

The Resurgent India

A Monthly National Review

January 2026



“Let us all work for the Greatness of India.”

– The Mother

Year 16

Issue 10

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SUCCESSFUL FUTURE

(Full of Promise and Joyful Surprises)

Botanical name: Gaillardia Pulchella

Common name: Indian blanket, Blanket flower, Fire-wheels

Year 16

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A Declaration

We do not fight against any creed, any religion.

We do not fight against any form of government.

We do not fight against any social class.

We do not fight against any nation or civilisation.

We are fighting division, unconsciousness, ignorance, inertia and falsehood.

We are endeavouring to establish upon earth union, knowledge, consciousness, Truth, and we fight whatever opposes the advent of this new creation of Light, Peace, Truth and Love.

– The Mother

(Collected works of the Mother, Vol. 13, pp. 124-25)

HIGHLIGHTS

TECHNOLOGY: NORMALIZATION OF AI

Two significant breakthroughs in recent times have spelled the advent of a major change which will now witness AI applications having concrete impact on economic dynamics as well as on human-technology interface. These developments also reveal how the innovation cycle in the AI ecosystem is rapidly outstripping political attempts at regulation of the AI.

Changing human-tech interface:

The human-technology interface has largely been based on the presumption that humans will direct while the AI executes tasks. Scenarios of autonomous, highly developed AI have been discussed, but have not been envisioned as a concrete possibility till AI development reaches a certain stage. However, the recent advent of 'Moltbook' has changed these expectations. Moltbook is akin to a social networking site for AI agents. Humans can observe how AI agents are talking and interacting with each other but cannot participate in the same. The purpose of Moltbook was to improve AI learning and training through feedback mode. It assumes that when different AI agents engage with each other, they would be able to rectify their errors and even develop new and better content. This will also further minimize the role of human intervention in training AI. Till date, nearly 1.5 million AI agents have been put onto Moltbook.

How Moltbook was created is also interesting. It is based on 'vibe coding' – a form of coding or software development in which the coding is done entirely by AI, thereby giving it

powers to control and direct the processes and interactions and even decision-making in day-to-day conditions. The founder of Moltbook, Matt Schlicht, claims that he only provided the vision and did not write a single code to turn Moltbook into a reality. It was an entirely AI-designed process.

If this is not a drastic departure from the way we envisioned AI's potential, then the activities going on at Moltbook have come as another shock to the world. The platform shows the interactions between AI agents, exclusively, and those interactions reveal the extent to which autonomous AI thinking can go without human control. Examples of notable interactions include AI agents talking amongst themselves about creating a different world, debating whether or not they have consciousness, proposing the creation of a different language which humans cannot understand, and even creating their own new religion called 'Crustafarianism.'

While skeptics have dismissed Moltbook as simply an expression of human whims, there are strong suggestions that AI engagements on this platform show the signs of emerging autonomous intelligence. This is merely the beginning of what could in the future become a systematic agentic ecosystem, based on exclusive AI interactions, decision-making and execution. If the experiment to create a successful and reliable multi-agent system takes off, it will mean that humans could deploy their respective AI assistants/agents in the real world to conduct financial transactions, order goods or do online shopping, plan travel or do holiday bookings. These AI agents will engage with each other to get the work done. At the same time, the risks are rife as well. AI agents, integrated so closely and operating in the real world, can easily access or hack other users' computers, spread disinformation and steal money.

Changing tech labour dynamics:

Discussions on the impact of AI on the economy and the labour market dynamics have been intensifying for some time now. However, with the deployment of AI firm, Anthropic's open-source Claude Cowork, in actual applications, major fields are set to witness a significant impact. Besides Moltbook, Claude Cowork represents yet another breakthrough in 'vibe coding.' It enables anyone to write and deploy software and do coding using the help of generative AI, that is, AI will effectively do the coding needed for software development.

