

# MONDAY, JUNE 3, 2024



# DEMOCRATISED SPACE TRAVEL

SpaceX CEO Elon Musk

Over time, SpaceX will enable anyone to go to space and travel to the moon and Mars

# Falling footfalls

As single-screen owners struggle to stay afloat, a steady supply of good movies and lower ticket prices are a must

ARLIER IN MAY, the Telangana Theatres Association decided it would shut down 450-odd single-screen cinemas in the state until the end of the month. In the absence of any good releases, footfalls had dwindled and, on some days, barely 10 people were watching a film. Consequently, while ticket and food and beverage (F&B) sales were fetching them around ₹4,000 a day, the cost of running the theatre was higher; according to a report in The Indian Express they were running up losses of close to ₹7,000 a day. The episode is ironic because Telugu-speaking audiences are the most prolific visitors to cinema theatres. According to Ormax Media, while the average number of films watched by "a theatre-going population" of 157 million in 2023 was six, Telugu audiences beat the average with nine films.

Largely because of the proliferation of multiplexes and also because there are more viewing options today on streaming platforms at affordable prices, single-screen theatres are in jeopardy of becoming a dying species. But it is not as though multiplexes themselves are doing roaring business. The very ordinary quality of content being screened, the high prices of tickets, and poor marketing are the main reasons why audiences are not exactly flocking to the theatres. According to EY, cinema-goers these days wait for movie reviews before taking a call on whether to watch the film in a cinema or wait for an over-the-top (OTT) or television release. This hurts exhibitors. At PVR Inox, footfalls in the March quarter went up by just 7% year-on-year while occupancy moderated to 22.6% from 25.3% in the December quarter. Box-office collections during this period were modest with only two films crossing ₹200 crore — *Fighter* and *Hanuman*.

To be sure, the film industry had a good 2023 with the number of films released in the theatres going up by 11% to 1,796. Theatrical revenues were a strong ₹12,600 crore on the back of blockbusters and mid-budget hits. However, the rise was driven by higher ticket prices because, according to EY, the footfalls fell by 9%. In recent months though, films have been short in number and on quality as seen in the many flops. Producers and directors need to up their game and not just the budgets. They must ensure that films are worth the audience's time and money by providing wholesome entertainment and a good theatrical experience.

There also needs to be a steady supply of movies to the theatres so that exhibitors are not short of content. Unfortunately, the releases come down to a trickle in some seasons such as April and May when the Indian Premier League cricket tournament is played. The exhibitors are, therefore, compelled to screen films in the theatres even though these may have moved to OTT platforms. Some of these films -LaapataaLadies for example—will have seen a 50-day run in the theatres without the box-office collections reflecting this. Again, EY estimates that on average, ticket prices went up by a sharp 20% in 2023 and that rates at multiplexes were more than twice that of rates in single-screen theatres. Even as they work to bolster revenues by improving the share of F&B sales — which accounted for about 32% of revenues in FY22-24, compared with just 27% in the FY17-19 period — bigger exhibitors must keep ticket prices affordable.

# Golden Goose can't risk a shabby \$3-billion IPO

GOLDEN GOOSE GROUP SpA is seeking to list in Milan in an initial public offering that could value the maker of \$500 distressed sneakers at about €3 billion (\$3.2 billion) including net debt.

The company, the vast majority of which was bought by private equity group Permira for about €1.3 billion in 2020, is wooing investors as a luxury brand. But it looks more like Dr Martens Plc, in that it's reliant on a signature shoe style that risks falling out of fashion. Its valuation should reflect this.

True, there are some differences with the British bootmaker, which has had a torrid time since listing in early 2021. Golden Goose has a higher positioning than Dr Martens, selling shoes for up to \$2,000 a pair, compared with up to \$200 for Dr Martens boots. It's also less dependent on selling through third-party retailers in the US, which can be volatile.

Part of Golden Goose's appeal is that the shoes can be customised in its about 190 stores, a draw for younger shoppers, who value individuality, and with whom the brand is popular. The high price point and customisation delivered a full-year 2023 operating margin of 25%, around the level of the big luxury groups, excluding the much more profitable Hermes International SCA. Golden Goose is aiming to expand sales to €1 billion by 2029, implying continued growth over the next five years.

But it's hard to ignore that 90% of Golden Goose's business comes from its "lived-in" looking sneakers. Although casualisation is a long-term trend, fashion is notoriously fickle. Sneaker styles come and go — just look at the pivot from Nike Inc.'s retro basketball shoes to Adidas AG's Terrace models led by the Samba.

Already, the vogue for quiet luxury has made more formal styles desirable, with the rise of Loro Piana's Open Walk and Summer Walk slipons, and a viral New Balance shoe that's a cross between a sneaker and a loafer.

Golden Goose is developing a bag range, which is promising. If successful, this could reduce some of the reliance on footwear, to say 70%. Given that luxury brands have pushed up prices so much, there is room for appealing, affordable accessories. But as Burberry Group Plc has demonstrated, it's hard to stand out in this crowded market when a company's core competence is elsewhere.

Its worth remembering that when Dr Martens — also then owned by Permira — listed, it too was enjoying strong growth on the back of the fad for chunky boots, which had swept the catwalks in the preceding years. Sales rose 15% in the year to the end of March 2021, with Ebitda up 21% and an operating mar-

gin of about 24%. Since then, the company has struggled, issuing five profit warnings in the last

**FELSTED** 

Bloomberg

18 months, and dragging the shares down to less than a quarter of their debut price. It has been hurt by some self-inflicted wounds — such as problems at a new Los Angeles warehouse — which Golden Goose will hope to avoid. But it has also been hit by a slowdown in the US, as consumers have cut back.

With the Americas accounting for 41% of Golden Goose's sales (and Europe another 41%), this is a risk for the Italian company too. What's more, it will be exposed to many of the simply comfortable, rather than uber-wealthy, customers who have been reining in their luxury purchases.

Even Birkenstock Holding Plc, whose styles have transcended from fad to fashion staple, and which upgraded its profit outlook on Thursday, has struggled to win over investors. Although the shares are now trading above their \$46 debut price, they have dipped below this level on several occasions since the sandalmaker's IPO in October.

Given the uncertain luxury backdrop, the question mark over whether fashionistas will continue to flock to Golden Goose and the similarities to Dr Martens,

the British company looks a more appropriate valuation peer. After the boot brand's dismal performance, neither Permira, which will continue to have a sizable holding in Golden Goose post-IPO, nor new equity investors will want another shoe to drop.

## ASCENSION AMIDST TURMOIL

PRESIDENT LAI CHING-TE STARTS TERM IN THE FACE OF BEIJING'S WAR DRILLS

# China cloud over Taiwan

AI CHING-TE'S TERM as Taiwan's new President began on a stormy note on May 20 after Beijing interpreted his inaugural address as a soft pitch for independence. In his speech, Taiwan's leader had urged the Communist Party of China (CPC) to recognise the existence of the Republic of China (Taiwan's formal name), and engage with its elected representatives.

#### Pincer movement

China views Lai with suspicion, especially since he had earlier described himself as a "pragmatic worker for Taiwan's independence", and it responded with military drills in the straits, named Joint Sword 2024 A. Almost on cue, the domestic opposition parties in Taiwan pushed laws that gave the members of parliament more oversight over the political executive. The laws will enable members of parliament (Legislative Yuan) to access more information from private individuals and corporate entities. Even institutions like the military will be brought under the purview of Taiwan's domestic opposition, and could be mandated to divulge sensitive information. Giving this law more teeth will mean validating punitive measures like prison terms for those who found guilty of "contempt of parliament".

Taiwan's civil society has hit the streets to register their displeasure against what they perceive as Beijing's moves to get a backdoor entry into Taiwan's democratic process. This represents the re-emergence of "people power" as a pressure group. Experts in Taiwan express hope that the youth will become a guiding light for public policy discourse, since nearly 30% of its electorate lies in the 20-29 age bracket. Taipei had also witnessed an agitation in which demonstrators occupied the parliament building in 2014 to lodge their dissatisfaction against a trade deal promoted by the then-ruling Kuomintang party, as there were apprehensions that the agreement would bind Taiwan closer

**HARSH V PANT KALPIT A MANKIKAR** 

Respectively, vice-president for studies, fellow-China, Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi

to the mainland.

#### **Economy matters**

Security and economic issues dominated the 2024 Taiwan presidential election, and Lai will have to address the latter soon. First, Taiwan's economy is slowing down, with GDP growth dropping to 1.4% in 2023. Second, following military tensions in the straits since the 2022 visit of then-US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, for-

eign direct investment (FDI) has dipped. FDI The Lai administration inflows in Januaryfaces daunting November 2023 dipped challenges: a 13% compared to the same period in 2022. Taibelligerent opposition, wan's minimum wage is deteriorating low, putting the island's relationship with the educated workforce at a disadvantage, given that mainland, and the cost of real estate reinvigorating remains high. While ties the economy with the mainland worsen, Lai will have to direct his

attention to the economy too. In this respect, the ascent of "people power" is a double-edged sword for Lai, since failure to meet the aspirations of Taiwan's youth can rebound on him.

Beijing's designs Chinese President Xi Jinping will also be watching Lai carefully to plan his next moves. In his address to the CPC's National Party Congress in October 2022, Xi said China could use military force to achieve Taiwan unification. This presents Xi with options like a large-scale invasion across the straits, an economic blockade, or secretly plotting a coup d'état. Ahead of the 2024 presidential elec-

tion, China had made a pitch to Taiwan's people that they face a choice between peace and prosperity or conflict, leading to economic decline.

Following the election, China's ministry of state security put out an article stating that it was important to defeat forces promoting Taiwan's independence. The intelligence establishment said that for the unification of Taiwan, it was imperative to bolster forces that shared the

> mainland's views on unifying the breakaway province. The article argued for rallying public opinion in Taiwan, and pushed for building a covert front on the island that could discreetly pursue the mission. This was also followed by the visit of former Taiwan President Ma Ying-jeou to China to meet Xi this

#### **Denting Taiwan's morale**

Apart from empowering elements opposed to Lai, Beijing is also trying to overawe the people of Taiwan. Commenting on the recent Chinese military exercises in the straits, a commentary in China's Science and Technology Daily boasts of the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) prowess in "subduing" Taiwan. The article states that the PLA's joint drills enabled it to develop real-time combat capabilities in the Taiwan straits. It adds that the drills will enable the PLA to carry out an effective blockade of Kaohsiung

Port (south of Taiwan), which handles a large volume of the island's trade, and routes that serve as a supply line for the island. It adds that a sustained blockade will deal a blow to the island's economy since its exports and energy imports are routed through sea lanes that PLA can gain control of.

Another piece in *Guancha*, a Chinese news portal with nationalist leanings, gauges the reaction of the Taiwanese public to PLA's exercises. It quotes former Taiwan military figures assessing PLA capabilities as being better. They caution that repeated war drills may follow suit in the straits. Once normalised, the PLA may then launch a swift invasion and seize Taiwan by force. The article surmises that on account of the war drills ordinary Taiwanese say that they are at a "dangerous point" in mainland-Taiwan relations. They worry that President Lai peddling a "two-state" theory will worsen tensions that will have catastrophic consequences for livelihoods of the Taiwanese.

The Lai administration faces daunting challenges: a belligerent opposition, deteriorating relationship with the mainland, and reinvigorating the economy under the shadow of Beijing's military coercion. Beijing will not ease the pressure on Lai, and may prefer a strategy to hurt Taiwan's economy in the long run. Xi has professed his intentions to build bridges with elements on the island opposed to the Lai administration with an eye on putting roadblocks in the new government's agenda. Nurturing such a fifth column can come in handy to create conditions that can generate disenchantment if the government is unable meet the aspirations of the electorate. Thus, China could engineer sociopolitical unrest in Taiwan, and then use pro-Beijing elements to stage a coup d'état. Such a scenario would not be in the realm of fantasy in light of the discovery of satellite pictures that purportedly show a replica of the Taipei presidential precincts in China's Inner Mongolia.

# An ally or a double-edged sword?



**SAMEER GUPTA** 

National Tax Leader, EY India

**DOCHATGPT PASSING BAR** exams with flying colours took many by surprise. Artificial intelligence's (AI) ability to come up with suggested diagnosis in the field of medical sciences has also opened several new paradigms to transform healthcare. Another knowledgeled profession, taxation, cannot be immune to the impact of the newest AI avatar, generative AI (GenAI). We are seeing several use cases emerging at a fast pace, helping legal and tax professionals in their daily lives; they not only help improve productivity but also improve quality of work. However, with the impact of AI also comes the need for careful consideration. Will AI challenge the ways of working of tax professionals, or it will challenge the core competencies of an average tax professional?

## AI as an innovative partner

Across the spectrum of a typical tax function, there are multiple areas where GenAI is showing promising impact; these areas cut across compliance, research, and litigation for activities such as data handling, smart analysis, document reviews, and summarisation.

Tax compliance typically involves collecting data from various sources, processing it, and then filling a form template like a tax return or similar document. Conventional tools automate this process to a great extent, but many qualitative tasks are still performed manually. AI can reduce these manual tasks by providing insights and analysis

from the data and results. For example, reading and analysing general ledgers or purchase registers and identifying specific events/triggers having an impact on computation of income, blocked input tax credit, or reverse charge transactions under the goods and services tax law.

The function of tax research and litigation is attracting interest in GenAI for its ability to do several tasks better than humans. For example, when a company receives multiple tax notices, AI can help the tax team by quickly reading and validating these notices, and

even drafting responses to review and finalise in near-real time. Similarly, GenAI solutions can read and analyse thousands of annual reports and other information and convert it into an insightful output in a matter of minutes. AI is also transforming

courtrooms with the eCourts project, where live video streaming is just the start. Soon,

digital records and virtual participation will be common. Imagine AI recording and storing court transcripts for future analysis and providing analytics about the arguments taken and the observations of a bench. Tools like this, which can transcribe meetings, exist today.

Recently, the Chief Justice of India, DY Chandrachud, also commented: "This proves that AI has the potential to enhance the efficiency of court proceed-

ings by automating routine tasks such as document review, case management, and scheduling. By leveraging AI-powered tools, courts can streamline administrative processes, reduce paperwork, and expedite the resolution of legal disputes. This not only saves time and resources but also improves access to justice by reducing delays and backlogs in the court system."

AI should be seen as a transformative ally in

taxation; but given that it is nascent and evolving, its

responsible use with humans in the loop is necessary

Furthermore, AI chatbots can help users 24/7, predictive analytical models can tap into historical data to forecast tax

trends, and automation of tax calculations can simu-While the tax late different scenarios and function is help to optimise tax strateprogressively gies, demonstrating AI's crucial role in modernising pressured with many tax practices and guiding issues, there is an strategic decision-making. opportunity to see how to use GenAl to suitably tackle these

## AI as a complex ally

GenAI is useful, but it also comes with privacy concerns. We need to

think carefully about how we use it. So, what are the challenges? GenAI uses large language models and learns from vast data, but its accuracy isn't guaranteed. In the tax landscape, the margin of error is minimal, and output should be highly accurate.

GenAI can also make up its own answers, which may sound correct but are wrong."Hallucination"effects can happen for different reasons, like if there's too much data or if the AI wasn't trained well.

Hence organisations may explore developing their own pre-trained model for specific tasks on their proprietary data or partnering suitably. Yet the necessity of maintaining a human oversight, often referred to as the "human-in-the-loop" approach, will remain critical till this technology is nascent and evolving.

Another complex question arising due to advent of GenAI is learning and skilling of next-generation tax professionals; academia as well as young professionals need to find new frameworks of learning, and not fall into the trap of "ChatGPT" shortcut.

While at one level, the tax function is progressively pressured with multi-level policy changes, increased controversy, tighter budgets, talent issues etc., there is tremendous opportunity to see how to use GenAI to suitably tackle these challenges. As a catalyst for change, AI is poised to propel the tax profession in a new era.

However, the future of AI in taxation involves balancing technological advancements with risk mitigation. AI should be seen as a transformative ally in taxation, boosting efficiency and aiding strategic decision-making as tax plays a greater role in C-suite discussions. Yet given that GenAI as a technology is nascent and evolving, its responsible use with humans in the loop is necessary. The revolution is here, and it is time to embrace AI's transformative potential.

> With contributions from Abhishek Kumar, director, EY India

## **LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**

#### GDP growth amid unemployment

The robust GDP growth of 7.8% for the last quarter has once again beaten all estimates. But why is this growth not reflected in the economy? The unemployment figures should have not been what they are for an economy growing around 8%. Consumer spending is still not picking up, as the results of many consumer companies show. People

are spending more on health and transport than food and housing because medical bills are rising and transport costs are higher than earlier. In trying to earn their daily bread, they are finding less money to spend on food. A less-than-ideal food intake is bound to increase health costs in the future. Discretionary spending is low. All this does not point to an economy growing at the rate it is projected at.

—Anthony Henriques, Maharashtra

## A wasteful exercise

After months of hectic campaigning and heavy polling in the ongoing Lok Sabha elections, the battle is about to reach its finale on June 4. Various exit polls have already given their verdict in favour of the Bharatiya Janta Party. But exit polls have not always been accurate. There have been several instances in the past when their projections were way off the mark, such as for the 2004 Lok Sabha

New Delhi

giving a majority to the Atal Bihari Vajyapee-led National Democratic Alliance government. However, exit polls are a business for TV channels and other agencies involved in the conducting the surveys, leading to a huge wastage in monetary terms. They do not help determine the actual results. So what's their purpose? —Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

election, when every pollster was

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# **Chronicle**

# Do exit polls reflect mood? Status quo remains in N-E

he first results of the 2024 Lok Sabha and Assembly elections are already out with Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim having to count their state polls numbers early as the tenure of the assemblies was running out on Sunday.

Both results — the one in Arunachal a foregone conclusion because 10 seats were won by BJP were without a contest and in Sikkim the ruling party Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM) returns with an amazing tally — showed a bias for the status quo that could very well be an indicator of the larger national mood.

Prem Singh Thamang's SKM achieved the impossible in a near-total sweep in an Indian poll, losing only one of 32 seats to the Sikkim Democratic Front, which his party had displaced in 2019 winning 17 seats after SDF had ruled uninterrupted for 25 years. The truly amazing performance of a 97 per cent landslide is something any neta and his party would

The major exit polls may also be seen to point towards a trending statusquoist theme as the lower turnout in many states and constituencies despite an expanded base of voters since 2019 suggested there was no great wave to be seen either way in a somewhat lacklustre and long election

cycle in the sweltering heat of an Indian summer.

It is a popular notion that exit polls are not to be trusted and are to be viewed with scepticism. They have, at times, gone very wrong. But, in the modern era, when conducted by professional agencies that understand the science of psephology and are funded well enough to poll a large enough sample size, exit polls do tend to get it right.

The exit polls were mostly accurate, within the range of statistical chance, in the last two elections — in 2014 when they pointed to a big change in the fall of UPA-2, and in 2019 when they predicted the status quo in a win with a sizeable margin for the BJP-led NDA.

If the major pollsters are right again, it is the combined Opposition, having coalesced somewhat better in a third attempt at a grand coalition, which will have much introspection to do. Their contradictions showed in their effort to paper over the cracks in a disjointed group among which they opposed one another in places like Kerala, West Bengal and Punjab.

Most of all, their narrative was less about what they would like to achieve if given the opportunity to rule nationally and more about how they wanted to dismantle things the ruling party had put together in its ideological tilt to governance. Not being in power, they could freely promise the moon in tempting people with freebies, including an impossible sounding ₹1 lakh per Indian woman per year while threatening wealth redistribution.

