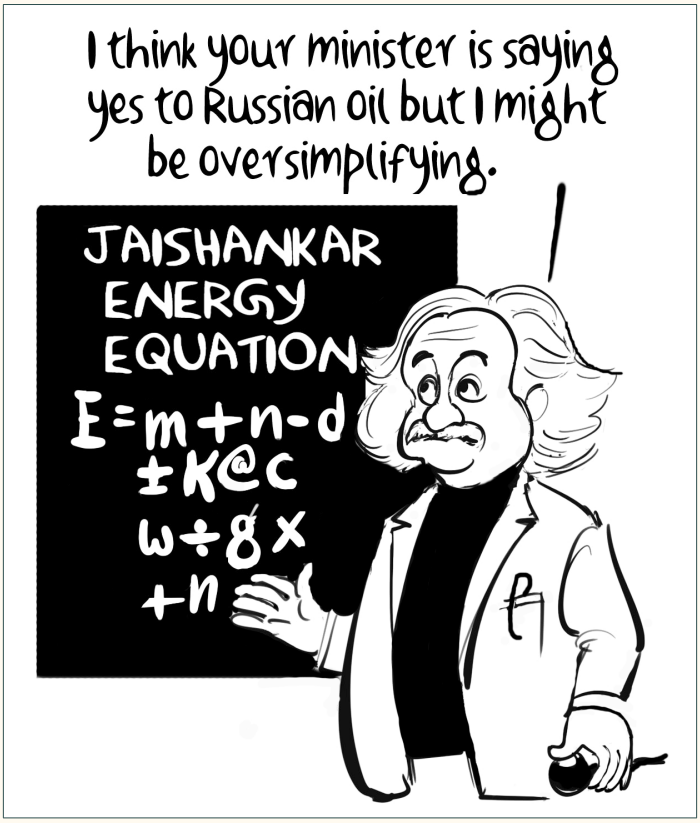


WHEN ORION MUST HAVE LET OUT A 'BOW-WOW' IN APPROVAL AND (J)AI WAS DECODED BY ALBERT

by

R. RAJAGOPAL

When orion must have let out a 'bow-wow' in approval and (J)AI was decoded by Albert

R. Rajagopal
(Review)

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The electronic versions were generated from sources marked up in LaTeX after incorporating all the thumbnails of the original sketches, in a computer running GNU/LINUX operating system. PDF was typeset using LuaTeX from TeXLive 2025. The base font used is Cormarant Garamond Medium at 10 pt.

Cover: Cartoon by E. P. Unny (See *The Indian Express* dated 16 Feb 2026).

Sayahna Foundation
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Trivandrum, India 695571
URL: books.sayahna.org

The February now in progress has been tough on cartoonists. Competition from real life has been too keen this month with Orion, the robot dog, launching a blister fest of memes, the medal-winning robot that Bal Narandra built spoiling to inspire generations to come, a former IFS officer and current minister retelling a "joke" about his email trail with Epstein … Not to forget the beef memes taking down Kerala Story 2.

If such a kaleidoscope of breathtaking events compete with another to earn a spot on the collective Comedy Central, what chance do career cartoonists have with their puny tools of irony and lampooning? That must be the reason that I did not pay adequate attention to this month's "Business as Usual" cartoons by EP Unny in The Indian Express.

Mercifully, Ashok Kumar PK of Sayahna Foundation, which propagates open access publishing and has an English version too, sent me the link (https://books.sayahna.org/ml/pdf/unny-300.pdf) to some of Unny's cartoons in The Express this month. Ashok Kumar, a free con-

tent activist who has four decades of experience in typesetting and who is also one of the pioneers of the palliative movement in India, regularly sends the links (the Internet-age hyper word is evocatively and lyrically translated as the calming "*kannikal*" on the Sayahna site) to Unny's cartoons.

I, like countless cartoon fans, have always been an admirer of Unny's cartoons and have been following his work since 1991, especially after I reached Calcutta. (It could be a mere coincidence that I am writing this in Calcutta or it could be that the great city sets the pace and temperament to savour a cartoon without losing any of its bite.) Yet, I was not prepared for the back-to-back brilliance, the steady and relentless rat-a-tat shots from Unny's weapon of choice.

Only those with steel in the heart and fire in the belly would dare venture into AI territory after the Galgotias knocked the stuffing out of every lampoonist in town. How can you beat the devilish delight that makes a YouTube humorist mispronounce the name as "Golgappa Uni-

versity"? Onto such a treacherous territory, Unny waded in with his pen and ink to ask on February 20, two days after the robodog hit the headlines: "Before our next big AI event, will we be ready with our own scapegoat?" In 14 words, Unny has covered several issues – and without joining the lynch-mob that targeted only the university.