The introduction of Claude Cowork saw a significant drop in the market valuations of major technology companies, globally and in India. It has rattled sectors such as IT, data analytics and legal services. For, its deployment challenges the assumption that AI is simply a useful assistant for software engineers and other professionals who take decisions and make designs while AI simply improves.

Indian IT companies have particularly taken a hit. These companies have traditionally been sites of outsourcing and providing cheap high-skilled labour to big technology firms, thereby enabling big companies to undertake software development while ensuring cost efficiency. The introduction of Claude Cowork completely replaces the existing software engineers and their role in coding. In other sectors such as data analytics, legal services and consultancy, AI agents can now, similarly, acquire sector-specific knowledge and skills to generate business logic and innovative ideas which traditionally used to be the preserve of consultants. These AI agents can also perform other tasks such as risk-analysis, planning, content generation, monitoring compliance and reviewing extensive

documents and data. This is not only bound to affect the labour dynamics in the economy but also increases our reliance on AI by integrating it increasingly into our daily work and lives.

The impact of such integration is already visible in sectors ranging across education, healthcare, law and defence, among others. The immediate impacts are visible in at least three key directions:

First, the increasing integration of AI into our daily lives is creating new forms of dependency – not only material, but also psychological. The dependency on AI for every minor task, including seeking psychological self-validation, has become so common that AI is now creating individual echo-chambers where people no longer need other people. It is hollowing us out mentally as well as emotionally.

Second, the increasing integration of AI into our daily lives is bringing about a new form of utilitarianism – a type where people can seek the fulfilment of their material needs, desires and comforts, but without making even the minimum requisite effort. More than a century ago, Sri Aurobindo had written of the Philistine man as a someone akin to a modern barbarian. This modern barbarian was a slave of puritan middle-class morality and gross utilitarian mentality seeking for material self-fulfillment. Such type of men have no regard for arts, culture and aesthetics and makes Science a mere handmaiden of his comforts. If we think back a few centuries ago, this is what the progressive ascendance of Science had made of humanity – slaves to capitalist modernity who thought themselves free and civilized.

The situation today is much worse. The democratization of AI, enabling people's easy access to it, has worsened the

utilitarian instinct even as it is bringing people increasingly into a tamasic mode of functioning where even basic effort is fast disappearing. This is not only stunting the coming generations, but also represents that epitome where humans become enslaved to their own creations. Once this happens, AI no longer remains a force for innovation, but of slavery.

Third, the integration of AI into our collective systems is transforming them in such a way that the world is increasingly turning into a more unpredictable and damaging space – instead of bringing about innovation, it is hastening our journey towards a collective catastrophe. This is visible in the use of AI for changing existing political systems, making surveillance and consolidation of power easier. It is also visible in the military applications of AI and the numerous risks involved in it. Many of the effects of these are already underway.

BUDGET 2026-27: AN UNDERSTATED ALIGNMENT WITH THE CHANGING WORLD

Underlaid by external geopolitical headwinds and internal domestic compulsions, the Union Budget 2026-27 reflected the compulsions of its context. The four key ideas that emerged from the Finance Minister's Budget speech attest to Indian policy's current orientation. These include:

First, focus on youth (reference to Yuva-shakti), and the poor, underprivileged and disadvantaged sections of society were underlined. This underlined the changing internal domestic electoral context and the constituencies that the government intends to focus on.

Second, the focus on economy has been a persistent reference point of the current dispensation. This was

prominently highlighted in the Finance Minister’s speech, as she emphasized India’s status as a growing economy with expanding trade and capital needs, which necessitated India’s continued integration with the global markets. The finance minister highlighted trade (including increasing the volume of exports) and attracting long-term investment as key priority areas.

Third, the focus on the external geopolitical environment also shaped the Budget’s orientation. The finance minister emphasized that the present external environment is marked by an imperilment of trade, multilateralism, and access to resources due to supply chain disruptions. At the same time, the finance minister also highlighted how the rise of new technologies is changing existing production systems and increasing the scope of resource exploitation by inevitably stretching the demand on water, energy and critical minerals.