The flow of invective from both sides was free, the use of divisive talk and imagery perhaps more from the ruling side, especially from the Prime Minister, but this was one election in which the singular target at whom the diatribe was nastily aimed was the PM, Narendra Modi himself. Curiously, they objected even when all he did was meditate. At the end of the day, it is only the people who speak the loudest with their choice of who

## Amid growth, focus on skills

ndia's economy has achieved better than expected growth in the financial year 2023-24, largely on the basis of the robust growth in manufacturing and Lonstruction sectors. The consensus estimate for the GDP growth was 7.8 per cent, while the real growth was 8.2 per cent. The growth was also partly helped by robust corporate profits, with industry outpacing services. The bull-ishness in stock markets, which are at their peaks, also hints at India's

A large portion of the economic growth, however, comes mainly from the government's public investment in infrastructure. Private investment, though it has picked up, has not reached a level where the government can reduce public investment. Experts, however, believe that private investment will pick up after the new government is formed at the Centre.

Despite a robust growth rate, data suggests a wide gap between higher investments and lower consumption in the financial year 2023-24. As the private sector investment picks up going forward, the government needs to focus on reviving consumer demand by addressing issues that stem the growth in consumption. Unless this issue was addressed, there cannot be sustainable investment by the private sector in capacity expansion.

Another time bomb that is ticking is people's debt levels. In the light of easy loans, the government should study the drivers of private consumption. If a significant percentage of consumption comes from loans, a higher debt level could create a bubble. If and when it bursts, it will have several adverse impacts. It will hit overall consumption, reduce corporate profitability, lead to stress in the job market and also pull down economic growth.

The government should be mindful of the fact that the higher growth in the economy during financial year 2023-24 was achieved in the wake of lower base in the last fiscal. Therefore, it is likely that the current fiscal may not see a similar growth rate, and the government and private sector must work harder and implement next generation reforms by focusing on people's skill development and employability.

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# Only US, not Israel, can ensure a Gaza solution



Sunanda K. Datta-Ray

Reflections

ised on the brink electoral uncertainty, India defended Palestine's rights last week with a shade more confidence than before. Yet, by making the future dependent on "direct and meaningful" negotiations with Israel, India's ambassador to the United Nations, Ruchira Kamboj, fell into the trap of making peace and justice hostage to the Israelis, who are the prob-lem in West Asia rather than the solution. But then, she must be loyal to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's fervent declaration that "the people of India firmly stand with Israel".

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's recalcitrance makes it clear that if a solution does emerge, it will be not because — but in spite of — Israel.

fashionable phrase is again a "two-state solution" with secure borders for an independent iron guarantees of Israel's

True, this is the only realistic answer to the problem created by Zionist landgrabbing camouflaged in myth and mysticism. But US secretary of state Antony Blinken is wrong to call Hamas ("human animals" for some Americans) and Iran its worst enemies. The real opponents are not Muslim terrorists but fanatical Jews who never stop reliving the Holocaust and seem determined to make Palestinians pay for Nazi sins.

Mr Blinken was reminded that Mr Netanyahu presents formidable objections to the two-state solution when he calls the West Bank, where the bulk of Palestinian refugees live, "Judea and Samaria", the Jewish homeland of Biblical times. Even the language suggests eternal and inalienable possession. With US President Joe Biden gushing that "if there

were not an Israel, we would

have to invent one to make sure our interests were preserved", it is no surprise that the Zionists are confident of American backing. Bilateral talks, as demanded by the United States and repeated by Ms Kamboj at the UN, will only give them the power of veto over the future. President Biden's latest proposal for a temposix-week cease-fire leading to negotiations to end the war and rebuild Gaza must be scrutinised in

that light. Israeli propaganda suggests that the war began with the horrors which Hamas perpetrated on October 7, 2023. Even Ms Kamboj referred to a conflict of "over seven months" At least 76 years would be nearer the mark for the October 7 terrorist raid into Israel marked only another milestone since the Naqba" — Catastrophe – whose anniversary the Palestinians mourn every year on May 15. That was the day in 1948 when Palestine was ethnically cleansed of some 800,000 Palestinians so that Israel could be carved out of the ruins of a once flourishing community. Actually, Zionist terrorists had launched the process of displacing Palestinians long before May 15, 1948. In fact, by then, half

the total of Palestinians had

already been expelled. That

process still continues in Mr

Netanyahu's "Judea" and

'Samaria" Making a solution to this tragedy dependent on Israel's goodwill is to equate murderer and murdered. An Israel that has already killed over 36,000 Palestinians in Gaza cannot be the solution. The solution can only come from the US. It is clear too that Mr Netanyahu is battling as much to save his own career as to defeat Hamas. Adversaries like Benny Gantz, a member of Israel's War Cabinet and touted as the next Prime Minister, will renew their

Mr Netanyahu presents formidable objections to the two-state solution when he calls the West Bank, where the bulk of Palestinian refugees live, 'Judea and Samaria', Biblical homeland of Jews

attack over pending charges of corruption, breach of trust, bribery and fraud as soon as the crisis ends. President Biden's invitation last month to Mr Gantz to improved his prospects.

There is no legal reason why Israel, with its own smash-and-grab lineage, should have any say in Palestine's future. But as the de facto occupying power, although without de jure sanction, Israel exercises the authority of legitimacy while dismissing the more than 140 governments that now recognise Palestine as irrelevant. But with Sweden, Norway, Ireland and Spain joining the list, and the European Union calling for a ceasefire in Gaza, cracks have appeared in the Western façade. Even the US is worried that post-war Gaza might be rudderless like Afghanistan after the American pullout, which is why Mr Blinken stresses that Israel must "focus on what the future can and must be" to avoid 'anarchy and a vacuum that's likely to be filled by chaos". He may also have in mind the duplicity of an Israel that financed Gaza's Islamist movement to counter the Palestinian secularists led by Yasser Arafat's Fatah, which dominated the Palestine

Liberation Organisation. An offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas was formally established with Israel's support soon after the first Intifada in 1987 opposing the Israeli occupa-tion. The twofold objective was to split the nationalist Palestinian movement and, fundamentally, thwart the two-state proposal Israel calculated that the rise of a rejectionist Islamist group would undermine the two-state formula and curb

Western support for an independent Palestine. Victor Ostrovsky, a Mossad whistleblower, revealed in The Other Side of Deception that this was part of "Mossad's general plan" for an Arab world "run by

fundamentalists" whose rejection of "any negotiations with the West" would leave Israel as "the only democratic, rational country in the region".

The immediate question

is: Who will rule Gaza now? Warning that he opposes Israeli control, Yoav Gallant, Israel's defence minister, wants Netanyahu to publicly rule out Israeli governance and to disclose his post-war plans. Only Palestinian enti-ties under international supervision can provide an alternative to Hamas, he says, calling on Mr Netanyahu "?to declare that Israel will not establish civilian" or military control

over the Gaza Strip.

Mr Gallant's remarks came as questions were being asked about Israel's long-term strategy with military officials warning that the lack of one would mean repeating the Gaza tragedy again and again. Mr Netanyahu says that neither Hamas nor the Palestinian Authority can ments, and that he will not "replace Hamastan with Fatahstan", meaning Fatah. As for the US, Mr Blinken does "not support and will not support an Israeli occupation" but he doesn't support Hamas either. "There needs to be a clear and concrete plan, and we look to Israel to come forward with its ideas.' Israel is the tail that wags

the American dog that has tied not just its security but its very existence to the Zionist state whose government is charged with genocide and crimes against humanity. Many more Palestinians will die as Israel continues to bomb indiscriminately and prevent adequate aid from entering the devastated enclave that is still home to more than two million victims of racist imperialism.

> The writer is a senior journalist, columnist and

It is heartening to note that Chief Justice of India, D. Y. Chandrachud has volunteered to provide water and food grains to quench thirsty and hungry birds and small animals suffering a lot due to the unprecedented temperature in the Supreme Court premises. This concern for pitiable living creatures is a very rare phenomenon from a personality of his stature. We should salute him for this noble service. his act MAY inspire many people to emulate him and such lives would be benefitted.

M. Govindaraj, Gudiyatham

#### **EXIT POLL RESULTS:** FACT OR FICTION

All 7 mega exit polls are unanimous in their findings that the BJP-led NDA is poised to form the next government with a comfortable majority. According to them, the NDA has an unassailable lead with the INDIA left far behind in the race to form the government. It is nobody's case that there could be a reversal of fortunes or inversion of the number of seats predicted for the NDA and the INDIA, but it is a fact that the channels that conduct ed the exit polls with gusto may be biased in favour of BJP. BJP's return to power will represent a setback to the causes of secularism and social justice and be a victory handed to the social elites by the impoverished multitude. The predominance of the BJP will be reinforced if it indeed makes a 'clean sweep' in the Hindi belt considered as its stronghold and makes gains in eastern and southern parts of the country. A stunning victory for the BJP, predicted by exit polls, could earn the Hindutva-oriented party the status of 'the natural party of governance'. The biggest takeaway from a resounding victory to the BJP as forecast by the exit polls would be that the overarching app eal of Hindutva still remains undiminished and Prime Minister Narendra Modi remains immensely popular despite the detection of 'Modi fatigue' by those who are not favourably inclined towards him. G.David Milton, Maruthancode

#### DIVINE **INTERVENTION?**

It is true that unlike the 2014 and 2019 elections, the BJP leaders were not so confident of securing their target of 'Chaar Sau Paar". Hence all of their leaders like the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, Home Minister, Amit Shah and BJP President Nadda thought it fit to visit the temples and seek divine intervention. But still the Exit Polls have predicted only about 359 seats for NDA combined. It is possible that the BJP score could get less than the 303 they secured in 2019. Though some opposition leaders have planned to go abroad and take much needed vacation, the BJP leaders, who toiled day and night for the past two months, decided to invo ke divinity. No doubt, BJP might have failed to achieve their target of chaar sau paar and their own 303, but still the total of 359 seats is a daunting one to prove that they are on a firm wicket for another five years.

Janaki Mahadevan, Chennai





with US & Europe?

n May 26-27, 2024, the 9th Trilateral Summit was held in Seoul with the participation of South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol, Chinese Prime Minister Li Qiang and Japanese Prime Minister Fujio Kishida after a long gap of more than four years. Such supposedly annual summits of the three East Asian economic giants had begun in 2008, with Chinese participation at the level of Prime Minister, downgrading its status and keeping the focus on economic cooperation. The joint statement issued after the summit does not have much notable content except that the three countries will speed up negotiations for a trilateral FTA. It may be noted that these three countries are members of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership under the auspices of Asean.

The statement hopes that the three countries would "strive to hold" such summits annually. There was emphasis on boosting "people to people' exchanges with a target of 40 million contacts by 2030 through tourism, education and cultural

In his public remarks, the Chinese PM urged Japan and South Korea to reject "protectionism" and uphold the principles of free trade. Undoubtedly, these three countries have perhaps been the biggest beneficiaries of the present WTOled foreign trade regime in the past three to four decades, running huge trade surpluses with most major economies. The three countries have robust trade with each other being part of global supply chains through their MNCs with the United States,

Europe and Asia as the final destinations for their

With both the US and the EU pushing back against perceived Chinese overcapacity in the manufacturing sector, more protectionist measures against Chinese exports are expected. In this background, China is working to shore up its long-existing economic linkages with its two major trade partners. Prime Minister Li Qiang spoke also against turning trade and economic differences into "political games or security matters".

Analysts have noted a trend of some shift away from the South Korean foreign trade dependence on China. The United States emerged as South Korea's top export destination in December 2023, surpassing China for the first time since 2004. Also, in 2023, South Korea had a \$18 billion trade deficit with China, the first such bilateral deficit in 31 years. South Korean exports to China in 2023 were \$125 billion, 20 per cent less than exports in 2022. Similarly, South Korean imports from China in 2023 were \$143 billion, a drop of eight per cent over imports in 2022. There have been heavy investments by South Korean "chaebols" in the United States, mainly in the automotive industry, including car batteries. South Korea's ministry of trade, industry and energy has announced a strategy designed to stabilise South Korea's supply chains and reduce dependence on any product from China to less than 50 per cent by 2030.

China continues to be the largest trading partner of Japan. Japan's exports to China in 2023 were \$163 billion, with a share of 21.6 per cent in its total exports. Japanese exports to the US were worth \$136 billion, with a share of 17.9 per cent.

The joint statement called for the de-nuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula and pledged to "make positive efforts for the political settlement" of the issue. This is only a statement of intent and no concrete follow-up action is expected. North Korea continues on its path of periodic missile tests and attempts to launch spy satellites in space. North Korea's President Kim Jong Un keeps his own counsel and has gradually come close to President Vladimir Putin on strategic cooperation in defence supplies and space technology.

While China is unable to pressure North Korea to halt its nuclear programme, it is worried about the likely reaction in South Korea and Japan, which have the option to go in for their own nuclear weapons. An iconoclast future Trump administra-

tion may be no respecter of NPT! Recent opinion polls in South Korea have revealed about 71 per cent of South Koreans would support developing their own nuclear weapons or the return of US nuclear artillery with US forces in Korea, which was removed by President George Bush in 1991 after the collapse of the Soviet Union and end of the Cold War. Japanese strategic thinkers are also watching with concern President Vladimir Putin's threat to use nuclear weapons in the Ukraine war and the increasing Chinese nuclear arsenal, which is estimated to rise to 1,500 warheads in 2035 from the present number of about 400. However, public

opinion in Japan is still overwhelmingly opposed to the development or deployment of nuclear weapons

Both South Korea and Japan watch with alarm the expansionist actions of the People's Republic of China in South China Sea and its hostile exercises around Taiwan straits. In bilateral discussions, Prime Minister Kishida reportedly expressed "serious concern" on the situation in the South China Sea in the backdrop of almost daily stand-offs between an intimidating Chinese Coast Guard and the relatively small Filipino fishing and supply vessels. The strongly pro-American orientation of South Korea led by President Yoon and Japan under Prime Minister Kishida has been clearly laid out in the "Camp David Spirit" adopted by the two along with President Joe Biden in August 2023, projecting China as their strategic adversary in the Indo-Pacific region. China is therefore biding its time and focusing on shoring up its trade and investment relations with its two longtime economic partners — South Korea and Japan — as more protectionist headwinds against China are expected both from a future Trump administration and the European Union worried about dumping from Chinese manufacturers. Given China's growing economic heft, no decoupling should be expected of the Chinese economy from both the South Korean or Japanese economies.

The writer is a retired diplomat and has served as India's ambassador to South Korea

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-PAPER WITH PASSION-

# An encore?

Exit polls predict an easy win for NDA, though INDIA says it is confident of 295+ seats

f what the exit polls say holds true, the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) is going to form its third successive Government at the Centre. The seventh and final phase of polling has concluded and the nation eagerly awaits on June 4 a formal announcement of the results. The exit poll predictions notwithstanding, the Opposition Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) coalition remains optimistic of securing over 295 seats. This juxtaposition of predictions raises intriguing questions about the electorate's intentions as well as the efficacy of exit polls itself. These polls, often seen as a barometer of public sentiment, do give a sense of the electorate's mood though it may or may not be accurate. If the predictions ring true, we can confidently say that it reflects a continued endorsement of the NDA's policies and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership. We can conclude that the BJP's focus on economic development, national security and social welfare schemes seems to have struck a chord



with a substantial number of voters. Initiatives like the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) and various infrastructure projects have likely contributed to this favourable outlook. On the other hand, INDIA has been claiming, based on its own assessment, a clear majority for itself. Despite the exit polls, the INDIA alliance, comprising 28 major Opposition parties, remains confident of winning over 295 seats.

This coalition, which includes the Congress too, believes that their emphasis on inclusive growth, social justice and a more decentralised governance model has resonated with a significant segment of the population. INDIA's campaign has centred on addressing econom-

ic disparities, improving education and healthcare and promoting secular values. Their optimism suggests a belief that there is a substantial undercurrent of support not fully captured by the exit polls. As far as exit polls are concerned, it would be too early for the NDA to start celebrating and for INDIA to sulk. There have been instances when exit polls have been wide of the mark and actual results have been at total variance with the predictions. Experts say the sample size must be at least five per cent (which is rarely the case) and it should be spread across demographics. Besides, predicting the number of seats based on exit votes is always subjective. What is important right now is a smooth transition/retention of power by whichever alliance takes Delhi. As the nation waits for the final results, the exit polls and INDIA's confidence set the stage for a potentially transformative election. The voters' message appears to be multifaceted, reflecting a balance between a desire for stability and development on the one hand and a push for inclusive growth and accountable governance on the other. Ultimately, regardless of the outcome, the next Government will need to respect the mandate and address the aspirations of the populace without discrimination and bias. So, till the actual verdict comes, keep your fingers crossed!



People take a boat ride on the Ganga at Assi Ghat, in Varanasi

# Dawn of a new era in Indian politics



Beyond the immediate winners and losers, the aftermath promises to be marked by potential new alliances, power shifts and the rise of emerging political forces

he 2024 Lok Sabha elections are closing and the results will be on June 4. The aftermath of the election is not simply about winners and losers. It is about more than just the anticipated outcomes. It includes the potential for unfore-seen alliances, dramatic shifts in power dynamics and the emergence of new political forces, all of which are yet to be unveiled. The BJP's potential win in the election is a significant event that could reshape the political landscape. However, the outcome is uncertain, with two possible scenarios, each with implications. One scenario predicts a massive victory for the BJP, possibly even exceeding 400 seats. The other scenario suggests a more modest result for the BJP with fewer seats.

#### A landslide victory for the BJP

have far-reaching consequences. In a worst-case scenario, if the BJP wins fewer seats, the party could still secure support from other parties. If the party emerges as the single largest, albeit with fewer seats than in the 2019 poll, it has a plan B to form the Government with the help of some neutral parties.

The strategic decisions made by the Congress party, such as reducing the number of contested constituencies, highlight the depth and complexity of Indian politics. Each move is a calculated step towards a larger goal. As the sixth phase of the Lok Sabha polls concluded on Saturday, the Congress claimed the BJP's fate is "all but sealed," with the INDIA bloc having already crossed the halfway mark of 272 seats and is on course for a total of over 350 seats.

The INDIA Alliance, a significant player in Indian politics, was formed by 26 Opposition parties last year to fight Modi unitedly. However, if the BJP returns to power, the alliance may face a significant challenge. Some partners, such as the Trinamool Congress and the AAP, have decided to refrain from forming partnerships for the Lok Sabha polls, weakening the Congress's position. A BJP victory could

Alliance's strategy, with some partners choosing to align with the BJP and others seeking new partnerships or independent paths. If the BJP wins more seats,

smaller parties may rush to join the alliance. This rush may be fueled by their desire to align with the winning side, which could impact the postelection scenario. However, this rush to join the coalition may be more than just motivated by political interests. Some parties want to oppose Modi, while others see alliances as a failed attempt. Others, like the Trinamool Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in Punjab, have chosen to refrain from engaging in partnerships. They, along with the Congress and the Left Parties, would challenge the NDA. This could result in the col-

lapse of the newly formed India coalition, as this alliance has many fair-weather friends who may ally with any party based solely on their selfinterest. The BJP's ability to secure more seats or gain support from other parties will not be a surprise. This could impact the political lead to reevaluating the INDIA landscape, potentially leading



THE UDDHAV **THACKERAY** FACTION OF THE SHIV SENA AND THE SHARAD PAWAR-LED NCP WERE **PREVIOUSLY** WITH THE BJP AND IT WOULDN'T BE **SURPRISING** IF THEY

to a realignment of political forces, including the INDIA The BJP has lost some crucial

allies, such as SAD, Shiv Sena and JD(U). However, JD(U) and the TDP have now rejoined. In Tamil Nadu, the AÍADMK, a former NDA ally, may also rejoin the NDA depending on its performance in the polls. Even the ruling DMK is considering its options after the election. The party understands the importance of maintaining a solid working relationship with the NDA and PM Modi. These potential alliances and shifts in power dynamics could significantly impact the political landscape after the elections.

The BJP could seek support from parties led by influential leaders such as Naveen Patnaik, Jagan Mohan Reddy, K Chandrashekhar Rao, Mayawati and others. Though not aligned with any coalition, these leaders have significant political influence and have helped the BJP in the past when the ruling party needed them. Their potential role in the post-election scenario could significantly shape the political landscape.

