will be better able to defend American interests than Hillary or Biden! It is time the Democrats leave behind the polls and start studying the rival and his mind.

By-RN Prasher