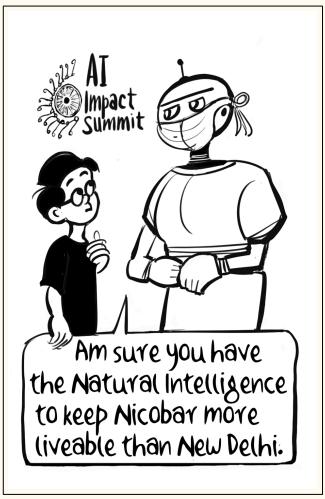
Unny's February 20 cartoon is so multi-layered that reams can be written about what he must have really meant. He has accomplished this without mentioning the dog that has now become a cliche but the goat brings out the domesticated animal link without making it too apparent. The overseas connection is also made clear through the words "our own" without mentioning China.

The drawing too was phenomenal. Calvin is slightly hunched. Does it signify our shame or am I imagining things by seeing what I want to see? If so, the cartoon-

ist has transcended a barrier and succeeded in taking the audience to another plane. My only worry is that the robotic components in the scapegoat look so fetching that the Chinese may clone it. Remember, all this is done in the narrowest real estate available on the front page.

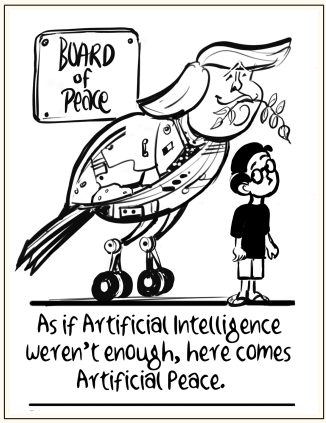


Unny had dipped his toe in the AI pond on February 17 (which means the cartoon must have been drawn on February 16), making the desktop to ask: "Want me to generate a suitably positive, non-anxious welcome note for AI?"



The next day – two days after the National Green Tribunal cleared the Great Nicobar mega infrastructure project – a robot tells Calvin: "Am sure you have the Natural Intelligence to keep Nicobar more liveable than New Delhi." Do not miss the mask on the robot which

apparently has kitted itself better than Calvin for New Delhi. Again, am I imagining that the robot's posture is slightly deferential to Calvin, as machines are now but we are not sure for how long?

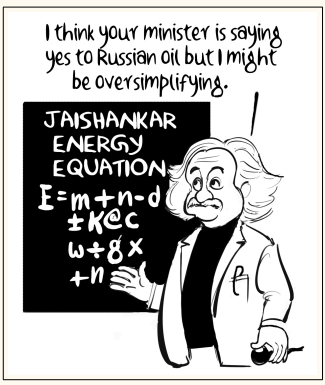


On February 21, Unny broadened his canvas, figuratively, melding geopolitics and AI. Bearing an olive branch, a Trump-like robobird of peace rolls towards the Mideast Board of Peace as Calvin looks on and mutters: "As if Artificial Intelligence weren't enough, here comes Artificial Peace." It is pertinent to recall that on February 19, India had attended the Board of Peace meeting in DC as an "observer".

Before AI interrupted, special relativity had powered a knockout punch by Unny. On Valentine's Day, external affairs minister S. Jaishankar told the Munich Security Conference in reply to a question on the interim trade deal with

the US and India's energy ties with Russia: "We are very much wedded to strategic autonomy."

Jaishankar also noted: "As for energy issues, this is a complex market today. Oil companies in India, as in Europe, as probably in other parts of the world, look at availability, look at costs, look at risks and take the decisions that they feel are in their best interest. If the bottom line of your question is, would I remain independent-minded and make my decisions? And would I make choices which sometimes may not agree with your thinking or somebody else's thinking, yes, it can happen."



On February 16, Unny marshalled the services of Einstein to decipher what Jaishankar said in 91 words. Einstein scrawled the "Jaishankar Energy Equation" on the blackboard, complete with "$E = m + n - d \pm k \,@\, cw \div 8x + n$" and tells the class: "I think your minister is saying yes to Russian oil but I might be

oversimplifying."

Can any news report, editorial or commentary be more eloquent than the 15 words uttered by Unny's Einstein? My only complaint is that the ageless Calvin is not seen in the frame. Hopefully, he is in the class, learning from the master.

As for me, this is what I learnt: No matter how threadbare an event or issue has been reported, there's always another angle to be explored. No matter whether a newspaper is reaching the reader 17 hours after news breaks, it can still offer the reader a fresh perspective, instead of reproducing what has been reported ad nauseum by other media in the intervening hours.

The cartoons mentioned above need not be Unny's best. But they stood out because they brought out the astonishing regularity with which Unny produces brilliance. The strike rate was not that apparent to me or I had not thought it should be underscored until Sayahna made me aware of the feat. □

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