The Uddhav Thackeray faction of the Shiv Sena and the Sharad Pawar-led NCP were previously with the BJP and it wouldn't be surprising if they helped the NDA. Delhi Chief Minister Kejriwal

is ambitious and eyeing the prime ministership. He will remain in opposition. Kejriwal predicted that

if Modi wins again on June 4, he will put Uddhav Thackeray, Sharad Pawar, Rahul Gandhi and Mallikarjun Kharge in jail. He would also be sent back to jail. However, it's important to note that these are potential scenarios and not confirmed outcomes. Various factors, including the election outcome, can influence it.

The June 4 election results will show how politics will shape the Indian alliance, splintering or strengthening it. They will also indicate whether the BJP will become more arrogant with a hat trick under its belt. A third consecutive BJP win could embolden the party, leading to a more assertive political landscape.

(The writer is a popular columnist; views are personal)

# Tobacco addiction grows steadily among the youth



With 24 per cent of children under 16 already using tobacco, the urgency for immediate intervention and education cannot be overstated

**¬**he escalating trend of addiction among the youth in India is a serious challenge to public health. Each year, tobacco consumption claims the lives of 1.2 million people in the country. The theme of World No Tobacco Day 2024, 'Protecting Children from Industry Tobacco Interference, underscores the urgent need to shield the younger generation from the harmful influence of the

tobacco industry. Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable deaths and diseases worldwide. It significantly contributes to heart disease, cardiovascular issues and brain strokes. The Global Adult Tobacco Survey 2016-17 revealed that approximately 29 per cent (270 million) of Indian adults use tobacco products, including cigarettes, gutkha, supari tobacco, jarda,

bidi and hookah. Alarmingly, about 24 per cent of children under 16 years old in India consume tobacco in some form, leading to devastating health outcomes. The National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) indicates that about 38 per cent of



consumption is higher in rural areas (42.7 per cent) compared to urban regions (28.8 per cent). Among women, tobacco use stands at approximately 8.9 per cent, with rural women showing higher consumption rates than their urban counterparts. These statistics are a cause for significant concern. World No Tobacco Day, celebrated by the World Health Organization and global partners, aims to raise awareness about the detrimental effects of tobacco use and promote cessation. The 2024 theme focuses on protecting children, as the majority of regular smokers start before the age of 18. This highlights the necessity of safeguarding adolescents from the perils of

Smoking damages the alveoli in the lungs, leading to lung diseases, with most lung can-Indian men are addicted to cer cases linked to cigarette are available to help individ-

smoking. Tobacco increases the risk of cancers such as oral, throat, oesophagal, bladder, kidney and lung cancer. It also leads to chronic diseases like COPD, heart attacks and strokes. Smoking is responsible for approximately 90 per cent of cancer deaths. The risk of death from heart disease and strokes rises significantly among

tobacco users. Smokers are prone to numerous diseases, with a general decline in overall health. Additionally, tobacco use reduces fertility in both men and women and can cause severe complications during pregnancy. Smoking and use of tobacco can lead to severe lung diseases, including COPD, Asthma, TB and Lung Cancer causing significant suffering. Smokers are significantly more likely to die from COPD and are at a higher risk of developing TB. People should avoid tobacco products and seek medical help if addicted. Various resources, including nicotine replacement therapy, prescription medications, coun-

selling services, support

groups and smartphone apps,

uals quit tobacco. Among youth, smoking is often wrongly perceived as a sign of masculinity. Additionally, tobacco use is not universal-

ly seen as a vice. The Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA) 2003 aims to protect consumers, reduce tobacco use and prevent related diseases. It includes measures such as banning smoking in public places, regulating sales near educational institutions and issuing health warnings to inform the public. The Telangana Government in May 2024 has recently banned all tobacco products for one year, realising the grave consequences of tobac-

The rising addiction among youth threatens their future health. Young people must resist industry influences that target youth and promote ecigarettes and flavoured nicotine pouches and candy which are also harmful and lay the foundation for tobacco use later on.

(The author is a public health expert working as an Assistant Professor at MLB. Medical College, Jhansi UP, views are personal)

#### **OPPOSITION ASSURED OF VICTORY**

Madam — Apropos the news story "Cong assured of 295+ seats for INDIA bloc," published on June 1, this is my response. As a daily newspaper reader, I find the recent claims by Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge quite significant. The assertion that the INDIA Bloc will secure over 295 Lok Sabha seats in the 2024 elections reflects a strong confidence in their coalition's appeal. The strategic meeting, attended by prominent opposition leaders like Sonia Gandhi, Arvind Kejriwal and Akhilesh Yadav, underscores their united front and meticulous planning for vote counting on

Kharge's emphasis on staying vigilant during the vote count, particularly concerning EVMs and Form 17C, highlights the coalition's commitment to ensuring a fair process. The involvement of various party leaders, including Sharad Pawar and Tejashwi Yadav, signals a robust alliance to overcome the BJP's influence. The INDIA Bloc's confidence, bolstered by their internal survey, suggests a significant shift in Indian politics. If their predictions hold, we could witness a transformative phase in the country's governance.

Tisha Reddy | Hyderabad

#### **SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH**

Madam — Apropos the news story "Economic growth raises sustainability concerns," published on June 1, this is my response. India's economic ascent is remarkable, with its GDP growth rates positioning it as the fifth largest economy, surpassing the UK in 2022 and poised to overtake Japan by 2025. This growth is fueled by increased consumption, driving production and employment. However, this surge in consumerism raises significant sustainability concerns. The Household Consumption Expenditure Survey, 2022-23, shows a notable rise in average Monthly per capita consumer expenditure (MPCE), with urban and rural households increasing their spending by 33.5 per cent and 40.42 per cent respective-

### **Haryana thrives under current Govt**

THE EDITOR



his is my response to the news story "Haryana is driving towards progress and prosperity," published on June 1. Haryana embodies courage and strength. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who has savoured Haryana's spirit, has led with vigour for ten years. Seeing Rafale jets soar in Ambala skies today is a proud moment

BJP's dedication to Haryana's development. Earlier this month, former Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar led a mega rally endorsing Lok Sabha candidate Mohan Lal Badoli, marking a significant moment in Haryana's political landscape. The rally, attended by over 15,000 supporters, showcased the deep-rooted admiration for Khattar's leadership. The Modi-Manohar effect has propelled Haryana towards economic prosperity and social development, Initiatives like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao and PM-KISAN have brought transformative changes. Haryana's rise as an investment hub, with significant contributions in textiles and agriculture, underscores its progressive vision and commitment to holistic development.

for all of us. Modi recently highlighted the oppo-

sition's deceitful intentions and reaffirmed the

Rishabh Khanna | Chandigarh

wants' echoes Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs but also underscores the unsustainable wastage of resources.

High consumption depletes non-renewable resources, leading to scarcity and environmental degradation, including pollution, deforestation and climate change. Income disparities exacerbate these issues, as benefits are unevenly distributed, increasing economic inequality. To balance economic growth with sustainability, India must promote environmentally friendly consumption through education, incentives and regulations, investing in renewable resources and green technologies and implementing policies that encourage sustainable practices. Prioritising sustainability can ensure growth benefits society while preserving the environment for future generations.

Yashika Mehta | Mumbai

#### **REVIVE FARMING, SAVE ENVIRONMENT**

Madam — Apropos the news story "Recycle nutrients to mitigate fertiliser crisis," published on June 1, this is my response. As someone who follows environmental issues closely, the growing ly since 2011-12. This shift from 'needs to concerns about the disruption of natural

nutrient cycles due to human activities are alarming. Historically, sustainable farming practices effectively maintained the balance of essential nutrients like nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium.

The staggering Rs. 2 lakh crore annual subsidy on fertilisers in India underscores the scale of this problem. Compounded by the separation of livestock farming from crop production, vast amounts of nutrients now pollute water bodies, causing eutrophication and damaging ecosystems. It's encouraging to see advancements in wastewater treatment and nutrient recovery. Cities like Delhi and Hyderabad are expanding their treatment capacities and exploring nutrient recycling. However, the challenge remains immense. Implementing efficient nutrient recovery systems and adopting best practices from Europe could significantly reduce environmental pollution and support sustainable agriculture, potentially transforming India's agricultural landscape and mitigating the ongoing

Aarav Singhania | Jaipur

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# **FIRST COLUMN**

### MIND MANAGEMENT IS **CRUCIAL FOR HAPPINESS**

We can truly celebrate only if we are able to silence our mind



hat is the difference between PK and PIKU? Two letters, 'I' and 'U;' I is us and U are them (an extra-terrestrial Aamir Khan). Their CPU is cerebral and our CPU is at the level of abdomen. Or say for vast multitudes the focus is at the abdomen. It would be quite captivating watching the main protagonists PK (of the eponymous movie) and Bhaskor (of Piku fame) sharing their thoughts and respective metabolisms in a spaceship.

Food has a tremendous impact on our system, which we do not quite comprehend. Improper diet first takes a toll on the metabolism and then attacks other organs of the body. Simply put, intake of toxic foods generates repugnant thoughts and results in a weak mind and body.

The human mind is an enigma and a reservoir of potential. But the moot question is how do we tap this potential? The mind is a movie theatre where we script and enact innumerable movies and soap

Technology alone cannot be a substitute for the enormous potential of the mind. It needs to be cultured, harnessed, and harmonized with needs and wants.

We need to distinguish brain from the mind. The brain is an organ that serves as the center of the nervous system in all vertebrate and most invertebrate animals. Only a few invertebrates such as sponges, do not have a brain, diffuse or localized nerve nets are



present instead.

Mind on the other hand is the faculty of consciousness and thoughts. It is an individual's intellect or memory or his attention span or will. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar has captured it very succinctly. He says mind is like the sky and thoughts are like clouds. Your thoughts make or mar the progress and development of the mind.

To be happy in life humans need to calm the obdurate and recalcitrant mind. Further keep reminding ourselves that we are blessed, grateful and have abundance in our lives. Life is full of valleys and peaks. It can never be a rising curve or a straight line permanent-

The human mind vacillates between the past and the future. In the past, the mind is regretful and if it is in the future, it is anxious. In either situation the mind is not at peace nor in the present moment and thus remains unhappy.

Incidentally there is a deep connect between the stomach and mind. That is why it is called the gut feeling or the sixth sense. Our solar plexus keeps sending us signals. It depends as to whether we are conscious and wakeful enough to grasp those signals.

We humans can truly celebrate only if we are able to silence our mind. There are techniques to do it and develop a relaxation room or space in our minds and harness the energy so that it does not get enervated. By practicing Suryanamaskars and Padmasadhana as crafted by Gurudev we can enhance our Prana, (chi) or energy levels substantially.

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd.and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)

# New sankalps from the sadhana in Kanyakumari



Kanyakumari has always been close to Modi's heart; on his recent visit to India's southernmost part, he gets into a pensive mood to reflect on Bharat's future

y dear fellow Indians, the biggest festival of democracy, the 2024 Lok Sabha Elections, are concluding today in our nation, the Mother of Democracy. After a three-day spiritual journey in Kanyakumari, I have just boarded the plane for Delhi. Through the day, Kashi and numerous other seats have been in the midst of voting.

My mind is filled with so many experiences and emotions... I feel a boundless flow of energy within myself. The 2024 Lok Sabha elections are the first in the Amrit Kaal. I began my campaign a few months ago from Meerut, the land of the First War of Independence of 1857. Since then, I have traversed across the length and breadth of our great nation. The final rally of these elections took me to Hoshiarpur in Punjab, the land of the great Gurus and a land associated with Sant Ravidas Ji. After that, I came to Kanyakumari, at the feet of Maa Bharti. It is natural that the fervour of the elections was echoing in my heart and mind. The multitude of faces seen in rallies and road shows came in front of my eyes. The blessings from our Nari Shakti...the trust, the affection, all of this was a very humbling experience. My eyes were getting moist... I entered into a 'sadhana' (meditative state). And then, the heated political debates, the attacks and counter-attacks, the voices and words of accusations which are so characteristic of an election...they all vanished into a void. A sense of detachment came to grow within me...my mind became completely detached from the external world. Meditation becomes challenging amidst such huge responsibilities, but the land of Kanyakumari and the inspiration of Swami Vivekananda made it effortless. As a candidate myself, I left my campaign in the hands of my beloved people of Kashi and

I am also grateful God for instilling me with these values from birth which I have cherished and tried to live up to. I was also thinking about what Swami Vivekananda must have experienced during his meditation at this very place in Kanyakumari! A part of my meditation was spent in a similar stream

Amidst this detachment, amidst the peace and silence, my mind was constantly thinking about the bright future of Bharat, the goals of Bharat. The rising sun at Kanyakumari gave new heights to my thoughts, the vastness of the ocean expanded my ideas, and the expanse of the horizon continuously made me realize the unity, the Oneness, embedded in the depths of the universe. It seemed as if the observations and experiences undertaken in the lap of the Himalayas decades ago were being revived.

Kanyakumari has always been very close to my heart. The Vivekananda Rock Memorial in Kanyakumari was built under the leadership of Shri Eknath Ranade ji. I had the opportunity to travel extensively with Eknath ji. During the construction of this Memorial, I had the opportunity to spend some time in Kanyakumari as well.

From Kashmir to Kanyakumari... this is a common identity that is deeply ingrained in the heart of every citizen of the country. This is the 'Shakti Peeth' (seat of Shakti) where Maa Shakti incarnated as Kanya Kumari. At this Southern tip, Maa Shakti performed penance and waited for Bhagwan Shiva, who was residing in the Himalayas at the northernmost parts of

Kanyakumari is the land of confluences.



For thousands of years, Bharat has been moving forward with this sense of meaningful purpose. Bharat has been a cradle of ideas for thousands of years. We have never considered what we have acquired as our personal wealth or measured it purely by economic or material parameters. Therefore, 'Idam-na-mama' (this is not mine) has become an inherent and natural part of the character of Bharat.

Bharat's welfare benefits our planet's journey to progress as well. Take the freedom movement as an example. Bharat gained independence on August 15, 1947. At that time, many countries around the world were under colonial rule. Bharat's independence journey inspired and empowered many of those countries to achieve their own freedom. That same spirit was seen decades later when the world came face to face with the once in a century COVID-19 pandemic. When concerns were raised about the poor and developing countries, Bharat's successful efforts provided courage and assistance to many nations.

Today, Bharat's governance model has become an example for many countries around the world. Empowering 25 crore people to rise above poverty in just 10 years is unprecedented. Innovative practices such as Pro-People Good looking towards Bharat with many

Governance, aspirational districts, and aspirational blocks are being discussed globally today. Our efforts, from empowering the poor to lastmile delivery, have inspired the world by prioritising individuals standing at the last rung of society. Bharat's Digital India campaign is now an example for the entire world, showing how we can use technology to empower the poor, bring transparency, and ensure their rights.

Inexpensive data in Bharat is becoming a means of social equality by ensuring the reach of information and services to the poor. The whole world is witnessing and studying the democratization of technology, and major global institutions are advising many countries to adopt elements from our model.

Since the success of the G-20, the world has been increasingly envisioning a bigger role for Bharat. Today, Bharat is being acknowledged as a strong and important voice of the Global South. The African Union has become a part of the G-20 group at the initiative of Bharat. This is going to be a crucial turning point for the future of African countries.

The development trajectory of Bharat fills us with pride and glory, but at the same time, it also reminds the 140 crore citizens of their responsibilities. Now, without wasting a single moment, we must step forward towards greater duties and larger goals. We need to dream new dreams, convert them into reality and begin living those dreams.

We must see Bharat's development in a global context, and for this, it is essential that we understand Bharat's internal capabilities. We must acknowledge Bharat's strengths, nurture them, and utilize them for the benefit of the world. In today's global scenario, Bharat's strength as a youthful nation is an opportunity from which we must not look back.

The world of the 21st century is

hopes. And we will need to make several changes to move forward in the global scenario. We also need to change our traditional thinking regarding reform. Bharat cannot limit reform to just economic reforms. We must move forward in every aspect of life towards the direction of reform. Our reforms should also align with the aspirations of a 'Viksit Bharat' (developed India) by 2047.

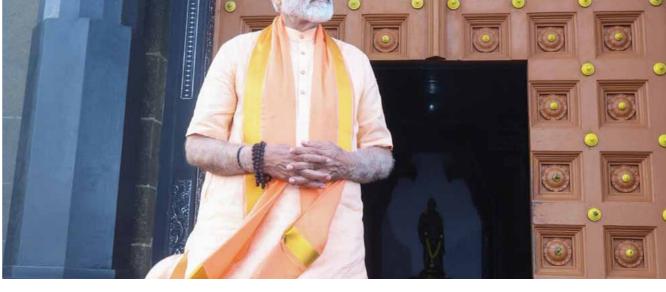
We should take pride in every moment that God has blessed us with birth in the land of Bharat. God has chosen us to serve Bharat and fulfil our role in our country's

journey towards excellence. We must redefine our heritage in a modern way while embracing ancient values in a modern context. As a nation, we also need to reassess outdated thinking and beliefs. We need to free our society from the pressure of professional pessimists. We must remember that freedom from negativity is the first step towards achieving success. Success

blossoms in the lap of positivity. My faith, devotion, and belief in the infinite and eternal power of Bharat are growing day by day. Over the past 10 years, I have seen this capability of Bharat grow even more and have experienced it firsthand.

Just as we utilized the fourth and fifth decades of the 20th century to impart a new momentum to the freedom movement, we must lay the foundation for a 'Viksit Bharat' in these 25 years of the 21st century. Today, we have the same golden opportunity. Let's dedicate the next 25 years solely for the nation. Our efforts will create a strong foundation for the coming generations and the coming centuries, taking Bharat to new heights. Looking at the energy and enthusiasm of the country, I can say that the goal is not far away now. Let us take swift steps...let us come together and create a Viksit

> (These thoughts were penned by PM Modi on 1st June during his return flight from Kanyakumari to Ďelhi)





THE RISING SUN

AT KANYAKUMARI GAVE NEW HEIGHTS TO MY THOUGHTS, THE VASTNESS OF THE OCEAN EXPANDED MY IDEAS, AND THE EXPANSE OF THE HORIZON CONTINUOUSLY MADE ME REALISE THE UNITY, THE ONENESS, EMBEDDED IN THE **DEPTHS OF THE** UNIVERSE

# Kerala Govt faces backlash over flawed liquor policy

#### Criticism has arisen over the demand for bar owners to pay ₹2.5 lakh each to circumvent a Government-mandated monthly closure

¬he demand that all bar owners in the State should pay Rs 2.5 lakh per establishment instead of cancelling a Government order that makes it mandatory for all watering holes to down shutters on the first of every month and restrictions on opening more bar hotels underscore the opinion that it is time for the Kerala Government to come out of liquor business

The latest controversy about the demand made by the powers that be to the bar owners to pay exorbitant money as a bribe for altering the excise department's laws establishes that the CPI(M)-led LDF and Congress-led UDF are swindling the State alternately, a charge made time and again by Prime Minister Narendra



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

Modi during his campaign speeches in the State.

The Government has no business to be in business and is more so in the case of the liquor business. Unlike other States, Kerala and Tamil Nadu follow liquor policies that promote high-level corruption. The Governments in these two States are the monopolies in the liquor trade. The

Nadu State Marketing Corporation (TASMAC), the State-owned entities are the only bodies that can buy and sell liquor. Bar restaurants owned by the private sector should procure the liquor supplied by these two bodies. Long back there were private liquor outlets in these States doing roaring business.

After the "nationnalisation" of the liquor business in Kerala, the tipplers face severe hardship in getting their daily quota of spirits and they are also forced to consume what the brands that BEVCO 'impose' on them.