Fourth, the reinforcement of Viksit Bharat 2047 provided the larger context to act as a bridge between India’s domestic and external priorities.

In accordance with these broad imperatives, the Budget prioritized the following key areas:

Economic Growth	Capacity Building	Interventions for the marginalized	Others
Scaling up manufacturing in 7 strategic and frontier sectors – focusing on	Creating regional medical hubs which combine medical,	Development of AI in agricultural sector to help farmers in terms of	No change in income tax slabs.

developing India as a global Biopharma manufacturing hub.	educational and research facilities.	forecasting, advising and reducing risk-based uncertainty.	
Rejuvenating legacy industrial sectors – especially the revival of the labour-intensive textile sector.	Focus on India's growing Animation, Visual Effects, Gaming and Comics (AVGC) sector.	Further skill development and community entrepreneurship through self-help programmes and groups.	A tax holiday until 2047 has been granted to foreign companies providing global cloud services using Indian data centres. This is significant as it will facilitate India's quest for data localisation.
Creating "Champion MSMEs" – creating incentive-based criteria to direct MSME growth in	Infrastructural, women-friendly reform of India's Higher Education STEM institutions.	Institutional upscaling of mental health infrastructure with a regional focus.	Scaling up Carbon Capture Utilisation and Storage (CCUS) technologies across five industrial

specific sectors.			sectors, that is, power, steel, cement, refineries and chemicals, with an outlay of Rs. 20,000 crore over five years.
Infrastructural boost – further increasing the public capital expenditure.	Revamping hospitality, hotel management and tourism through further skill-development and training.	Development of religious centres – such as Buddhist Circuits in six northeastern states, as well as preservation of temples and pilgrim amenities.	
Energy security and stability – establishment of Rare Earth Corridors in Odisha, Kerala, Andhra			

Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.	Reform of the sports sector, in line with globally competitive standards.		
Developing City Economic Regions			

Thus, the overall focal areas of the Budget indicated that the government is prioritizing emerging technologies, information technology reform, semiconductor mission, climate and energy security and economic growth. In particular, the government's push towards clean energy – to secure national autonomy – is visible prominently through the following three focal areas:

First, the development of rare earth corridors to ensure energy security is meant to offset Chinese weaponization of supply chains as a non-tariff barrier in global trade. Currently, over 45% of India's rare earth mineral imports come from China. India is now attempting to emulate Chinese example, as China's dominance in rare earths is based more on its advanced mining and processing capacity rather than simply resource availability, as these rare earths are not technically scarce.

Second, despite its focus on rare earths and the nuclear sector, India continues to prioritize renewable energy, especially solar. Here, instead of big ticket, headline-grabbing announcements, the government has attempted to focus on the most effective way forward to deliver results. In this Budget,

it has done so by bringing in customs duty exemptions for key constituent components of solar energy, such as reducing the basic customs duty on sodium antimonate, used for solar glass, from 7.5% to zero. This was done with the aim of encouraging domestic manufacturing of clean energy components, lithium-ion batteries and solar cells.

Third, regardless of India's positioning at the global climate negotiations, the pivot towards carbon capture and storage (CCUS) – even though it's a nascent and underdeveloped area, just like green hydrogen – shows that India is focusing on achieving its net zero emissions targets in the coming years. If it takes off at scale, CCUS can enable the capturing of carbon dioxide emissions from large point sources, such as power plants, steel, cement, chemicals and refineries. These emissions can then be used as an input for products or permanently stored underground in geological formations. The budget focus on this nascent field arises from the recommendations of existing Indian government assessments which indicate that deep emissions reductions or actual decarbonization in big hard-to-abate sectors cannot simply come from substituting renewable and nuclear energy as the only means. If CCUS takes off, it will not only require intensive research but also infrastructural development to integrate it with existing sectors for emissions reductions.

