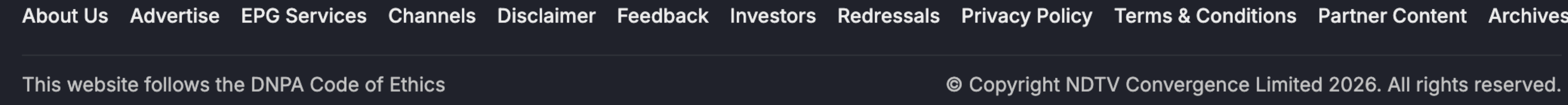


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A Reputation Built On Fear

Now the restraint has loosened. Larger numbers and the echo chamber of social media have encouraged louder assertion. With it, some of our least admirable habits travel too: disorder in public spaces, indifference to civic norms, behaviour that unsettles neighbours. A welcome once taken for granted is now turning into irritation. Respect that rests on caution evaporates as soon as caution is abandoned.

Numbers show the paradox clearly. Nearly one-fifth of humanity lives in India, but our share of world trade is barely four per cent. The contrast with the past is stark. Once, our exports determined the strategies of empires. Today, our goods are so ordinary they can be replaced overnight by Bangladesh or Vietnam. Once the world came to us; now our brightest rush to them.

We console ourselves with software services, but even that is brittle pride. Clients come because we are inexpensive, not irreplaceable. Take away the cost advantage and the illusion collapses. A country staking its self-respect on cheapness stands no firmer than a man balancing on rented crutches.

Why do we cling to illusions? Because they are easier than courage. Families still measure success by the dollar salary of children working abroad, not by what is built here. Safe employment is prized, risk discouraged.

The deeper condition is not economic but psychological. For centuries we have leaned on someone else: kings

Social media magnifies the illusion. Viral clips assure us that every modern discovery already existed in our scriptures.

everything, the present is not our responsibility. But consolation is not progress; it is only another way of postponing work.

too often visibility is mistaken for value. Noise is confused with dignity.

clarity need not be displayed as noise. Once religion becomes mere performance, it has already been lost.

sacrificed for appearance.

Respect cannot be borrowed; it must be created. Those who have built companies, advanced research, or entered public life abroad are honoured not because they demanded it but because they delivered value. Respect always

Laboratories that should push knowledge forward are too few. In their place we raise slogans. We shout to feel strong. But strength that depends on shouting has already confessed its weakness.

their achievements, and one policy abroad unsettles us once again.

The visa hike is not the real issue. Nor are the protests abroad. They are only reminders. The deeper problem is our addiction to borrowed pride and our unwillingness to face our weakness.

change their rules tomorrow, and again we will flinch. What trembles is not their policy but our own shaky foundation.

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