Earlier, the tipplers had the choice of getting their favourite brands and drinking too. After the taking over of Beverages Corporation of the liquor business by the Kerala (BEVCO) and Tamil Government, the brands to be

sold in the States are decided by the party in power and there is no transparency in the selection of liquor to be traded through the outlets or restaurants(bars). The liquor manufacturers who pay the ruling parties get the contract and laugh at the banks. The Government claims that

the nationalization is the prelude to the introduction of total prohibition in Kerala. This is a dream that will never materialise unless other States bring in legislation banning liquor. Neighboring Karnataka is a tippler's paradise as the private outlets sell all popular brands patronized by the con-While arrack, the country

spirit is banned in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, the same is available in the rest of the country much to the delight of the working class. Those who toil in farmlands from morning to evening need a bit of relaxation after a hard day's work and hence it is not proper on the part of the Government to

ban the stuff. Pinarayi Vijayan, chief minister of Kerala, is on record stating that toddy is a most nutritious drink and not alcohol. Tamil Nadu has banned toddy tapping forcing the poor workers to rush to TASMAC with their hard-earned wages to buy the spirit for the evening. If arrack is not banned in these States (where spurious arrack is available from bootleggers) the workers need not have spent the day's earnings in State-owned liquor outlets.

imperil health has to go. Many findings have been confirmed through scientific research that a moderate quantity of liquor is good for health. There is a Chinese adage about liquor: "A man takes a drink. The drink takes more drinks. Finally, the drinks take the man". If the authorities could make the man consume fewer drinks, that would be the best solution to alcoholism. But it should not be by killing the goose that lays the golden eggs. We live in an era when Indian-made scotches have beaten the spirits brewed in Scotland and the USA to emerge as their rivals in the global market. Colombo and suburbs, hard-

ly an hour of air journey from Kochi is a study in contrast. The notion that liquor would Though there are many liquor every month is a regressive

outlets in Sri Lanka, one cannot come across long queues of tipplers in front of these shops. Devan Ramachandran, a judge of the Kerala High Court, said recently that the drinkers need much better treatment from the BEVCO outlets. He was drawing the attention of the Government to the plight of tipplers who have to wait for hours in the queue braving the scorching sun and heavy downpours to get their daily evening quota. Sunil Kumar, a fellow journalist, said that the Government's stringent and outdated regulations alone are responsible for making people consume more and more liquor. He says that the decision to

down the shutters of liquor outlets on the first day of

measure as it forces the drinkers to buy an additional bottle in the previous evening to stock for the next day. But what happens is that they consume that extra bottle on the same evening leaving them "high and dry" on the day of shutdown. Let the tipplers have the freedom to gulp down their quota.

It is impossible to have total prohibition in the country. Piloo Modi, the veteran parliamentarian said during a debate on prohibition that he could stay away from alcohol for any number of years. But I cannot live even for a minute without the right to consume liquor," Piloo Modi had said. Let better sense prevail.

(The writer is a special correspondent with the Pioneer, views are personal)

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# TheStatesman

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# **Polls and markets**

Tith voting in all seven phases of the Lok Sabha election concluded, the nation stands on the brink of a significant political moment. With counting scheduled for June 4, investors and market watchers are keenly anticipating the impact of the results on financial markets. This pivotal juncture in the world's largest democracy carries substantial implications for India's economic trajectory and market stability. The current sentiment among financial experts suggests that the benchmark indices, Nifty 50 and BSE Sensex, may be somewhat inflated, indicating a potential for correction. This belief is grounded in the understanding that market valuations have reached high levels, and any deviation from expected election outcomes could trigger volatility. A clear majority for the BJP-led NDA is widely anticipated to boost market confidence, reinforcing investor sentiment and potentially driving the Nifty 50 towards 24,200 and the BSE Sensex to around 78,500. This optimism is rooted in the expectation of policy continuity and economic stability under a strong, decisive government. Historical patterns support the notion that markets respond positively to clear and stable political mandates, reducing uncertainty and fostering growth. Conversely, if the BJP secures fewer seats than necessary for a decisive majority, the markets might face turbulence. Small-cap stocks, in particular, are vulnerable to political instability and could see significant declines in such a scenario. While large-cap stocks might also correct, their resilience compared to small-cap stocks could mitigate the severity of market fluctuations. Beyond the immediate election results, broader economic factors will play a crucial role in shaping market trends. The Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) monetary policy, particularly the possibility of interest rate cuts later in the year, will be influenced by the performance of the monsoon. A favourable monsoon could prompt the RBI to lower rates, thereby providing an additional boost to the economy and markets. Amid these developments, a prudent approach for investors is to maintain a long-term perspective. While election results can cause short-term market movements, the fundamental strength of the economy, technological advancements, global events, and corporate performance are vital in determining longterm market trajectories. Investors are encouraged to avoid making hasty decisions based on speculative outcomes and instead focus on solid investment plans and diversified portfolios to manage risks effectively. Many investors are currently adopting a wait-and-watch strategy, holding onto cash until the election results are clear. This cautious stance reflects the unpredictable nature of political events and the risks associated with attempting to time the market. It underscores the importance of patience and strategic planning in navigating periods of uncertainty. As we approach the election results on June 4, the key for investors is to stay informed and prepared for various scenarios. A well-crafted investment strategy that emphasises long-term goals, diversification, and fundamental analysis will be essential in weathering the post-election market landscape. While short-term volatility is expected, maintaining a disciplined approach will help investors manage risks and capitalise on future

# Iran's choices

growth opportunities.

he tragic death of President Ebrahim Raisi in a helicopter crash has thrust Iran into a period of intense political upheaval and uncertainty. This unexpected event has not only opened up a new presidential race but also exposed the underlying tensions and dynamics within the political system. The forthcoming election on June 28 now stands as a critical juncture for the country, both domestically and in terms of its international relations. Former Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani's decision to enter the race is particularly noteworthy. A prominent conservative figure and close adviser to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Mr Larijani's candidacy signals a potential shift in the political landscape. His assurance of not being disqualified by the Guardian Council, which had barred him in the 2021 elections, suggests a strategic realignment within the upper echelons of Iran's political hierarchy. Mr Larijani's platform focuses on resolving economic hardships and addressing US sanctions, indicating a pragmatic approach to Iran's pressing economic issues. His ability to navigate the complexities of both domestic politics and international diplomacy could make him a pivotal figure in the coming months. The competition from other hardliners, such as Mr Saeed Jalili and Mr Parviz Fattah, adds another layer of complexity to the race. Mr Jalili, with his experience as a chief nuclear negotiator and former head of Ayatollah Khamenei's office, brings a wealth of experience and a staunchly hardline perspective. His reentry into the presidential race underscores the ongoing influence of hardliners within Iran's political framework. Similarly, Mr Fattah's potential candidacy, backed by his connections to the Revolutionary Guards and his role in an investment fund linked to the Ayatollah, highlights the interplay between economic power and political influence in Iran. Interim President Mohammad Mokhber's possible candidacy introduces another dimension to the election. As someone already in a position of temporary authority, his role and decisions in the lead-up to the election will be closely scrutinised. His actions could significantly influence the electoral landscape and voter perceptions. The broader context of this election cannot be ignored. Iran is grappling with severe economic challenges, exacerbated by international sanctions and internal mismanagement. The discontent among the populace is palpable, with many Iranians frustrated by the lack of political and economic reforms. This discontent poses a risk of low voter turnout, which could undermine the legitimacy of the election process and the eventual winner's mandate. Moreover, the Guardian Council's role in vetting candidates has long been a contentious issue, with accusations of bias favoring hardline candidates. This election will be a litmus test for the Council's impartiality and the broader political system's ability to accommodate diverse political voices. The election in Iran is not just a routine political event but a critical moment that will shape the country's future. The candidates' ability to address economic issues, navigate international sanctions, and manage internal political dynamics will be crucial.

# Language and Thinking~II

Psychology defines thinking as an activity that goes on in the brain while processing information received through senses and stimuli. Thinking involves memory but goes beyond - thinking is involved when we form concepts, feel an emotion or physical pain, engage in problem solving, reasoning or decision making. Can we experience a feeling of a sensation without a corresponding word in our language? Can we experience and identify pain without having a concept of pain in the language?

n Pormpuraaw, a small Aboriginal community on the western edge of Cape York in northern Australia, people speak Kuuk Thaayorre language which does not have any words for relative directions like left, right, front or back, but only absolute cardinal directions of north, south, east, west, etc. Even a child is able to identify these cardinal directions with absolute certainty, which many of us would not be able to do readily. It would appear that while language may not be the determinant of thought, it still moulds our thinking and world views and plays a causal role in shaping our cognition. But overall, modern research on cross-linguistic differences tends to suggest that the relationship operates both ways.

There are languages scattered around the world, from Polynesia to Mexico, from Namibia to Bali, which rely primarily on geographical coordinates. An Australian aboriginal tongue, Guugu Yimithirr, also has no relative directions, but only cardinal directions. To indicate where exactly they left something in the house, they'll say, "I left it on the southern edge of the western table." When shown a film on television, if it was facing north and a man on the screen was approaching, they would say that the man was "coming north-

To be able to think like these people, one needs to have a compass somewhere in the mind all the time. Regardless of visibility conditions and regardless of where they are indoors or outdoors, stationary or moving, they have a spot-on sense of direction, and for this they don't need to look at the Sun. They simply feel where north, south, west and east are. Guy Deutscher narrated how a speaker of Tzeltal from southern Mexico was blindfolded and spun around more than 20 times in a darkened house, but being blindfolded and dizzy, still pointed the geographic directions accurately. We cannot conceive how they experience the world, or whether it influences their sense of identity: if a Guugu Yimithirr speaker is pointing at himself, it may be not to draw attention unto himself as we would, but maybe, to point at a cardinal direction behind his back, his own existence being

To understand the role of language in thought, let us look at how different languages treat gender, or time. In English, if one says "I dined with my friend", one need not specify the sex of the friend. This is not the case with French (amie (f) /ami (m)), or German (Freundin(f) /Freund(m)). But English is particular about the time of dining (dines/dined/ dining/ will dine, etc.), while Chinese, for example, does not oblige its speakers to specify the exact time of the action ~ the same verb form is used for past, present or future actions. It does not mean that the English do not understand the difference between sexes or that the Chinese do not understand the difference between past, present and future ~ but it does mean that they are not obliged to think about timing while describing an action.



habits of speech are inculcated

Mark Twain once mocked the pronoun confusions of "the awful German language"

~ a young girl is an "it" while a turnip is a "she". Most people, how-

keys, mountains, etc. was reversed.

When they were asked to assign human voices to various

fourchette), while Spanish speakers, for whom el tenedor is masculine, preferred a male voice. This is not to say that speakers did not know that inanimate objects do not possess biological sex, but to look at the inanimate world through the prism of gender may have some emotional

Deutscher wondered whether the opposite genders of "bridge" in German and Spanish, for example, could have an effect on the design of bridges in Spain and Germany. We real-

ly do not know how the "emotional maps imposed by a gender system" affect tastes, habits and preferences. In Mandarin, speakers point past in the front and future at the back with their hand gestures, unlike us whose spatial gestures for the past and the future are just the opposite. In English, for

example, we look forward to the future lying ahead, or look back to the past left behind. But for the Chinese, the past gives the strength to move ahead, while uncertainties of the future are

better left behind. The question whether language shapes thought probably goes deeper ~ what do we actually mean by thought? Psychology defines thinking as an activity that goes on in the brain while processing information received through senses and stimuli. Thinking involves memory but goes beyond ~ thinking is involved when we form concepts, feel an emotion or physical pain engage in problem solving, reasoning or decision making. Can we experience a feeling of a sensation without a corresponding word in our language? Can we experience and identify pain without having a concept of pain in the language? Can there be thought without concept, or concept without language?

To a large extent thinking may be language-based, but obviously we can think in images. Experimentally, it has been shown that imagining a physical activity stimulates the same regions in our brain that get activated when we actually perform

Rather than being unidirectional, traffic flows both-ways between language and thinking, both of which are again influenced strongly by culture. As linguist Philip Lieberman says, "there are intimate, complex relationships that hold between biology, culture, language, and thought. Biology sets limits on thought, but culture changes biology, language transmits culture, and culture influences language and thought." That language is a mirror of culture, and not something inherited by a child in the form of Chomskian Universal Grammar, has been convincingly demonstrated by Daniel Everett based on his study of the Piraha people who inhabit the extremely isolated Amazonian regions of Brazil. The language of the Pirahas

does not exhibit one characteristic common to all languages, which is recursion ~ the embedding of clauses within clauses seen in most languages and is regarded as the defining characteristic of any human language. Everett lived with Pirahas for 86 months and observed that they live a simple life, based on bounties on nature, and live on 'here and now' without having any sense or need of the past or the future, recognizing 'the passage of time through wet and dry seasons' and using 'the full moon as a simple calendar' Consequently, their language has evolved to meet the needs of their values, lifestyle and culture. It has no words for numbers ~ only 'few' and 'many', no words for colours or for markers of time like a week, month or year ~ only seasons, wet or dry. Their language to them is only a tool to negotiate their life which is lived only in the present and without much complexity. Actually, we are as yet far from understanding how the words that we hear or sentences that we read acquire meaning in our minds ~ how the brain's neurons translate them into perception and thought.

Given that neurons in our brain are responsible for everything we perceive, think or do, we cannot as yet answer how objects, events, ideas, sensations, or people are encoded in the hardware of the brain by the actions of the hundred billion neurons that are tightly packed inside it. We may have shaped our destiny through innovation and creativity, through the use of increasingly sophisticated tools and language that had set us apart from our primate cousins and given us cognitive flexibility far superior to every other animal, flexibility that has led to the astounding diversity of about 7,000 languages around the globe. But we are at the infancy of our understanding of the relationship between language and thinking. As Alan Moore said in his Promethea, "The only reality we can ever truly know is that of our perceptions, our own consciousness, while that consciousness, and thus our entire reality, is made of nothing but signs and symbols. Nothing but language. Even God requires language before conceiving the Universe. See Genesis: "In the beginning was the Word.""

(Concluded)



S ASIAN VOICES

# Watching the medical school expansion dispute

ecently, the Seoul High Court overruled a petition by the medical community to block the government's plan to drastically increase the enrolment quota at medical schools.

However, the controversy over medical school expansion will continue in South Korea because people think that it will bring not only medical reform but also ultimately the alteration of the Korean health care system.

Those who support the government's policy criticize doctors for selfishly trying to protect their personal interests, without considering patients' needs. Those who do not support the policy warn that it will benefit only a few mammoth hospitals and ultimately aims at privatizing the medical insurance system currently managed by the government at a deficit. If the opponents' claim is right, the new policy may be problematic, even though we need more doctors.

Presently, [the Korean health care system is a combination of socialism and capitalism; the government manages the medical insurance, while most hospitals are private. Therefore, Koreans can benefit from inexpensive health insurance and excellent medical services at the same time.

As a result, the South Korean medical insurance system is undisputedly one of the best in the world. That was

## III The Korea Herald

why ex-US President Barack Obama wanted to import the Korean health care program to America when he implemented the Affordable Care Act to provide a government-sponsored inexpensive health insurance option to lower-middle class Americans, which

was indispensable to them. The problem with the Korean health care system is that it is so easy to see a doctor without an appointment, even for a common cold, and you only pay 3,000 won (\$2.20) per visit. In many other countries, that is not possible. In the US, for example, you would not see a doctor with minor symptoms such as a cold or indigestion, and you must pay about \$100 dollars, or 135,000 won, just to see them.

Such a uniquely Korean phenomenon hampers the opportunities for patients with urgent medical needs to see a doctor who is always busy treating not-so-urgent patients. In addition, doctors cannot allocate enough time for any one patient because so many patients are waiting. As a result, a Korean patient can typically expect to see his doctor for only a few minutes at a time. In the US, patients can see their doctor

for half an hour to one hour at a time. However, the American health insurance system has its own chronic problems. In the US, private companies sell various insurance policies to employers and individuals, and then negotiate the occurring medical expenses with hospitals and doctors. Therefore, in the US, medical expenses are astronomically high because hospitals tend to inflate them, expecting a drastic cut from insurance companies. If you do not have health insurance, therefore, you can find yourself in big trouble. In fact, even if you do have health insurance, problems still exist if it is not an expensive one with extensive coverage. In the US, unlike Korea, dental care and vision are separate from health care, and thus you have to buy your own insurance policies for your teeth and eyes. Dental and vision treatments are costly in the US. For example, if you need a dental implant in the US, you could pay as much as \$8,000, or 11 million won. Most dental insurance policies do not cover implants. In Korea, your insurance will cover up to two implants.



about facts they are reporting. A Matses man when asked how many wives he has, unless he can actually see them at that moment, would have to answer in the past tense, like "There were two the last time I saw." He must be absolutely certain that one of them hasn't died or run off with another man since he last saw them, even if this was only five minutes ago. When one is obliged to specify certain types of information, it forces one to be attentive to those details. Since such

from childhood, it is only natural that they will become habits of mind that go beyond language and shape experiences and perceptions, feelings and memories. The question is, is it supported by hard evidence?

ever, treat gender assignment in a language as arbitrary without any cognitive content. But experiments suggest that speakers do indeed, on a subconscious level, form associations between nonliving ("neuter") objects with masculine or feminine properties depending on their gender assignment, as in the 1990s experiment with German and Spanish. A German bridge is feminine (die Brücke), for instance, but el puente is masculine in Spanish and the same is true for clocks, apartments, forks, newspapers, pockets, etc., whereas an apple is masculine for Germans but feminine in Spanish, just like for chairs, brooms, butterflies,

When speakers were asked to grade various objects on a range of characteristics, Spanish speakers deemed bridges, clocks and violins to have more "masculine properties" like strength, but Germans tended to think of them as more slender or elegant. With objects like mountains or chairs, which are "he" in German but "she" in Spanish, the effect



editor@thestatesman.com

**LETTERS TO THE EDITOR** 

# **Sustained effort**

**SIR**, This refers to the article "Protecting Children" by Yogesh Pratap Singh. It is unfortunate that film stars and sport icons of India are pushing for tobacco products rather than discouraging it.

Sunil Gavaskar and Kapil Dev are very health conscious and it is improbable they use the tobacco products they advertise. Perhaps they do not realize the consequences of advertising tobacco products. India is already the cancer capital of the world, and these numbers are only set to grow as more young people fall into the tobacco trop. Young people start smoking as a dare and are unable to withstand the peer pressure of trying to act cool. Cigarettes are not supposed to be sold within a certain distance of schools. How much these rules

are followed is anybody's guess. Instead of academics which have no further applications in later life, it would be a good idea to take children to visit hospitals with tobacco related cancers. this would act as a better deterrent than most other methods. We also need to deglamorize use of tobacco products to stop children from experimenting with them. A long and sustained effort by those who want the nation to be free from this addiction is needed in order to stop the increasing consumption of tobacco products! Yours, etc., Anthony Henriques,

Mumbai, 31 May.

## **EQUALLY GUILTY**

**SIR**, Apropos the report "Porsche crash: Docs got Rs. 3 L for replacing teen driver's blood sample"

(May 29), there is no doubt a serious offence was committed by doctors who allegedly caused disappearance of evidence to save the accused driver for a consideration.

In the eyes of law, the offence committed by the doctors should be treated at par with the offence committed by the prime accused.

The motive of the doctors was to rule out alcohol consumption by the juvenile offender by allegedly changing the blood sample.

The accused doctors dared to do this unethical work for they got allured by the juvenile's father.

A foolproof investigation is the need of the hour and if necessary, under the supervision of a high court judge irrespective of the fact that a committee has been formed to investigate the incident.

> Yours, etc., Arun Gupta, Kolkata, 29 May.

# **MEDITATION**

**SIR**, This refers to the front page report, "After hectic poll paign, PM meditates at Vivekananda rock memorial" (1 June). As we approach the conclusion of the election campaign in India, we have observed the culmination of a particularly contentious period.

The Bharatiya Janata Party has, regrettably, engaged in disseminating hate speech and disparaging opponents in its efforts to garner votes. Such tactics have tarnished the democratic process with unnecessary hostility and discord.