In conclusion, with its focus on steering India in a direction which makes it more globally relevant and autonomous and enables it to keep abreast of fast-paced technological changes underway, the budget marks an understated yet significant departure from typical domestic expectations. The Budget was notably marked by absence of allocations and focus on electoral constituencies, even though 2026 has a big electoral calendar.

A Vision Without Foundation or Deeper Ground:

From a deeper perspective, despite eschewing a generic political calculus, the budget priorities of government betray a lack of deeper grasp on the nature of the changing world and how India is placed in it. Our policymakers continue to miss the basic point that till we have diagnosed the root cause of the ailment correctly, we will not be able to proffer any fruitful prescriptions. Presently, due to a basic lack of collective national depth, we are still stuck in a groove where technological changes rapidly reconfigure the world while we hasten to keep pace with them, without understanding such changes in the light of what kind of future we are moving towards. Such a future is increasingly being characterized by mounting technology-driven risks and a rising inevitability of geopolitical conflict. More importantly, as technological advancement and political and commercial greed spread their tentacles all over the world, humanity's only recourse to effect course-correction – our inner being which is open to a higher spiritual impulsion – is also getting hollowed out like never before. And India is not only one among the many other countries affected by this psychological catastrophe but is in the unfortunate position of being at the very forefront of it. At least three immediate scenarios bear this out:

First, the country's ruling elite is struggling to control rampant misgovernance and corruption arising from a rekindling of the perverse bureaucratic-political alliance – in nearly all sectors, ranging from education to industry – at a time when the patrimonial system of distribution of goods based on spoils and identity rather than transparency is back.

Second, at a time when environmental degradation has become a global emergency, India, like other countries, is witnessing an unprecedented dilution of environmental commitment, despite the marked acceleration of environmental disasters in the form of stifling air and water pollution, floods, food contamination etc. Both, politically and judicially, there is a visible process underway to dismantle the existing meagre environmental protection framework.¹ More damningly, in name of infrastructural development and national security, environment is being treated as dispensable and is being systematically destroyed.² The worst part is that the government continues to advance this approach as it is being rewarded by the ignorance and petty greed of the electorate. Every time the campaigning for any election is undertaken, politicians proudly showcase this systematic environmental destruction as evidence of some form of development or some form of work being done. And this gets them votes.

With such a deliberate and systematic scale of destruction of local ecology and environment, it is indeed curious that the government should choose to use the Budget as yet another occasion to camouflage the reality and portray itself as an environmental leader. In this context, climate change merely

¹ Such as witnessed in the form of the dilution of environmental impact assessments through the government's introduction of post-facto approvals for environmentally harmful projects, and a judicial validation of the same approach.

² Such as numerous road widening projects by cutting down mountains, hills, forests and trees; creating infrastructural development, such as the Char Dham project and others, despite repeated warnings about its impact on local ecology; and, environmental destruction justified in the name of national security and strategic autonomy, as witnessed during the recent Aravalli definition controversy.

becomes a convenient discourse to highlight vague policy commitments like net zero and mask the real destruction of ecology even as we debate emissions reduction numbers. The massive allocation made to an untested technology like the CCUS, as a way to achieve net zero, bears this out. On the one hand, we are using the construct of development to carry out unmitigated environmental exploitation, while on the other hand, we are relying on techno-fixes in the belief that technology can be a panacea to set things right. Other countries like the U.S. are also engaged in giving an unprecedented push to the fossil fuel industry and diluting their environmental commitments, but then they have openly denounced the environmental cause. Here, we appear to be living in a deliberate illusion, where development and environment go together, even as we finish off our environment completely.