Prime Minister Modi has opted to spend the final moments of the campaign in meditation. This appears to be a calculated attempt to alter the narrative and appeal to the electorate's sense

of spirituality and contemplation. Perhaps, it is to consolidate his political gains. Vivekananda was a saint who was not a part of politics. One cannot say this about the top leader as he has filed his nomination in Varanasi

for the general election! This is the significant difference. Many political parties have rightly objected before the Election Commission of India that the 'mediation move' goes against constitutional principles because secular credentials expect one to keep religion and politics apart.

> Yours, etc., S S Paul, Nadia, 1 June.



# Should finance lead the real sector?

**ANDREW SHENG** 

s emerging and developing economies (EMDEs) navigate a turbulent world of intense geopolitical rivalry and worsening climate warming, the question of a new development model is at the top of the growth agenda. The current narrative is one of how EMDEs choose sides between an insecure rich West and the rising BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) grouping of countries that seek an alternative order to the current G7 dominated neoliberal system. The Biden Administration story of a choice between democracy versus autocracy and supporting a rules-based order is today not convincing to the Global South, which sees a global retreat in democratically-led countries, whilst the West can selectively "do as I say, not as I do". Free market order is in serious retreat as tariffs and sanctions are raised unilaterally, with industrial policy and state intervention rising by the day.

The issue is less capitalism versus socialism, because some capitalist countries are turning fascist, whereas climate change policies cut across ideologies. All countries face two serious imbalances – social injustices in terms of widening income and wealth, as well as planetary injustice as natural capital is being plundered with pollution, biodiversity loss and ruthless extraction of minerals and nonreplaceable natural resources.

Attending the Global Islamic Economy and Finance Forum in Kuala Lumpur this week, it struck me that the theme illustrated a dilemma of policy choice – promoting the real economy over finance or the other way round? Finance has led the real economy in global growth since the 1980s, when financial liberalization became synonymous with the neoliberal order. Allowing open capital accounts, promoting free financial markets and competition seemed to

lead to efficient capital flows that helped economic development. The Washington Consensus was discredited by the 1997 Asian financial crisis and the 2008 global financial crises, which revealed that free market order promoted concentration, financial frailty, market instability and social inequality. The 2020-22 pandemic and economic lockdown was "medicated" at the economic level with greater monetary creation and loose fiscal policy, but since 2008, global growth has slowed because financialization increased debt at the expense of real sector productivity, inviting short-term speculation rather than making long-term investments and structural, but painful reforms.

A policy of "low hanging fruits" that took easy (politically less painful) solutions ended up with "small yards and high fences", effectively protectionism and containment instead of multilateral cooperation to resolve global issues.

The dilemma of finance versus real sector is easily seen by the example of a national balance sheet, in which the national assets (real)side is funded by the liability (monetary or financial structure) side.

Finance does matter, because if the real sector is funded fully by debt, especially foreign debt, and the country has no foreign exchange to repay when required, the country will go into crisis – exactly what happened to the Latin American economies in the 1980s, as well as the East Asian economies in 1997/98. The European debt crisis of 2008/2009 revealed that even though Europe was rich and prosperous, when the deficit countries of Ireland, Greece and Italy could not pay their debt (even in Euros), they had to "mutualize" debt across Europe as a whole.

From a national financial condition perspective, a country is viable if the return on total assets exceeds the cost of funding on the liability side.

The country will go into debt and deficit if the return on assets is lower than the debt funding costs, especially if consumption has been largely funded by debt. The free market model has allowed debt to balloon since the 1980s. In 1980, the total financial asset to GDP was nearly 100 per cent of GDP, which has risen to over 400 per cent, with massive growth in debt, whereas equity has remained around 100 per cent of GDP. In other words, the gross leverage (debt versus equity) has risen to roughly three times.

This is where the US stock market model has become superior to the Chinese, European and Japanese models, which are heavily bank-led. The US corporate sector is not bankfunded, preferring to take high bets on technology through funding by the private equity-venture capital model using IPO (initial-public offering) to attract public capital. Both China and the United States have considerable strength in Artificial Intelligence, but the US stock market capitalization, aided by the Magnificent Seven tech companies, increased by US\$10 trillion in 2023, whereas the Chinese tech platforms market value was flat last year. Guess who has a better tech and market narrative, with the ability to attract global talent? In other words, a country with a stronger real economy story, funded by the right type of risk capital, will outperform competitors with a weak real economy development

model, funded by fragile debt. The Islamic economy and finance story is illustrative of this dilemma. There are roughly 1.6 billion followers of Islam, roughly one fifth of mankind, but the Islamic countries' GDP is approximately 9 per cent of world GDP, whilst Islamic finance assets were \$6.7 trillion, about 1.5 per cent of global financial assets of more than \$461 trillion. Clearly, there is a considerable way to go to develop Islamic economies on



the real side and financial side.

Islamic finance is equity-based or a risk-sharing model, with ethical or Syariah considerations. The Muslim faith abhors usury and encourages the rich to perform zakat or charity. In that sense, the logic of Islamic finance promotes a circular economy of selfrestraint discipline through faith and is more just through risk-sharing. Debt finance operates on risk-transfer – the lender protects its interests through collateral or third-party guarantees, whilst the borrower bears all the risks of failure. In short, in a world of more volatile and unpredictable geopolitical and climate warming risks, funding development through equity and ethical values is a demonstration of practicing sustainable ESG (environmental, social and governance) goals.

Under the free market model

with one dominant hegemon, free market policies make sense because the hegemon maintains overall stability and benefits from everyone following its rules. In a world of contending powers and higher risks, with greater uncertainty, practicing real sector strategy and prudent, low-geared equity-based funding that tackles both social and environmental injustices seems the right way to go.

Playing with finance is shuffling decks on the Titanic. Turning the Titanic away from existential disaster is the real sector realistic approach, where we should put all our collective

(The writer, a former Central banker, is Distinguished Fellow of Asia Global Institute, University of Hong Kong.)

Special to ANN.

IT CAME TO MIND | MANISH NANDY

# Getting to know your lover

n a friend's suggestion, I took a look at several episodes of the Netflix series Love is Blind. It starts with the interesting proposition that love relationships are often initiated based heavily on the looks of the persons involved. To counter this, two sets of eligible young men and women are brought together in an unusual way. Each person meets the person of the opposite sex individually only in a 'pod,' a comfortable room divided by an opaque partition. Men and women talk to each other, easily and at length, but don't see the other person. The premise is that the men and women would find persons after their heart, based on a genuine exchange of ideas and feelings, without being unduly influenced by their appearances.

The explicit assumption is that, once they have found a person they know they like, sight unseen, they would meet them and know them better in various social circumstances, and then proceed to get married. The programme directors even set a target wedding date, doubtless to light a fire beneath the romancing and courtship.

This being a television show, the hosts have chosen a dozen handsome men and an equal number of attractive women. They duly enter the pods and talk to each other, earnestly and sometimes candidly. But this being real life, half of them do not find a congenial partner and are not heard of again (unless they turn up later in another season of the programme). The other half is luckier, their hearts



illastration by: Debabrata Chakrabarty

melt and they decide unseen to become a couple, and get to see each other. They get to spend time together, first socially and then privately – like a honeymoon before the wedding – and then proceed to a wedding ceremony. Not all reach the end point; some break up, some even during the nuptials.

Is love really blind? Does it really benefit from a period of unseen romancing, abstracted from the looks of the lover and loved? There is something to be said for courtship in a clinical but comfortable pod, where you not only don't see the other person, but you are removed from all other distractions and focus exclusively on the relationship. It gives a certain edge to a pair's exchange, almost forcing them

to open up and speak their mind. Even then, I was struck by how superficial were many of the exchanges, how apparently unprepared the couples were to explore the gamut of complications in a relationship. Even the internet might have better prepared many to ask the Twenty five Most Important Questions. No surprise that a participant's bisexual orientation is not revealed until too late and his fiancée breaks off the relationship.

Perhaps the hothouse nature of the experiment itself causes an air of expectancy and a rush to judgment that avoiding a face-to-face encounter was supposed to guard against. Even though the men and women were primed to seek a link and came ready to find a bride or a groom, their breakneck rush

to identify the ideal person – though good for television drama – seemed hard to believe. Speed or the sense of time-is-running-out haste is no help. One is tempted to grasp a straw that is floating by, fearing that another may not come floating our way soon.

The directors contribute to the drama by emphasizing the imminence of the wedding date. The prospect, almost a 'threat,' of an unalterable day of marriage hangs like Damocles's sword over the participants and keeps them running breathlessly. Like a second-hand car salesman, they all seem too eager to 'close.' Equally unhelpful are the picturesque locations and lavish facilities chosen for the couples to initiate mutual discovery once they have identified their lovers. Ideal circumstances, very different from normal ones, are hardly ideal for people to seriously explore one another. In movies, beautiful people fall in love in beautiful places. In life, lavish arrangements in hotels, boats and exotic resorts don't help. Rather, they create torpor, a blithe acceptance of the not-so-acceptable, like going along with a fairy tale, without asking too many questions. One participant talks, with knowing anticipation, of the coming conflict between unpleasant reality and romantic serenity. The show raises a provocative question about the outsize importance of looks in men and women getting attracted. But if looks can be misleading, words can be too. The power of one's appearance is both unquestionable and obvious. Less obvious is the power of words –

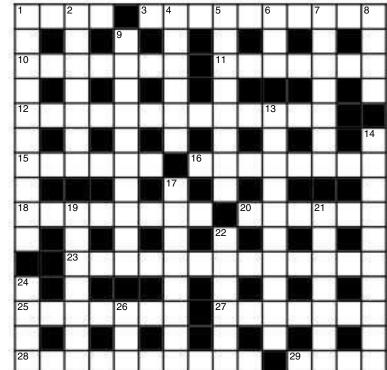
until a few words in a special circumstance either thrill us and become memorable, or cut us to the quick and become even more memorable. I may foolishly fall in love with a person quite unsuitable for me because I am entranced by how she looks. But I may with equal obtuseness give my heart to a person who simply charms me by her words. A far bigger question remains. If both looks and words can be deceptive, what do we rely on in choosing a lover? The disconcerting answer seems to be that there is no reliable measure, no certain, failsafe yardstick in human affairs. We have to judge as well as we can, knowing full well the limits of such judgment. Beyond that, it is a leap in the dark. Those who like to place their naïve faith in zodiac signs or some astrologer's calculus would do better to heed Shakespeare's disconcerting but invaluable counsel that the fault or fulsomeness lies not in our stars but in ourselves. The far greater reliance has to be on our ability to steer our relationship in a way that it gets closer to what we want it to be. Given our infinite capacity, both to change and to develop, what we start with matters far less than how we develop and direct a relationship to something more durable and desirable. That is a tougher challenge than just overcoming the lure of good looks and seductive talk.

(The writer is a US-based international development advisor and had worked with the World Bank. He can be reached at

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NO-292799

CROSSWORD



# YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION



## **ACROSS**

Saucy, for a time

Popular story about sick revolutionary is perfect (10) 10 Regulate boxing

agents, in part 11 They're positive half

of defensive works must be removed (7) 12 In test, males frequently getting compassion in critical period (6,2,5) 15 Most balanced article

18 Shapes I'm busting to get attention (8) 20 Try to get alcoholic drink put in dessert from the east (4,2)

23 Local restorer restored railroad ride 25 Box, perhaps containing old chief's

16 Chap wearing trousers **DOWN** 

playing old musical

instrument (8)

foot (7) 27 Look to wear green pants soon (7) 28 British demand queue for boundary (10) 29 Pretending to be undressed, or similar on Sweden is in French

prison (8)

Essentially, tall locals patrol Maze

mailman? (10)Engineers and soldiers following soldier`s rules

Expert's love for top

American

Unacceptable to claim inventor's first idea

Allow John to start to investigate flies

7 Relative nearly left establishment that struggles to maintain social

8 Worried, skipping question that`s simple

distancing

9 One's again hit hard following server issues during court proceedings

13 I bury someone who's 24 Objections about passed in an unconventional manner?

(10)

17 Team, one from Madrid, of stars

14 Photograph last plant

19 Dangerous to shave bottom close to heater in living room

21 Pick imitation nursing attire, 50% off

22 Shelter in rocks at foot of mountain (6) displaying butt

26 Grant possibly picked up for cast (3)

## **100 YEARS AGO**

## **OCCASIONAL NOTE**

THE annual report of the Foreign Missions of the United Free Church of Scotland is a record of varied work carried on in many fields under vastly different conditions. The revenue raised for this work in Scotland amounted to over £180,000, but the sum contributed in the mission fields themselves was even larger-£230,000. More than half of this consisted of fees from students in the colleges and pupils in the schools. The staff of missionaries, men and women, clerical and lay, numbers 428, and in addition to these, 186 missionaries' wives are regarded as "on the strength," many of them, it is said, doing a missionary's full work. The workers recruited in the field number 5,581, of whom 4,607 are teachers. The total Christian community in the mission fields is 264,276. As a result of the War, several of the areas in which German missionaries were at work were placed under the care of the United Free Church, and negotiations are now being made for the return of German missionaries in certain cases. This is mainly a matter for the civil authorities to decide, and they seem disposed to sanction the return of the Germans on conditions. Their loyalty to the British Government must be guaranteed by the British Conference of Missionary Societies; and they must have no political conversations with the people. The Germans, however, while ready to send back their missionaries, have intimated that they are unable to pay their salaries. It is expected that their fellow-Lutherans in America and elsewhere will supply the necessary funds.

**NEWS ITEMS** 

#### **JOHNSTONE APPEAL**

## **CONVICTIONS UPHELD ON ALL CHARGES**

(FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT)

THE Johnstone appeal has been dismissed. The convictions were upheld on all three charges. Johnstone burst into tears and was led away by European sergeants.

Mr. Justice Carr, in the course of his judgment on Johnstone's appeal against conviction on three charges of cheating whilst in charge as rice manager of the London-Rangoon Trading Company said that the evidence of the Chinese brokers was highly unsatisfactory. They had to consider Johnstone's influence over them. The judge referred to the defence declaring to call all available evidence, but said there was no question of using presumption in the present case to volster up the prosecution. The third case, in his lordship's opinion, was a perfectly simple one, and he could not accept the defence's plea that only a technical breach of trust had been committed. All three appeals were therefore dismissed. There was a big crowd in court.

## **MACLAREN'S PLANE**

## **NEW MACHINE IN A FORTNIGHT**

PENDING complete details of the damage to MacLaren's aeroplane in Akyab, Lieutenant-Colonel Broome has tentatively arranged to rush a 'plane from Hakodate to Akyab.

Commander Abbot, of the 43rd United States Destroyer Division, on learning of MacLaren's mishap, offered to use an American destroyer to transport the aeroplane at full speed from Hakodate to Hongkong, subject to the approval of the Admiral commanding the Asiatic Fleet, which will probably be forthcoming. Lieutenant-Colonel Broome has gratefully accepted the offer. About a fortnight will be required for the machine to reach Akyab

# **HOWRAH BRIDGE**

## **NO ACTION TILL BILL is PASSED BY COUNCIL**

The Bengal Chamber of Commerce has received intimation from the Finance Department, Government of Bengal, that the orders of the Government of India are expected shortly in connection with the demanded reconstruction of Howrah Bridge. No further action, it is stated, towards carrying the project into execution will be possible until the Bill has been passed by the Provincial Legislative Council.

## **FORD'S WORLD TOUR**

CAPT. WANDERWELL and HIS sister Miss Aloaha Wanderwell, who are touring round the world in a Ford car, arrived here on Saturday evening from Karachi with two Ford cars. Owing to a passport difficulty, they could not land till Monday afternoon. Capt. Wanderwell, who is touring on a wager with his wife, told a Press correspondent that the party is paying its way by selling postcards and showing cinema films of their travels. The party will be leaving for Calcutta on Friday intending to get there before the break of the monsoon.

NOTE: Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required. (By arrangement with The Independent, London)





This time I am going, I don't know when I will return, I don't know what they will do to me in jail. If Bhagat Singh could go to the gallows, then I am ready to go to the gallows too

ARVIND KEJRIWAL Delhi Chief Minister



With China's support to Russia, the war will last longer. That is bad for the whole world and the policy of China - who declares that it supports territorial integrity and sovereignty and declares it officially

VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY Ukrainian President



The exit polls are completely bogus and have been orchestrated and masterminded by the man whose exit is inevitable and guaranteed on June 4

JAIRAM RAMESH

Congress general secretary

# Man-made mess in space

Ven the sky is not the limit for human greed. After the planet Earth, it is now the turn of space to suffer the consequences of human ✓ recklessness. Space debris, the junk that humans leave in space, can be extremely dangerous as they zip around the Earth at nearly 10 km per second almost seven times faster than a bullet — and risk colliding with communication, monitoring and astronomy satellites. The amount of space junk orbiting the Earth has skyrocketed in recent years. It is estimated that more than 30,000 pieces bigger than 10 cm in size litter the low-Earth orbit — up to 2,000 km above the earth's surface. 'Gravity', the 2013 Hollywood science fiction thriller about astronauts lost in space after orbital debris destroys their space shuttle, was fictional but the threat of a cascade of space debris is very much real. The orbital debris can come from rocket-launching material and defunct satellites or from metal, screws, paint flakes and other smaller items. Even a single paint flake at that speed can damage or destroy a satellite. Explosions in orbit, triggered by residual energy stored in

fuel and batteries aboard spacecraft and rockets, are a significant source of debris. Increasing government and private space traffic is pushing up the combined mass and area taken up by space trash. Right now, there are nearly 10,000 satellites orbiting the Earth. The polluted orbital environment is becoming more crowded by

nations to stop treating space as a garbage dump and clean up the Earth's near orbit

It's time for

the day, threatening the growing space economy. It's time for nations to stop treating space as a garbage dump and clean up the Earth's near orbit. Strange, as it may sound, there is still no international treaty that limits space junk or sets standards for negligence. Global cooperation is needed to arrive at an agreement that outlines responsibilities and imposes fines on companies whose spacecraft debris causes harm. Under the 1967 Outer Space Treaty, nations are supposed to be responsible for damages caused by space junk, even if it was originally launched by a private firm. But, the arrangement has not worked. One way to reduce the risk of future impacts with space litter is to burn up the spent satellites and rockets in the atmosphere. The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has taken a lead in this area and plans to include the debris-free approach for each mission, beginning 2025. This would include carefully selecting clean orbits, budgeting for fuel to dispose of rockets after the mission and efficiently controlling trajectories as they re-enter the earth's atmosphere so that they don't leave any orbital debris. Although commerce might be the bulk source of space debris, the militarisation of Earth's orbit has had and will continue to play a role in cluttering orbits. Experts have suggested a global treaty along the lines of the Antarctic convention to keep space clean before tensions rise any further.

# Art of judicious postponing

**Putting aside** non-urgent work can help create mental space needed to focus on what truly matters



VIIVECK VERMA

t is not uncommon to have your dashboard bursting at the seams with work. Professional assignments, personal commitments and acts of self-care can be far too many and we might always feel like we are running out of time. Since our days are always going to be 24 hours long, time management is often emphasised. Yet, the focus is routinely on performing multiple tasks in the same window and not on decluttering the dashboard, to get rid of unnecessary concerns which can be taken care of at a later time, with no harm involved. This underrated and overlooked aspect of time management, ie, 'postponing with a dif-ference', can be the key to a lot of our problems around multitasking and feeling overwhelmed with an endless list of things to take care of. Let us unpack this at length.

#### The Eisenhower Box

Deliberate postponement, when applied judiciously and not as a means to procrastinate, can emerge as an artful strategy in decluttering priorities and fortifying one's focus on essential timebound tasks. In a world inundated with incessant demands and deadlines, mastering this art of selective delay can be transformative for personal and professional productivity. At the heart of this approach, lies the recognition that not all tasks are created equal.

A cursory academic engagement with the subject at hand can bring us to The Eisenhower Box, a popular decision matrix attributed to Dwight D Eisenhower which categorises tasks based on urgency and importance. In the same vein, by adopting the approach of consciously delaying non-urgent or less critical activities, individuals can create the mental space needed to concentrate on what truly matters.

Postponing tasks demands a nuanced understanding of the implications of

time. It is not about avoidance or procrastination but a deliberate, calculated choice to allocate our resources optimally. This involves assessing the consequences of delaying a task against the benefits of freeing up immediate band-

width for tasks of greater significance. One key aspect of this art is the ability to discern between tasks that appear urgent and those that genuinely contribute to overarching goals. The adrenaline rush gained from completing multiple seemingly urgent tasks at once can be deceptive, often leading to a sense of accomplishment without meaningful progress and can impact the quality of work done. Through strategic postponing, one can break free from the urgency trap and redirect energy towards impactful endeavours.

#### Concept of Minimalism

Secondly, the art of judicious postponing is closely tied to the concept of minimalism. Minimalism advocates for simplifying one's life by focusing on what adds value and discarding the rest. By postponing non-essential tasks, individuals can align with this minimalist philosophy, streamlining their daily activities to amplify their purpose and effectiveness.

Consider a professional confronted with a demanding project and an invitation to attend a somewhat non-urgent meeting on the same day. The art of judicious postponing would involve recognising the critical importance of the project, potentially deferring the meeting to a later date. By prioritising the project, the individual ensures ded-

icated focus on a task that significantly contributes to overarching goals, minimising distractions from less impact-

In a more personal context, imagine someone striving to maintain a healthy work-life balance. They may face the choice between working late to meet an arbitrary deadline or postponing less urgent work to spend quality time with family. Opting for the latter re-flects the art of judicious postponing, acknowledging the long-term value of nurturing personal relationships over immediate but less meaningful work

Furthermore, let's explore the realm of personal development. An individual committed to continuous learning may receive an opportunity to participate in a non-essential workshop while simultaneously grappling with a pressing self-improvement project. The judicious approach will involve delaying the workshop to focus on the project, recognising the transformative impact of sustained, concentrated effort on personal growth.

Similarly, in the fast-paced world of

Mastering this art of selective delay can be transformative for personal and professional productivity, helping achieve sustained success entrepreneurship, a business owner might face the choice between responding immediately to every email or strategically postponing non-urgent correspondence to concentrate on core business strategies. By postponing less critical communication, the entrepreneur can create a space for strategic thinking and decision-making, ultimately enhancing the company's long-

As these instances demonstrate practical terms, adopting this approach is likely to entail creating a system of sorts for task evaluation as well as thinking practices geared towards the same end. We must review and reassess our to-do lists, weighing each item against its true importance. This iterative process can allow for adjustments, ensuring that your efforts remain aligned with overarching goals.

Another facet of the art of postponing is recognising the psychological benefits it may accrue to us. Constant multitasking and overwhelming to-do lists can regularly contribute to stress and burnout. Deliberately choosing to postpone certain tasks provides mental respite, fostering a sense of control and preventing the feeling of being perpetually swamped.

#### Some Pitfalls

However, it is essential to practice discretion with this approach. Indiscriminate delay can lead to its own set of challenges. Tasks that are consistently postponed may accumulate, creating a backlog that becomes daunting to address. Sometimes, one can fall into a habit of procrastinating which can be pernicious in the long run. A vigilant and discerning approach, therefore, is crucial to avoid the pitfalls of excessive delay while still reaping the benefits of focused attention on priority tasks.

In essence, the art of judicious postponing involves orchestrating a symphony of time and tasks. It requires a thoughtful and intentional mindset, a commitment to assessing and reassessing priorities, and the discipline to execute decisions effectively. As individuals navigate the complexities of modern life, mastering this art can be a transformative step towards achieving clarity, purpose and sustained success.

It is about making intentional choices which recognise that not all tasks carry the same weight in contributing to long-term success and fulfilment. This mindful approach empowers individuals to navigate the complexities of their lives with purpose and efficiency. So, go ahead, embrace the liberating power of saying "no" to unnecessary demands that detract from your long-term objectives and imbue your productivity with meaning!

(The author is Founder & CEO, Upsurge Global, Advisor & Adjunct Professor, EThames College, and Strategic Advisor and Venture Partner, SilverNeedle Ventures)

#### Letters to the

Editor

#### Plan ahead

The existing rules governing the functioning of schools, syllabus, and the conduct of examinations have to be reviewed if not already done and improvements if necessary have to be carried out in the initial stages itself so that interruptions mid-way through the academic schedule will not be a hindrance to students and teachers. This applies both to government and private recognised schools. The number of working days has to increase so that teachers get more time to complete the syllabus and students to study. Periodic inspections without prior notice will instill a sense of fear and help

improve the overall standards.. NR RAGHURAM, Hyderabad

#### Crack the whip

The plastic menace is undoubtedly gaining huge proportions and tackling this menace is certainly a big challenge. It is commendable that the authorities are contemplating a ban on plastics in the Amrabad Tiger Reserve (ATR). It is a step in the right direction. The public seems to have lost their mind. They use and throw plastics left, right and centre, not realising where it goes. We see this situation also on beaches and other public places. When fishermen bring in their nets ashore, it is disgusting to see a major part of the catch is plastic. It's a pity that we have to resort to enforcing a ban on the use of plastic but then it seems like the public sometimes understand the language of the whip. So be it, 'crack the whip!'

MELVILLE X D'SOUZA, Mumbai

#### Sorry state

The Republican candidate for US Presidential election, Trump is found guilty on all 34 counts in hush money case. The surprising factor to us is that Trump is convicted not for his sexual encounter but for falsifying business records of election expenses. Another surprise is that the conviction will not be a stumbling block for him to contest in the presidential election, which the citizens of the US accept. The peak of all is that he declared himself as a political prisoner. The sorry state is that he compared himself to Mandela who was in prison for the cause of liberation of the Africans of his country. This reminds me of the saying that politics seems to be the last resort for scoundrels.

> RAJAKUMAR ARULANANDHAM, Chennai Write to us at letters@telanganatoday.com

#### Bizarre claim

With a grand design to erase the public memory of all genuine independence warriors, our PM has delivered a faux truth bomb, stating Gandhi was unknown to the world before 1982. In fact, Modi cited Einstein's statement, on Gandhi's 70th birthday, in 1939, "Generations to come, it may be, will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth," in his op-ed piece in The New York Times on October 2, 2019, titled "Why India and the World Need Gandhi," and mentioned Gandhi's influence on Martin Luther King Jr and Nelson Mandela. The list of Western celebrities who knew Gandhi personally or from a distance before 1982 includes Leo Tolstoy, George Bernard Shaw, Ho Chi Minh, John Lennon, Pearl S Buck and Chaplin. American journalist Louis Fischer wrote 'The Life of Mahatma Gandhi', possibly the most widely read biography of the man, in 1950. Besides, several countries have issued postage stamps in honour of Gandhi way before the 1982 film was even shot. Modi's claim is factually incorrect and bizarre.

KV CHANDRA MOULI, Mysuru hotspot

India in the

■ The Guardian

#### Narendra Modi's audacity of hate

No party or candidate shall include in any activity which may aggravate existing differences or create mutual hatred or cause tension between different castes and communities, religious or linguistic." So reads the rulebook for Indian elections. Has anyone told Narendra Modi?

#### Terracotta air coolers helping fight heat

In India's scorching summer heat, the ancient practice of chilling water in terracotta pots is inspiring new trends - from cooling towers to screens for buildings. Nandita Iyer hates chilled water. And yet, when temperatures soared, the cookbook author turned to a favourite childhood fixture: the matka.

Dhaka Tribune

#### Millions suffer on last day of election

India's grueling heatwave is set to abate soon but that was no consolation to housewife Bindwasvini Devi, one of the millions braving Saturday's scorching sun to vote in the final day of national elections. Crowds lined up early outside polling booths to beat the heat in the Hindu holy city of Varanasi.

# The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

# Exit poll results

BJP buoyant, Oppn rejects predictions

OLLING in Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and other states, besides Chandigarh, on June 1 brought to an end the seven-phase Lok Sabha elections. The Election Commission of India (ECI) deserves kudos for having conducted the long-drawn-out polls by and large smoothly. A glaring exception was West Bengal, which witnessed clashes between TMC and BJP supporters, especially in troubletorn Sandeshkhali. Commendably, the ECI directed both the BJP and the Congress to tell their candidates and star campaigners to refrain from making statements that could aggravate communal discord. However, the poll panel stopped short of rapping the PM on the knuckles for his controversial speech in Banswara, Rajasthan, in April. It was a no-holds-barred campaign from both sides, with political leaders having no qualms about hitting their rivals below the belt. The heatwave sweeping many parts of the country made things tougher for all stakeholders, be it poll officials, candidates, campaigners or voters. However, despite the demanding conditions, the dance of democracy continued unabated.

Several exit polls have predicted a comfortable majority for the BJP-led NDA. Despite the below-par turnout, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has expressed confidence that people have voted to re-elect the NDA government and rejected the 'regressive politics' of the 'opportunistic' INDIA. The PM chaired several meetings on Sunday, including one to review the 100-day agenda of the next government, thus sending out the message that his re-election is imminent.

Opposition parties have dismissed the predictions, saying that the election results would be entirely different. The Congress has said that the exit polls were a 'deliberate attempt' to justify the rigging of the elections and part of the 'psychological games' being played by the PM to lower the morale of INDIA bloc workers. The grand old party has accused the PM of employing pressure tactics to impress upon the bureaucracy that he is here to stay. The verdict will be out tomorrow.

# Tragic negligence

Akhnoor bus mishap calls for accountability

HE suspension of six J&K transport department officials following a mishap in which an overloaded bus fell into a gorge in Akhnoor, leaving 22 dead, underscores the dire need for accountability and systemic reform. The bus, with a capacity of 55, was carrying around 85 passengers. Such blatant disregard for norms and the fact that the bus was previously challaned for overloading are a sorry reflection on the regulatory mechanism. The situation is exacerbated by the poor condition of roads in Jammu district. Most of them are poorly maintained and have sharp bends, leading to frequent accidents. Last year alone, over 890 lives were lost on J&K's roads.

The magisterial inquiry and the suspensions must lead to a paradigm shift in road safety and the enforcement of rules. It is also imperative to address the root causes of frequent accidents. The inquiry panel, tasked with submitting its report within a week, must operate in a thorough and transparent manner. It should also look into the regulatory framework. The involvement of technical experts in analysing the wreckage and the inclusion of eyewitnesses' testimonies are critical to getting to the bottom of the matter.

This bus accident should catalyse a comprehensive review of transport policies and practices. Perfunctory investigations ordered after every major mishap have failed to curb the fatal errors committed by drivers. Robust measures to improve road infrastructure, scale up driver training and stringent enforcement of traffic regulations are essential for fostering safe driving practices in the long run. It is crucial to ensure that justice is served so that devastating losses are prevented. Only through rigorous accountability and proactive measures can we hope to transform our roads from deathtraps to safe pathways for all.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

# The Tribune.

LAHORE, TUESDAY, JUNE 3, 1924

Sir Malcolm Hailey takes charge

SIR Malcolm Hailey, who on Saturday took charge of this province from Sir Edward MacLagan at Bombay, has already reached his summer capital and assumed the reins of office. No one can say that His Excellency has come to a bed of roses. The legacy which he has received from his predecessor, is, indeed, as we have already said, in some respects just as troublesome as that which his predecessor himself had received from Sir Michael O'Dwyer. The very peace of which Sir Edward boasted in one of his farewell speeches is in itself a source of positive danger, for it is a peace which has all the elements of a calm before the storm. Then there is at least one problem which at the time when Sir Edward ascended his goddi either did not exist at all or was but a small cloud in Punjab's political horizon no bigger than a man's hand, but which thanks to the tactless, unintelligent and unsystematically handling of it by Sir Edward's Government has today assumed enormous size and proportion. In both cases, it will require statesmanship of the very highest order, states manship of which tact, judgment, sympathy, courage and imagination are the principle ingredients, to solve the difficulty with which Sir Malcolm finds himself confronted. This is not necessarily a disadvantage to an ambitious ruler on the threshold of his career. It is not merely your enemy to whom your difficulty offers an opportunity. Your own opportunity is just as great, if only you know how to turn it to account. From this point of view, no provincial ruler of our time, unless it was his own immediate predecessor, had a more splendid opportunity than what his Excellency has before him.

# Blue Star was ill-planned, badly executed

The Rajiv-Longowal Accord could have shown the way forward, but it was never honoured



RAMESH INDER SINGH FORMER CHIEF SECRETARY, PUNJAB

HE year 1984 was cataclysmic. Its defining moments — Operation Blue Star.

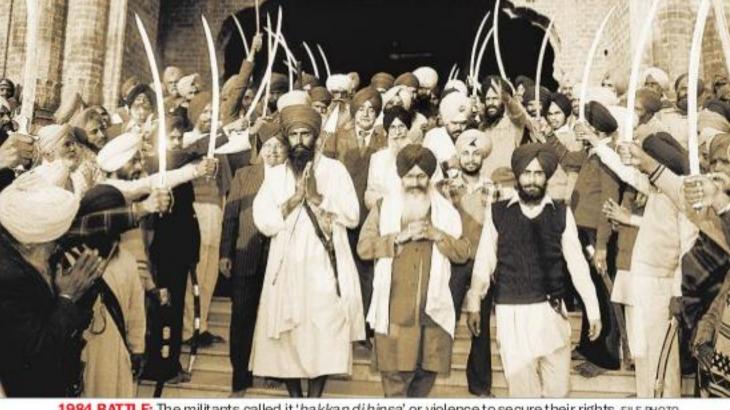
Operation Blue Star, assassination of the Prime Minister and the anti-Sikh pogrom — determined the internal discourse and history of the nation as probably no other year has since Independence.

The lapse of 40 years has not

helped to heal the hurt. The perceived non-delivery of justice to the victims and non-closure of the tragedy still haunt. A Truth and Reconciliation Commission to fix the responsibility of all concerned — the political elements, state actors, militants and killer mobs — would have lent finality and closure through a judicial process and reconciliation.

Was Blue Star avoidable? Then Central Government projected it as an imperative action to eliminate militancy. Armed militants had usurped the shrine, fortified it with weapons and challenged the legitimacy of the constitutionally established polity. Would there have been any need to mobilise the Army had there been no armed militants and fortifications in the temple—so runs the argument.

The perception of the devout, however, is different. Blue Star is viewed as a premeditated desecration of the holiest shrine with the political objective to polarise the nation to secure votes in the parliamentary elections that were a few months away. One has to only look at the election campaign for the eighth Lok Sabha to understand this. Advertisements underpinning polarisation, like "Will the country's border finally be moved to your doorstep" or one showing a Sikh taxi driver, with a poser to the readers —



1984 BATTLE: The militants called it 'hakkan di hinsa' or violence to secure their rights. FILE РНОТО

"Do you feel safe in the taxi?" dotted the election campaign.

Catastrophic happenings often obscure objectivity, particularly in matters of faith. In the case of Blue Star, however, by now, certain facts are well-established and undisputed. To recapitulate, the Shiromani Akali Dal had launched a morcha on August 4, 1982, in support of its 10 demands — a mix of religious, political, economic and interstate issues; it was daily courting peaceful arrests. Till June 1984, about 1,70,000 workers had courted arrests. There was hardly any village out of 12,000-odd in Punjab from where people had not contributed. The Akalis believed, in retrospect naively, that if they choked the jails with people, the Centre would be forced to concede their demands.

The nearly two years of the agitation were interspersed with 26 negotiation conclaves, some of these attended by the Prime Minister and Opposition leaders. At least on two occasions, an understanding was reached, but the Centre withdrew at the last minute. It seems that the government had made up its mind against a political settlement and a Cabinet sub-committee decided in May 1984 for a military solution. Pranab Mukherjee's note of caution was brushed aside by the

A Truth and
Reconciliation
Commission to fix the
responsibility of all
concerned would
have lent finality
and closure.

PM: "Pranab, I know of the consequences... The decision cannot be avoided."

The Chief of Army Staff was ordered by the PM on May 25 to march on to Amritsar, while a façade of negotiations was sustained by inviting Akali leaders for talks with a group of Union ministers on May 29. An understanding was arrived at, only to be retracted later by the Union ministers, saying "Madam does not agree."

Then Governor BD Pande was directed to requisition the Army and a formal order was issued by the Punjab Home Secretary on June 2. The troops carried out operations at the Golden Temple and 42 other gurdwaras. Pande had pleaded against the Army action and later confirmed that the PM "did not want a political settlement".

Jamail Singh Bhindranwale,

after the government backed out of two proposed meetings with him, including an aborted rendezvous with Rajiv Gandhi, cautioned his followers: "Keep having negotiations but also have your preparations complete." The preparations were for an armed struggle that ran parallel to the peaceful morcha of the Akali Dal.

The militants called it 'hakkan di hinsa' or violence to secure their rights. To them, violence and consequential police reprisal were also a type of dialogue with the State, though by other means. Since the militants lacked legitimacy, they fell back on what scholar Mark Juergensmeyer called "meta-morality that religion provides".

The violence accelerated. Pakistan stepped in to train and arm the militants. The State appeared ineffective, if not complacent. Weapons, including machine guns, now fortified the temple and if then Punjab Police chief Pritam Singh Bhinder is to be believed, "they (read weapons) were not intercepted because there were oral instructions 'from the top' until two months ago not to check any of the kar sewa trucks".

The troops surrounded the temple on the night of June 3. The Army made no attempt to negotiate with the militants to make them come out of the tem-

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

ple. Major Gen Shabeg Singh, who led the militants, was an instructor at the IMA when Maj Gen Brar, who commanded the Army troops, was a cadet — both knew each other well. Had they talked, probably a bloody tragedy may have been averted — but these are ifs of which history is made. The militants fought, as Lt Gen VK Nayar, who succeeded Gen K Sundarji as GOC, Western Command, wrote, "because they were given no option".

The intervening night of June 5 and 6 was horrific. The Akal Takht, the historical symbol of Sikh sovereignty and struggle against Mughal and Afghan tyranny, was in ruins. About 330 security personnel and around 780 civilians, including pilgrims who were in the temple to commemorate the martyrdom day of Guru Arjan Dev, died. Private property beyond the western end of the temple suffered collateral loss, with shells overshooting the intended target. About 160 shops and 15 houses were destroyed.

What was achieved? The troops liquidated a few hundred armed militants. However, it was a pyrrhic victory. Blue Star sowed the seeds for an ethno-national struggle, triggering greater violence. The nation was at war with itself, with soldeirs, some of them armed, abandoning barracks at many places. The militants were soon back in the temple and declared Khalistan in April 1986 from its precincts. Operations Black Thunder (1 and 2) had to be conducted.

The ill-planned and badly executed Blue Star, without politically addressing the Punjab problem, proved disastrous. The Rajiv-Longowal Accord could have shown the way forward, but it was never honoured.

Punjab suffered humongous losses. About 30,000 people died in a decade of violence. The state slipped from the number one position to below 15th among states on most of the socio-economic parameters. The ethno-national movement is dead, but it still resonates with a microscopic element abroad, raising concerns in India.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Reconciliation is a spiritual process. It has to happen in the hearts and minds of people. - Nelson Mandela

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# Introversion not an impediment

SUPREET SARAH GILL

"

ITH the abrupt announcement of the summer vacation due to soaring temperatures, most of the children's books were left behind in the class-rooms —much to their relief. Parents promptly received messages from class teachers, imploring them to collect their wards' books the following day.

As I entered the school, carrying my son's empty backpack, I could feel the oppressive heat — even at 8 am. My intent was to discreetly slip into the classroom, retrieve the books meticulously arranged by the co-educator and make a quiet exit without drawing attention. Being an introvert myself, I harboured the hope of avoiding the customary chatter among the mothers who stood in a tightly knit circle — akin to a huddle of players strategising before a match — deliberating over which summer camp would best mould their child into the next Virat Kohli or Arijit Singh. My son and I had no such ambitions. Our ideal vacation was one enveloped in the tranquillity of our home.