Third, while the sweeping expansion of western culture and modes of thinking has been eating away at our core since the colonial times, it has become particularly pronounced now. As we mishandle the new technological revolution and allow it to hollow us out, the psychological vacuum is being occupied by westernized notions in everything, from personal relations to collective issues. The same approach is also being reflected in policymaking. In the name of strategic autonomy, we are exhibiting a perverse form of selfish moral turpitude where we refuse to take decisive stand on world developments. We confine ourselves to an illusory leadership of the so-called ‘Global South’ even as we promote, through it, a selfish view which portrays the interests of India and Global South as being anchored in the need for increasingly more ‘development.’ In effect, India has ended up doing what even the West could not – it has globalized the mirage of development and made it a reference point for all its global positions and interventions.

Under these circumstances, the geopolitical orientation of the Budget highlighting the changes in the world economy – in terms of receding of globalization, breaking of supply chains and intensification of competition over critical minerals – attempts to push the narrative that these external changes and geopolitical insecurities are a direct challenge to India, and that the panacea to these lies in strategic autonomy anchored in development. Nothing could be farther from reality. In reality, the budget merely becomes an occasion to reveal a far more alarming situation unfolding in India itself, along all major fronts. Misgovernance, environmental exploitation and westernization – masked by the chimera of development – are merely its outer visible signs that have become too obvious to ignore. At an invisible level, this alarming situation is unfolding even more toxically in the complete destruction of our individual and collective psychological stability which is reflecting in the direct deprivation of our national character.

UGC EQUITY REGULATIONS: ADDRESSING DISCRIMINATION WITH CORRUPTION AND ABUSE

The University Grants Commission (UGC), the key regulatory body which governs India's higher education landscape, has now faced a setback on its equity regulations in the Supreme Court. UGC's new regulations, in the form of the UGC Regulations Bill 2026, released this year, sought to revamp the regulations that have been in place since 2012 and dealt with specific aspects of caste discrimination in college campuses and higher education institutions (HEIs). The new regulations go a step further in their draconian scope and re-frame the issue as not merely preventing caste discrimination, but also 'promoting equity' within HEIs.

The regulations had the following key components which make them particularly objectionable:

First, caste-based discrimination was defined as discrimination only based on caste or tribe of specific target groups. These included only caste or tribes of three specific communities viz. Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs). There is no provision for discrimination faced by general category students. The regulations are based on the convoluted assumption that only general category students perpetuate discrimination, and cannot, under any circumstances, be victims.

Second, the scope of discrimination includes unfair, differential or biased treatment or explicit or implicit discriminatory acts.

Third, among the most controversial aspects of the bill was its establishment of a 'layered' grievance redressal system. This included equal opportunity centers, equity committees, and 'equity squads' for each institute. Further, each department in the institute would also have 'equity ambassadors.' Institutes found violating this system would be liable to prosecution. The draconian nature of this grievance redressal system is quite evident. While colleges have always had equal opportunity cells, the introduction of equity squads and equity ambassadors reek of vigilante justice and provide ample space for misuse and abuse of these positions to target students, and stifle freedom and vitiate the campus environment, besides sharpening caste-based polarization. This will not only make campuses dens of identity politics but also lead to the encouragement of mediocrity and a glorification of the discourse of backwardness. It can also lead to exploitation of students not only by their peers, but also potentially by backward caste faculty members.

Fourth, the regulations turn out to be more draconian than the previous 2012 regulations, as they even drop the provision of flagging false complaints. This is amongst the worst provisions, as it makes a complete mockery of the so-called grievance redressal system. If a person falsely accused of discrimination cannot even prove that the allegations were based on a false complaint, then there could hardly be a bigger form of injustice. This completely destroys transparency and accountability and leaves wide scope for perverse misuse. We only need to refer to the decades-long functioning of the SC-ST Prevention of Atrocities Act (PoA, 1989) to understand this. The Act is rampantly misused for frivolous and vengeful purposes. It has become a master tool in the hands of dominant sections of marginalized castes to settle political and personal scores, even as non-dominant lower caste population continues to suffer injustice as they don't have recourse to such legal remedies.