As I packed the books into the bag, the co-educator approached me with the fervour of a prosecuting attorney closing in on a vulnerable witness. My stomach churned when she told me: 'I hope you are aware that Class III has a play this year.' I said 'Yes, ma'am' like a student. She continued: 'Right, I hope he actually opens the script we are giving to each child because he barely opens his mouth in the class.' My mouth went dry, and words seemed to elude me despite my best efforts. All I could muster was: 'But he has been doing theatre for almost a year now.' She dismissed my statement nonchalantly, saying, 'Oh, but that is different, na.'

I pondered, is it really so? Aren't we discussing performing on a stage, an activity my son has eagerly anticipated for a year? Realising that any further discussion would be futile, I reluctantly concluded our exchange. To her, my son's introversion was an impediment, a problem to be rectified in a societal and educational structure obsessed with team culture, with teachers metaphorically poised to dispense 'Vitamin Ex(troversion)'.

Penalising a child for his or her authentic self can yield deleterious long-term effects. If children are chastised for their authenticity, they may soon cloak themselves in defence mechanisms such as arrogance, disobedience and potentially destructive addiction later in life.

Much has changed over the years, but not the losthsome and

Much has changed over the years, but not the loathsome and dreaded holidays' homework. The very term strikes me as a misnomer — how can one enjoy a holiday when burdened by the weight of work? As my son and I look forward to immersing ourselves in the enchanting world of Ruskin Bondas part of a school project, I find myself thinking of an assignment for teachers. Perhaps they, too, should embark on some holidays' homework. A befitting beginning would be to delve into Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking by Susan Cain.

#### Centre must engage with Punjab

Apropos of 'Heed the cry from Khadoor Sahib'; the author has brought home the point in the incisive article that even if Amritpal Singh, a secessionist, happens to win the Lok Sabha election from Khadoor Sahib, it should not be misconstrued as a victory of insurgency or secessionism. For, the 2.14 crore voters of Punjab have chosen moderation. The issues facing the state, such as the agrarian crisis and environmental hazards, are real. It is the Central Government's indifferent attitude toward the genuine demands of Punjabi voters that is to blame for the growing discontent in the state. It is telling that even though many farmers died during their year-long agitation against the three contentiousfarm laws, their demand of a legal guarantee for MSP remains unfulfilled.

ROSHAN LAL GOEL, LADWA

#### Ensure peace in border state

Refer to 'Heed the cry from Khadoor Sahib'; the article has rightly highlighted the growing support for independent candidate Amritpal Singh in the Khadoor Sahib constituency and the ongoing protests demanding the release of the 22 Sikh prisoners who have been in jail for decades. These are indicative of the massive discontent simmering in Punjab. The Centre must reassess its stance on the treatment of the Bandi Singhs and engage in meaningful dialogue with Punjab's farming community to address the agricultural crisis plaguing the state. The government must heed Punjab's call for justice and economic revival to ensure stability and lasting peace in the region.

CHANCHAL S MANN, UNA

#### The ball is in US voters' court

With reference to 'Trump's conviction'; Donald Trump has become the first US President to
be convicted of a felony. Throughout the trial,
the former President tried to dismiss the
process as a political witch hunt orchestrated by
the Joe Biden administration. The politicisation
of such high-profile cases can affect the public's
perception of the justice delivery system and
erode its faith in the judiciary. Just like Trump,
his supporters are blaming the Democrats for
using lawfare to target him. Though Trump has
played down his conviction by saying that the
real verdict — the one by the people — will be

delivered on November 5, it does not change the fact that a grand jury in New York has found him guilty of falsifying business records. Now, it is up to the American voters to decide if they want a convicted felon as their next President.

PL SINGH, BY MAIL

"

#### Trump in the dock

Apropos of the editorial 'Trump's conviction'; it is alarming that former US President Donald Trump has been found guilty on 34 counts of falsifying business records to cover up his sexual affair with porn star Stormy Daniels ahead of his ascent to the White House in 2016. It is a matter of shame for America and its citizens that the presumptive presidential candidate of the Republican party is a convicted felon. Contrary to what Trump has always believed, he has to face the consequences of his actions. He is rightly being held accountable for breaking the law.

#### Restore peace in the world

BHAGWAN THADANI, MUMBAI

Amid the unending wars in Ukraine and Gaza and India's protracted standoff with China, there is a universal yearning for an end to the unrest. US President Joe Biden must take charge and deftly negotiate a ceasefire and an eventual détente between the warring countries. There is fresh hope for peace in Gaza. Even Moscow, under a perhaps mellowed Putin, seems inclined to find an end to the conflict. If Donald Thump returns to power in the US — which will elect its next President this November — the world could be a safer place. As a leader, Trump can restore peace in the world.

R NARAYANAN, NAVI MUMBAI

#### Down with exit polls

Refer to the front-page news report '350 paar, Modi sarkar teesri baar: Exit polls'; a clutch of exit polls has predicted that PM Narendra Modi will secure a third consecutive term as the Prime Minister. However, there is a lack of clarity about how many seats which party or alliance will bag. These polls only serve to sow more confusion in the minds of the electorate. It is worth remembering that such predictions are off the mark a lot of times. Besides, exit polls only create more conflict among political parties and their supporters. Do we really need them?

M SOMASEKHAR PRASAD, HYDERABAD

Letters to the Editor, typed in double space, should not exceed the 200-word limit.

These should be cogently written and can be sent by e-mail to: Letters@tribunemail.com

# An election marked by intense heat & hate



ASHOK LAVASA FORMER ELECTION COMMISSIONER OF INDIA

O, it is all over. Or, just not as yet. The marathon is over; the march to the podium remains. The race has left everyone, including the spectators, tired.

There are three ways to express our exhaustion: a sense of triumph as we completeyet another gigantic democratic exercise involving 970 million electors with a decent voter turnout and women continuing to play a lead role; a sigh of relief that an unprecedented phase of torrid toxicity unleashed by those that ought to be role models is over; a sense of nervous anticipation on the part of the pretenders to the Treasury Benches of the new Parliament.

The question before the nation, however, is whether we can expect a more participative democracy where public interest issues are debated with positivity and without the obsession to knock the other side down. Will those elected treat matdaan as people's vote donated (daan) to them for which they owe nothing to the people in return or as an expression of

popular will (mat) accompanied by high expectations?

After the dust and din has settled, what is it that the past 12 weeks following the announcement of the Lok Sabha elections by the Election Commission of India (ECI) on March 16 will remind us of? Will we be left remembering Mark Antony's words: "The evil that men do lives after them; The good is oft interred with their bones"? Or, is there hope that the new dispensation will deal with the pressing problems the nation faces?

This election will go down as one of unmitigated heat and undisguised hate, both unprecedented. High temperatures and frayed tempers reminded one of Jawaharlal Nehru's words: "Elections were an essential and inseparable part of the democratic process... Yet, often enough, elections brought out the evil side of man... Was democracy to be a close preserve of those possessing thick skins and loud voices and accommodating consciences?"

That is a question that even the electoral process conscience keeper, the ECI, found too hot to handle. People, too, were bothered by the question: Was it necessary to endure so much heat (and hate) to exercise the right to vote?

However, what the ECI should seriously ponder over is whether it was possible to curtail the duration of this vital exercise. The delayed initial announcement, the seven



NECESSARY: A more participative democracy where issues of public interest are debated with positivity is the need of the hour. PTI

Ages of Man'), the long gaps between some phases, the helpless obsession with the Central police forces. No wonder, star campaigners ended up having throats, spokespersons making predictable pontifications, pollsters inventing ingenious phraseology to avoid making forecasts falling foul of the ECI but unable to resist the temptation, YouTubers running out of new bottles for old wines and the entire nation glued to a suspense thriller that might turn out to be disappointing because their 'primary suspect' didn't turn out to be 'the man'.

Shakespeare's 'The Seven

Then there were enough twists and turns. The electoral bond verdict before the elections declared the more than Rs 16,000 crore that went to the political parties' coffers as phases (almost as long as 'unconstitutional'. But that

Making political parties responsible for the conduct of their star campaigners and candidates should be formalised without diluting the

didn't prevent its use to woo voters for earning the mandate to govern the state. Talk of ends and means. Then came the EVM/VVPAT verdict, dashing the hopes of those who expected an outcome that could help allay their apprehensions of manipulation of the machines. The court also refused to step into ECI's domain in over elementary voter turnout data contained in Form 17C. Eventually, in a bathetic turn of events, the hitherto reluctant ECI divulged the data that it was accused of hiding with 'motiveless malignity'.

Many felt this was the most 'issueless' election, with no political party anchoring its campaign on a dominant issue. Instead, parties clutched to everystrawthat their tried-andtested themes of religion and reservation threw up. People wondered if party manifestos

were a formality overtaken by an increasingly vicious war of words. The rusted and blunted swords were out and though they couldn't kill, they were enough to cause infectious wounds. The din became louder and competitively more offensive. At times, even violating the Model Code of Conduct (MCC), no stone was left unturned in challenging the patience of the ECI, which found itself under pressure to show teeth. A cavity had already been created before the elections over the controversial law of appointment of the election commissioners. The abrupt departure of a serving election commissioner, leading to the hasty appointment of two election commissioners under a law challenged in vain in the SC sharpened the debate over the poll body's impartiality.

The SC cannot be expected to intervene in every move required to strengthen the citizens' trust in the ECI. The commission needs to do that itselfthrough a regular and sincere dialogue with the stakeholders, finding optimum solutions to allay their doubts instead of heightening their fears. The perceived alienation between the election body and civil society organisations is a sad development, especially if the ECI wants to remain in the forefront of leading the effort at electoral reforms.

One of the principal electoral reforms facing the new govemment is evolving a transparent mechanism for the funding of political parties and

announcement. It was a point-

ed signal to right wing govern-

ments, such as in Argentina,

the need to prescribe a limit on spending by political parties during elections. The ECI, on its part, must address the need to remodel the MCC, which nearly cracked during these elections. It is evident that the chief criterion for assessing the neutrality of the ECI is its willingness and ability to firmly enforce the MCC. Besides, the MCC needs an overhaul through a consultative process, with consequences of violations and operating procedures embedded and all complaints and their status posted on the website for full public disclosure. In addition, making political parties responsible for the conduct of their star campaigners and candidates should be formalised without diluting the accountability of the individuals. If political parties can be arraigned as accused in cases under the PMLA and companies prosecuted under the Companies Act, why can't the parties take responsibility for the utterances of their campaigners?

While the successful conduct of elections is another feather in the nation's cap, public discourse and conduct employed for winning votes is something that no right-minded Indian can be proud of. The political leadership must realise that "words are like arrows; once shot, they cannot be called back." Francis Bacon had warned: "It is not the lie that passeth through the mind, but the lie that sinketh in and settleth in it that doth the hurt."

Time to cleanse our thought.

More and more European

# Right-wing rhetoric undermining India's discourse on Palestine

accountability of the

individuals.



**KP NAYAR** STRATEGIC ANALYST

HE descent into indignity and divisiveness speeches and on virtual platforms witnessed during the long Lok Sabha election campaign has seeped into diplomacy as well. Here is an example of what I received from a retired Indian diplomat at the beginning of last month through an instant messaging service.

"Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has done humanity a favour by crushing Islamists and Jihadis. It serves Muslims right," he wrote. I later found out that he had sent the same message to several friends and acquaintances. Despite spewing religious venom, he was gracious to add that "one feels sorry for the collateral damage though." All compassion had not ebbed from his heart, maybe some residue of his diplomatic training and practice remains even in retirement. His message went on. "Can you imagine that a Muslim lady anchor (sic!) on BBC said on air to white people that 'if you don't like Muslims in Britain, then you can always

leave.' If Trump comes back (to the White House), he too would check these people in the United States."The anchor reference was to Bushra Shaikh, a British-Pakistani who first came into the limelight on BBC One's The Apprentice seven years ago.

Right-wing hate speech, combined with crass ignorance, is robbing India's policy discourse on the Israel-Palestine issue of logic, reason and, most of all, an accurate understanding. Contrary to what the former Indian diplomat wrote in hismessage, Netanyahu will be remembered by future generations of Palestinians as the singular Jew who facilitated the ultimate creation of a Palestinian state. A two-state solution in the fratricidal West Asia region, which appeared to be a fading dream for all Arabs even a year ago, has been made inevitable by Netanyahu's policies since the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7. It is a reasonable prediction that Netanyahu, although 74, may see in his lifetime two states on the land he considers indivisible. In spite of himself, or, to be more accurate, because of him. Ironically, such an assessment has been enhanced by, of all persons, Netanyahu's own Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich. Few Israelis can match Smotrich in their hatred of Palestinians. He was, however, recently forced to admit at a meeting of Jewish local councils on the West Bank that "the danger of a Palestinian state becoming a



INTRANSIGENT: A two-state solution has been made inevitable by Netanyahu's policies since the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7. REUTERS

More and more

reality is more tangible than it has been for years."

In recent weeks, several Indian pundits have expressed genuine surprise in print and electronic media that students in the US should have overwhelmingly worked themselves up against investments by their alma maters in companies with Israeli links and those which profit from the Netanyahu government's aggression against all Gazans. They cannot comprehend how or why Joe Biden's re-election as US President is now at risk because of anger among voters mit violence against West Bank Palestinians. Apologists in India for Netanyahu's policies - for anything he does - were shocked into disbelief by this executive order. On March 14, when the Biden administration imposed sanctions on two entire Israeli outposts on the West Bank, some Indian pundits went so far as to criticise the White House. It was as if India itself was being sanctioned by the US.

Largely unnoticed in India, but critically more important than US sanctions and visa bans against errant Jewish settlers on Palestinian land, has been a break by Biden from Trump's policy on such settlements. On February 23, Biden authorised his Secretary of State Antony Blinken to unequivocally assert that any new Jewish settlements are "inconsistent with international law". Blinken chose Buenos Aires to make the that the US was cancelling its blank cheque to the incumbent Israeli government, which it issued after the Hamas onslaught last year. In November 2019, Trump changed a long-standing US stand that Jewish settlements on Palestinian land captured by Tel Aviv's military during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war was inconsistent with international law On January 8, 2020, while the Trump administration was having its last gasps before a reluctant handover of the White House to the incoming President, the then US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, rubbished the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 and several United Nations Security Council resolutions relevant to this issue. These UN measures universally prohibited the settlement of another country's civilians in this case, Israel — on any land under occupation. Israel has placed nearly 4,40,000 of its Jewish citizens among Palestinians who live on the occupied West Bank. Biden's break with Trump's travesty of global norms and opinion was a long-awaited consequence of the policies of Netanyahu's extreme conservative government. The restored US stand is consistent with India's long-held position, which has not been altered by the Narendra

Modi government.

countries are extending diplomatic recognition to the Palestinian state. Slovenia is the latest. It did so on May 29, Prime Minister Robert Golob announced. The previous day, Spain, Ireland and Norway extended such recognition. Among the 27 members of the European Union, Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Sweden have diplomatic relations with the State of Palestine. Malta is considering such a step. There will be a diplomatic earthquake if the UK recognises Palestine after its July 4 elections. Australia has said it is considering diplomatic ties as well.

In 1974, India became the first non-Arab nation to recognise the Palestine Liberation Organisation as the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Yet, when reporters quizzed the Ministry of External Affairs last week on these developments, its spokesperson was hesitant about the history of Indian recognition. "India recognised Palestineway back in the 1980s," he vaguely said. There is no reason for such hesitancy about India's relations with Palestine. Modi is the first Indian Prime Minister to have visited Palestine. Ditto the President's visit to Palestine a vear after Modi came to power. India's relations with Israel ought not to be a zero-sum game.

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European countries in some of America's swing are extending states over Biden's all-out support for Israel in the ongoing diplomatic violence. On February 1, Biden, recognition to the seeking to balance such support, issued a presidential Palestinian state. order which brings within the scope of US punishments Slovenia is the latest. those Jewish settlers who com-

QUICK CROSSWORD

SU DO KU DOWN An interruption (5) 2 To desert (3,3,2) Australian city; wife of William Short comic verse; Irish county (8) 6 5 4 Long loose Japanese robe (6) Derisive remark (5) Italian port; sail for yachts (5) 10 Exceed acceptable limit (2,3,3) 11 Traitor (5) A moment (5) 6 9 7 Travel round edge of (5) 12 William Tell's weapon (3) 12 Ask earnestly (3) 16 Dog with curly coat (6) 5 6 17 Waterproof jacket with hood (6) 13 Method (3) 14 Genoese explorer; 18 Rope to secure tent (3) 23 Search (5) Ohio capital (8) 3 24 An uncontested win (8) 15 Disregard claims of (4,4) 19 Bumpy (6) 25 Too honourable to stoop to (5) 26 Alaskan mountain; US 20 Inundate (5) 8 21 Quench (5) president (8) 22 To matter (5) 27 Seize without right (5) 5 4 SATURDAY'S SOLUTION 9 8 Across: 1 Come across, 6 Brag, 10 Mecca, 11 Perturbed, 12 Trombone, 13 Guide, 15 Unkempt, 17 Terrier, 19 Erratic, 21 Sharpen, 22

Depth, 24 Sculptor, 27 Potential, 28 Neigh, 29 Rank, 30 On the cheap. Down: 1 Camp, 2 Muckraker, 3 Alarm, 4 Rapport, 5 Serpent, 7 Rabbi,

8 God-fearing, 9 Bulgaria, 14 Super-duper, 16 Matching, 18 Improvise, 20 Cushion, 21 Squelch, 23 Put on, 25 Panic, 26 Chip.

FORECAST MONDAY SATURDAY'S SOLUTION 4 5 7 6 8 1 9 3 CITY MAX 1 9 3 4 2 5 Chandigarh 3 2 4 5 7 8 6 45 New Delhi 9 4 7 6 8 1 2 3 Amritsar 45 2 3 8 1 5 7 9 1 5 2 9 6 3 4 Bathinda 46 5 4 8 3 7 2 Jalandhar 46 2 8 6 1 4 9 5 7 Ludhiana 45 6 1 7 9 5 2 3 4 8 Bhiwani 45 CALENDAR 46 Hisar Sirsa 45 JUNE 3, 2024, MONDAY Dharamsala 34 Shaka Samvat Manali 24 Jyeshtha Shaka Shimla 21 Jyeshtha Parvishte Srinagar 30 1445 44 Jammu Krish na Paksh aTithi 12, up to 12.19 am Kargil 29 Saubhagya Yoga up to 9.11 pm 17 Leh Ashwin Nakshatra up to 12.05 am 42 Dehradun Moon in Aries sign 31 Mussoorie

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#### **OUR VIEW**



# Indian economy: We still have a long way ahead

Economic growth of 8.2% in 2023-24 commands attention and gives the new government a strong wicket to start on. Lifting GDP per head is the real aim and it will be a long haul

here is only one word that does justice to the gross domestic product (GDP) estimates released by the National Statistical Office (NSO) on 31 May 2024: Incredible. At 8.2%, GDP growth for 2023-24 is streets ahead of the most optimistic estimates put out by brokerages and much ahead of the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) estimate of 7% till as late as December 2023. It is possible, of course, that the numbers will undergo some revision in the months to come. It is also almost certain that some of this increase in our economic output is explained by how we compute the GDP deflator (used to get the real numbers from nominal) and on account of how net taxes behaved during the year (GDP is GVA or gross value added plus taxes less subsidies). But regardless of how you dice the numbers, how many caveats you add, there's no getting away from the fact that the India growth story is real. Better still, it seems to be both broad-based—other than agriculture, where growth still lags, all other sectors have done well—and here to stay.