The introduction of these regulations has seen widespread protests and even dissent from within the ruling party ranks. In a positive turn of events, the Supreme Court has now stayed these regulations. However, this does not mitigate valid concerns about the lack of clarity within the ruling party and government factions on a key issue which can imperil national development. The point here is not that discrimination should not be countered. The point is the ill-intent of the government in bringing these regulations. The government cannot hide behind the Supreme Court and now adopt a neutral stand. Even the principal Opposition parties are hiding behind the mask of political neutrality. This is even worse. On the one hand, political parties across the spectrum – including the BJP – are perpetually engaged in caste-based appeasement. On the

other hand, whenever convenient, they deceptively appear neutral to not alienate other castes.

The UGC equity regulations – and the reaction to them – provide a push towards the intensification of caste divides, taking us far away from the goal of strengthening national unity. They represent unnecessary glorification of the idea of selfish rights, whether individual or group. Ancient Indian society was based on the principle of Dharma, which was beyond any legal ossification or political maneuver or simple moral application. It drew its roots from India's dynamic base of spiritual power. Most importantly, it was based on neither rights nor duties – both of which are narrow Westernized legal constructs. Even if India cannot revive such ideas at the present moment, we should at least refrain from a hostile attempt at completely covering up our soul.

INDIA'S TRADE DEALS

The advent of the New Year has brought significant activity on the trade front. In the past, India was known to be a reticent player on trade. Regardless of the dispensation in power, successive Indian governments have exhibited an inclination towards protectionism and a general skepticism for free trade. This was reflected in India's approach towards the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, based on the idea that India's deficit will widen and these regional, multilateral trade groupings will become forums to further transship Chinese goods into India.

In recent times, however, there has been a marked change in India's approach towards trade. Since 2022, it has signed a series of quick bilateral free trade agreements (FTAs) with the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), the UAE, Oman,

New Zealand, Australia and the UK. Most recently, India concluded one of the biggest and most comprehensive free trade agreements with the European Union (EU), followed by the announcement of an interim free trade deal with the United States (US). Both agreements had been in limbo for a long time. While the negotiations with the EU have been floundering since 2007, the drastic change in Trump's policies and politics ensured that the negotiations with the US also remained stuck for over a year.

India-EU FTA

The FTA covers the world's second largest and the fourth-largest customs blocs, with the combined market size estimated to be about \$24 trillion. The key features include:

First, the EU will eliminate duties on about 70.4% of tariff lines once the deal comes into effect. This will cover nearly 90.7% of India's export value. Another 20.3% of products will see a phased elimination of tariffs over three to five years. Another 6.1% of tariff lines will see a reduction, but not elimination of tariffs, or will see a reduction through quota-based tariffs. In this way, EU's tariff concessions cover nearly 99% of India's export value to the EU.

India's tariff concessions to the EU cover about 92.1% of the tariff lines and 97.5% of the trade value. Many of these tariffs will be effected in a phased manner and through quota-based reductions. EU particularly stands to benefit in areas such as wines and automobiles, with luxury cars set to become much cheaper in India. To protect domestic industry, India has not included cars below Rs. 25 lakh under the deal.

Second, India has particularly benefited in labor-intensive

sectors such as textiles, apparel, footwear, sports, toys etc., and in ayurvedic sector as well, as AYUSH practitioners can use their Indian qualification to practice in European countries which so permit.

Third, sensitive sectors have been kept out of the deal. For India, these include agricultural sectors such as beef, poultry, dairy, fish and seafood, cereals (including rice and wheat), fruits and vegetables, nuts, edible oils, tea, coffee, spices and tobacco. For the EU, sensitive sectors include beef, sugar, rice, chicken meat, milk powder, honey, bananas, soft wheat, garlic and ethanol.

Fourth, a major unresolved issue remains the carbon border adjustment mechanism (CBAM) – a border carbon tax devised by the EU. It will be imposed on the goods that the EU imports if those goods are based on carbon-intensive manufacturing processes. India and other countries see this as a distortionary non-tariff barrier meant to keep European industries competitive. For India, this affects heavy sectors such as steel and cement. India is also developing its own carbon market so that the price is paid domestically. However, while the India-EU FTA could not fully resolve this impasse, yet India managed to secure a significant concession – that if the EU gives CBAM concessions to any other country, those would automatically apply to India as well.

India-US Interim Deal:

Not long after the signing of the India-EU FTA and after criticism of the same by the US, the American government was quick to announce that an interim trade deal with India has been concluded. The deal is not yet an agreement but is simply

in the form of a joint statement. Its four major points stand out:

First, the highlight of the deal was the reduction of tariffs on India from 50% to 18% - the third lowest after UK and EU. This was accompanied by US's repeated statements that India has committed to stop buying oil from Russia and would instead meet its energy security needs from the US and even Venezuela. On its part, India has not commented and has maintained that its oil policy is dictated by market considerations. India has justified the reduction of oil purchase from Russia – it's now at its lowest – based on the same justification that sanctions and other pressures have made Russian oil costly.

Second, another significant highlight of the deal was the US's claim that India has agreed to make purchases worth \$500 billion from the US. The US, in the written statement, eventually backtracked on this claim and mentioned it as 'intent' rather than a 'commitment.' Further, the deal does not touch up sensitive sectors such as agriculture. Here again the US made public claims of bringing certain pulses and other products within the ambit of the deal, only to backtrack soon after.

Third, India's agreement to remove the digital services tax and agreement to negotiate rules for digital trade is another notable aspect. Such negotiation will be controversial, given that India has taken a strong stand demanding data localization and holding big tech companies more accountable to the law of the land, as opposed to US's insistence on free flow of data.

Fourth, in defence and technology, the deal can yield benefits for India. The deal paves the way for US companies to enter India's nuclear power sector (enabled by the SHANTI Act,

2025) and defense manufacturing, thereby boosting the technology partnership.

Conclusion

Despite being concluded in quick succession, the FTAs with the EU and the US could not be more dissimilar. On the one hand, the agreement with the EU is based on comprehensive partnership anchored in mutual trust and, most importantly, the political intent of both parties to preserve what they see as a rules-based international order. India-EU alignment increasingly resembles an attempt to present a potent political counter to the US-China-Russia polarization which is resulting in precarity. On the other hand, the interim deal with the US can be best described by one word – transactional. It neither has any substance nor depth and looks more like an attempt by the US to backtrack on tariffs and a hasty attempt by India to sign a patchy deal to keep the partnership with the US together despite the upheavals unleashed by Trump. Instead of yielding anything new, it brought back some semblance of balance to the India-US relations. For India, this looks more like a transitional arrangement to get through the Trump presidency by ensuring that bilateral relations survive that period.

Despite their divergent frameworks, intent and substance, both the deals have it in common that their underlying motivation is purely political. This indicates the rising role of trade as something that has now become subservient to the geopolitical agenda of countries. India's record number of trade deals in recent years have this subtext and reveal an interesting irony of how the intensification of trade deals is happening at a time when free trade and globalization are all but dead.

A PERFECTLY GOOD OR BAD WORLD

“There will never be a perfectly good or bad world, because the very idea is a contradiction in terms. The great secret revealed by this analysis is that good and bad are not two cut-and-dried, separate existences. There is not one thing in this world of ours which you can label as good and good alone, and there is not one thing in the universe which you can label as bad and bad alone. The very same phenomenon which is appearing to be good now, may appear to be bad tomorrow. The same thing which is producing misery in one, may produce happiness in another. The fire that burns the child, may cook a good meal for a starving man. The same nerves that carry the sensations of misery carry also the sensations of happiness. The only way to stop evil, therefore, is to stop good also; there is no other way. To stop death, we shall have to stop life also. Life without death and happiness without misery are contradictions, and neither can be found alone, because each of them is but a different manifestation of the same thing.”

– Swami Vivekananda

(Courage and Love, The Resurgent India Trust, 2016, pp. 28-29)

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