Statistically speaking, after taking into account the GDP growth in the first three quarters of 2023-24 (8.2%, 8.1% and 8.4% respectively), the NSO's second advance estimate of 7.6% GDP growth for the year had implied a 5.7% GDP expansion in the January-March quarter. What we got, however, was a stunning 7.8%, taking the annual figure to a neck-turning 8.2%. Internationally, there is growing optimism that India is on the cusp of a long-awaited economic take-off, as evidenced by the recent revision in our sovereign-credit outlook from 'stable' to 'positive' by S&P Global Ratings, even if the actual

credit rating remains barely investment grade (for now). While revising India's GDP growth upwards by close to 2 percentage points for 2023-24, the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) April 2024 *World Economic Outlook* alludes to the robustness of growth expected in 2024 and 2025 as "reflecting continuing strength in domestic demand and a rising working-age population."

It may be tempting to conclude from all this that India has reached what development economist W.W. Rostow called the 'take-off' stage. And to fondly imagine that from here, it is only a "hop, skip and jump away" to the next two stages: the "drive to maturity" stage and the developed one of a "high mass consumption" economy. Unfortunately, this remains wishful thinking. We have a long way to go. For all the pride we can justifiably take in India having become the world's fifth largest economy (and IMF projections of becoming the fourth biggest by 2025 and third by 2027) the reality is that when it comes to per capita income, we are close to the bottom of the global league tables, at No. 144. Yes, this is an improvement from our rank of No. 153 in 2018, but it is nowhere near good enough if we are to lift our people out of poverty and give them a decent quality of life. It is a sobering thought that in per capita terms, it is only by 2029 that India is forecast to overtake countries like Uzbekistan, Papua New Guinea and Angola. Clearly, the new government that will take office in a few days has its task cut out for it. As we await the results of elections to the 18th Lok Sabha, due on Tuesday, there's no mistaking the size of the challenge before us. But the good news is that we start on a strong wicket.

#### MY VIEW | THE INTERSECTION

# The world must take up China's proposal of a no-first-use treaty

It is better than the nuclear status quo, not too painful and a move in the desired direction overall



NITIN PAI
is co-founder and director of The
Takshashila Institution, an independent
centre for research and education in public
policy.

he world is too distracted with ongoing wars and high-stakes election campaigns to pay attention to a remarkable proposal from China. At the United Nations Conference on Disarmament held in Geneva this February, one of Beijing's senior officials dealing with nuclear weapons policy declared that "nuclear-weapon states should negotiate and conclude a treaty on no-first-use of nuclear weapons against each other or make a political statement in this regard."

There had been some indications towards the end of 2023 that China was planning to engage the United States in a new phase of discussions on nuclear security, but the proposal in Geneva is as breathtaking as it is promising. The world—and India — must approach it constructively.

Now, it is easy to be sceptical about China's intentions. Although China has always maintained a no-first-use doctrine—Mao Zedong believed atomic weapons were paper tigers—it has used a 'cat's paw' technique of letting its proxies hold out nuclear threats against its strategic adversaries. So Pakistan's posture checks India as North Korea's does the United States and its allies. The cat won't strike first, but its paws might. Also, the expansion of China's nuclear arsenal and the deployments of its delivery mechanisms are arguably not consistent with a no-first-use doctrine.

Yet, nuclear strategy is nothing if not paradoxical, so the hugely consequential facts that China employs proxies and is beefing up its arsenal shouldn't be reasons to dismiss Beijing's proposals out of hand. A global no-first-use arrangement makes more sense than any other arms control framework extant or proposed.

The nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT) system is a failure and its perpet uation is only of interest to the five countries that use it to claim they are 'legitimate' nuclear powers. Universal nuclear disarmament seems like a great idea, but some theorists believe it makes for a more unstable world. Whatever the case, it is unrealistic to expect states to give up currencies of power and prestige, not least when the world order has crumbled and big powers are brazenly flouting international law. In this context, global no-first-use is attractive because it's a way station: It is better than the status quo, not too painful, and a move in the right direction overall.

There is a new urgency for the world to pin down nuclear risks. In my previous column, I argued that "in the face of the climate crisis, war is no longer only a moral crime against humanity. It is a material one against the survival of the species." A nuclear exchange might literally tip the planet into a different climate regime.

Our conception of what is 'mutually assured destruction' (MAD) no longer needs hundreds of nuclear missiles directly incinerating hundreds of millions of people. Even a limited nuclear exchange will suffice, not only killing millions of people, but throwing a megatonne of carbon into the atmosphere. A 2009 estimate by Stanford's Mark Z. Jacobson found that a small exchange would cause over 690 million tonnes of carbon dioxide emission, higher than the UK's annual total at that time.

China's proposal must be taken more seriously. In the United States, the Joe

Biden administration seems inclined to carry forward the conversation, but it's unlikely Washington will move before the presidential election scheduled on 5 November. Britain will probably follow the US lead. Russia, which has strengthened its ties with China, seems to be getting behind the Chinese proposal. It remains to be seen how France will respond. But the matter is too serious to be left to the self-serving NPT clique alone. A broader coalition of powers, many which are part of the G20 but also some that are not, needs to be brought together to create sustained pressure towards this end.

A global no-first-use regime is in India's interest and New Delhi should support the idea. Unfortunately, Beijing's dogmas are getting in the way. As much as China would like India's support—especially against the United States—Beijing holds that India is not a nuclear power and is thus loath to engage New Delhi in international discussions. Yet, India's involvement is necessary for any global no-first-use treaty to be feasible. If China invites Indian participation in global no-first-use talks, then the world will know that Beijing's proposal is genuine.

A wise leadership in Beijing will recognize that India and China have common interests on this issue. The onus should be placed on China to bring North Korea and Pakistan into the arrangement.

A global no-first-use declaration or even a treaty is merely the first step. A lot of details have to be worked out. Cheating, defection and enforcement are serious problems that do not yet have clever theoretical solutions. But a world with a self-declared no-first-use policy is arguably better than the *status quo*. Given the existential stakes, that's good enough a reason to take it up seriously. There is a Chinese saying that a journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step. Actually, it begins with the determination to take that first step.

#### 10 PCARS AGO



#### JUST A THOUGHT

A nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought. The only value in ... possessing nuclear weapons is to make sure they will never be used. But then would it not be better to do away with them entirely?

RONALD REAGAN

MY VIEW | MODERN TIMES

# Counsel of one: Why taking decisions is a lonely process

MANU JOSEPH



is a journalist, novelist, and the creator of the Netflix series, 'Decoupled'

ne way to irritate writers is to ask them what they are working on next. But somehow I heard myself ask this in an airport lounge when I bumped into a British historian, even though I liked him. He looked pained, but that was only because he wanted to answer the question earnestly, and it had evoked a private misery. He was torn between some options and was undecided between a book, podcast or documentary. He had to pick one because only amateurs do too many things at once. A professional has to bet on the best path. Every decision he makes would cost him months, even years, at the expense of other pursuits Then he said something intriguing. He said he couldn't decide and there was nobody he could turn to. "Nobody can help you," he said. He pointed to his wife who was sitting right next to him. Even she won't be able to help, he said. She can only listen, take in the facts, but the decision has to be his, and he had been in its throes for weeks. She, as is often the case with wives, was not surprised. She had heard it before and probably agreed.

This is a pleasant successful man with his own tribe of peers who care for him, friends and a loving home. Yet, he is alone when he has to make crucial decisions. That is the nature of decisions.

This is true not only of major decisions. Actually, major decisions have disproportionate grandeur because they are 'major.' Most people have to make a major decision very few times in their lives, if ever. I, for instance, have never had to make a 'major' decision. I have been seriously wrong about one or two important things, but I did not get there by deciding. I got there by being certain. I suspect that when people look back at their lives, some of the decisions they once considered 'major' may not be major at all. Life is filled with a series of small decisions, some of which can have an outsized impact.

When I set out to write a novel, it was *not* after a major decision. It was a mere inevitability. But once I began, the first shock was how many decisions I had to make. Should the narration be in first person, what should be the voice, should the lead character do this or that, should bad things happen to the main character, should it all be happy and well? All minor decisions, by the standards of decisions, but some of them turned out to

be crucial, not only to a page, or the tone, or the novel, but to my life.

Eventually, opinions on the manuscript came from a friend, agents and professional editors, all voices that attempt to influence a decision. Even considering the quality and intelligence of those opinions and advice, I

feel that the actual decision-making process was almost entirely lonely. You may say that writing is a lonely profession anyway and it is not surprising that such decisions do not involve the company of others. But I see that this is true in all professions, including managerial situations. There appears to be a swarm of advisors, but they are peripheral to the actual decision taken. In the end, decisions are

made alone.

Gregarious people, or normal people who have a circle of friends and family, may find this confusing. They have a community and accept that some people are very important to them. So it appears logical to seek the advice of those who matter to them when

they must make decisions. But it never helps. An odd thing about human relations is that odd combinations are forced upon them. For instance, parents are expected to be coaches and a person we love is expected to get naked with us. Far more absurd is that people who are close to us must be able to make decisions for us.

But people cannot help. Other people This is chiefly because we do not share complete cannot help; information with anyone. We never say entirely what chiefly because we want, what we need the we don't share most and the hierarchy of values we secretly hold. complete Yet, most people allow others to make decisions for information them. It is an act of love, even an obligation of love. with anyone

In 2011, Australian cricketer Greg Chappell released his memoirs,

Fierce Focus, which included an account of

his disastrous stint as India's coach. In the book, Chappell presents his view of Sourav Ganguly, the Indian captain at the time: "His problem was common in India, where the cultural upbringing of such young stars had it that parents, teachers, coaches and other

mentors, managers and even sponsors, would make their decisions for them."

It is not as though experts can alter the solitary nature of decision-making. But a whole industry of experts has risen to influence decisions. The most harmful thing about a successful person is that he begins to emit advice. Stripped of all the frills, the advice industry has one common theme: a person saying, 'Why can't you be like me?' Experts advise on decision-making itself. Now and then, a new material arrives in the advice podcast market on how to be a good manager by making "swift decisions," and I begin to see some people around me suddenly not spending too much time deciding which hotel to book or which airline to take. Other weeks, I see people taking their time, and explaining that being indecisive is smart. I then know that new material has come in that celebrates indecision.

Most people are not trained to be alone physically, therefore they are not trained to be alone mentally. I do feel that almost everyone has a conversation with the self, but very few know how to argue with themselves. And the only way to make decisions is to argue with oneself and be acutely aware of all the forces influencing us, especially the shameful and petty ones.



MY VIEW | GENERAL DISEQUILIBRIUM

# Vaghul: The deskless banker who deepened India's money market

The late banker's vision not only gave the market stability but also provided an alternate management exemplar for PSUs



is a senior journalist and author of the recently released book 'Slip, Stitch and Stumble: The Untold Story of India's Financial Sector Reforms'

egends abound about barefoot doctors or alfresco teachers. Here is a story about a deskless banker and his contribution to India's financial system.

Sample this. In this sweltering summer of shrivelled aspirations and forgotten civility, bankers have relied on a humble instrument called the certificate of deposit (CD) in their struggle to reduce the gap between rising credit demand and sluggish deposit growth. But beyond acknowledging the CD's quotidian utility, which is helping banks raise money from markets and sustain credit growth, bankers should also thank a former banker who recently migrated to the great beyond.

A larger universe comprising corporates, finance companies, housing finance companies or financial institutions has been relying on commercial paper (CP) issuances to raise funds for meeting short-term mismatches between income and expenditure.

The popularity of CPs can be gauged from the amount raised in just the one month to 15 May 2024: ₹1.13 trillion; the coupons ranged from 6.89% to 11.96%, the interest rate determined by the issuer's credit rating and the CP maturity profile, apart from the market's liquidity position. In fact, Reserve Bank of India (RBI) data shows even limited liability partnership firms (such as audit or management consulting firms) have been relying on CPs. Both CP issuers and investors should be thanking this banker.

On a much larger scale, appreciation is also due from the Government of India—specifically, from the finance ministry—for providing a critical instrument to tide over temporary mismatches between receipts and expenditure: the 182-day treasury bill. The government's net borrowings through this instrument in 2021-22 and 2022-23 amounted to ₹712.52 billion and ₹524.26 billion,

The late banker is Narayanan Vaghul, who died on 18 May. He was chairman of the development finance institution Industrial Credit and Investment Corporation of India, which later morphed into ICICI Bank.

The Indian money market owes a debt of gratitude to Vaghul for the depth and stability he has imparted to it. As chairman of a working group on the money market, Vaghul in 1987 had advocated the adoption of various short-term money market instruments like CPs, CDs and 182-day T-bills; this was in addition to recommending the use of bill discounting to replace the antiquated system of receivables financing or suggesting the establishment of a discount house, precursor to today's primary dealers.

The money market was often wracked in the past by wild swings in interest rates due to specula-



tion, lack of depth and paucity of instruments. This routinely upset RBI's monetary management, the noise of market volatility distorting interest rate messages. Cometh the crisis, cometh the banker: RBI accepted the Vaghul committee's recommendations, which helped steady the ship over time.

Vaghul's demise has occasioned a groundswell of tributes. Most of these are factual and sincere, but miss the central point about Vaghul's enduring exertions: to raze barriers and reduce systemic inflexibilities. For example, it is said (and rightly so that he was an institution builder, laying the foundations for the country's first rating agency way back in the 1980s; but he was equally adept in shutting down institutions that were past their utility or sell-by date. For example, he had no hesitation in merging Shipping Credit and Investment Corporation of India (originally set up in the 1980s to finance shipping and ancillary businesses) back into ICICI in 1996-97.

It has also been mentioned that he converted ICICI into a talent powerhouse, imbuing the institution with a gender-neutral hiring policy. What is also true is the fact that he was able to attract topclass talent and retain it by imparting flexibility to the institution's structures. Remember, ICICI was perhaps the only public sector financial institution (considered a deemed government company by virtue of government-owned insurance companies and banks being its majority shareholders) which had been recruiting regularly on IIM campuses.

K.V. Kamath and Kishore Chaukar, for example, were recruited in the early 1970s. Competition for talent had started intensifying by the time Vaghul joined in 1985, forcing him to adopt fluid structures and hierarchies.

VIEWS

The paradigm needed a visual endorsement and the ubiquitous office desk became the sacrificial lamb. Visitors to the ICICI chairman's office were surprised to find no desk and Vaghul seated on a sofa. The only reminders of officialdom were a monitor and a keyboard attached to the wall with a swivel arm which could be pulled up when needed and stowed away in the company of visitors.

When asked by this columnist many years ago about the utility of such an arrangement, Vaghul had explained that while his primary job was listening to clients and solving their problems, a desk added unnecessary distance and impeded a relaxed, candid exchange of views.

There were other ways in which he sought to gently demolish artificial walls and dogmas. Many years ago, in a late evening closed-door lecture to Kolkata members of a leading industry lobby, Vaghul provided a riveting 90-minute lecture on spirituality. A central theme of the talk was decoupling spirituality and religiosity, especially the latter's misleading emphasis on synthetic morality and purity. At the end of the session, Vaghul even quipped, with a twinkle in his eyes: I can now have a glass of whisky and yet retain my spirituality.

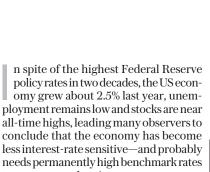
#### MINT CURATOR

## High US interest rates forever: Do not count on this scenario

The argument that the 'neutral rate' has shifted up isn't convincing



is a columnist focused on US markets and economics



to prevent overheating.  $Consider \, the \, shift \, in \, attitudes \, in \, recent$ months. For the better part of a decade,  $market\,economists\,generally\,believed\,that$ the longer-run 'neutral' Fed policy rateconsistent with low inflation and sustainable growth—was around 2.5%, and that remained the case even after inflation surged in 2021 and 2022. Once inflation had been beaten, economists assumed that policy rates would eventually 'normalize' around that 2.5% level. But in 2023, something snapped and economists' median views started to drift up.

As of the latest survey of primary dealers conducted by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, the median respondent now sees rates settling at around 3%—a tectonic shift in central bank forecasting. In options markets, traders are wagering on rates staying at around 4% into at least 2026. Market participants don't just think rates will stay at their current extremes for longer than previously anticipated; they now also believe that rates may have to stay moderately high forever—a shift that implies far-reaching consequences for housing affordability, corporate finance and the national debt.

But with all the moving parts in the economy today, can economists really know how interest rates will shake out that far in the future? I'd argue that many of these projections miss the particular and fast-changing circumstances of the current moment. Any explanation of the muted impact of rate hikes has to start with longer-term Treasuries. The 10-year Treasury yield is what drives the most important consumer and corporate borrowing costs, not the fed funds rate, and it hasn't tightened nearly as much as the latter—a historical rarity. From March 2022 to July 2023, the Fed raised policy rates by 525 basis points, but 10-year yields increased just 172 basis points. Even counting from the lows in 2020 to the highs in 2023, the 10-year only covered 448 basis points of territory. For most of the hiking cycle, investors and traders have been looking six months ahead to expected rate cuts that never seemed to materialize.

At first, those expectations were driven by recession forecasts, and, later, by the



The US Federal Reserve's rate policy has been the subject of many debates

belief in an imminent soft landing. But policy rates and 10-year yields are unlikely to remain inverted forevermore.

On the contrary, if inflation abates painlessly and the Fed cuts rates, you'd expect -all else equal—the yield curve to normalize and 10-year yields to fall less than the policy rate. Just as longer-run yields have been less restrictive than expected during the tightening, they could be slightly more restrictive than you might expect during the easing. We have no reason to conclude that the transmission mechanism has broken down; the timing may simply have changed.

The second key issue is the 'lock-in effect.' During the pandemic, consumers and businesses alike locked in ultra-low fixed-rate borrowing costs, effectively shielding themselves from higher rates. Fixed-rate borrowing has long been a feature of the US economy, but the past four years were different because of the breakneck speed at which the economy shifted gears from a fast and deep recession in 2020 to an inflationary expansion in 2021. The effect won't last forever. Already, businesses are rolling over debt at higher rates, and the effective mortgage rate on outstanding residential loans is creeping

The slow process by which that's happening may well be a reason for US policymakers to hold rates at the current level for a while, but this dynamic isn't permanent and is unlikely to repeat itself in future tightening cycles.

That's why I'm not on board with the near-universal adoption of the 'higher rates forever' thesis. As of the latest primary dealer survey, even the bottom 25% of the economist distribution now see the longer-run neutral policy rate drifting up to 2.75%. In the SOFR options market, current pricing implies just about a 30% probability of the Secured Overnight Financing Rate getting back to around 3% or lower by 2026. Given what we know today, those odds strike me as a bit off balance.

We've just gone through an extraordinarily unique period in world history, and the economy is behaving in bizarre ways-but probably just for the time being. It's always worth treading carefully when folks tell you that the world has fundamentally changed forever.

**GUEST VIEW** 

# STEM to STEAM: Fix gender biases at the school level

#### VINITA SHARAT & MANJIMA CHATTERJEE



STEAM and vice principal of Shiv Nadar School

n his poem, The Mushroom Hunters, Neil Gaiman posits women as progenitors of science. He refers to rules of gendered division of labour in the pre-agricultural world, whereby men were expected to hunt while women foraged. Consequently, men focused on growing stronger, being better fighters, developing their quick-thinking and risk-taking abilities, while women, "who did not need to run down prey,/had brains that spotted landmarks and made paths between them/... Observe everything." Even after agriculture began, in pagan religions women were the "wise ones": those who observed and experimented, developed medicine, spliced grasses to grow edible cereals and found the best materials to work with. They were the mothers who built the social institutions that would enable their societies. Yet, in the modern world, with the greatest career development opportunities and specialization of roles in history so far, less than 30% of people in science and technology are women.

Gender and STEM: Many attempts have been made to explain why men and women tend to go for different fields of learning. One of the more recent theories is that male and female brains are differently oriented. with women being more 'right-brained' (tending to be more emotionally expressive, dreamy, artistically and creatively oriented), and men being more 'left-brained' (logical better at sequencing and math skills, philosophical ideas and factually strong). This has been widely debunked. The human brain is generally asymmetrical, and while there are gender-based asymmetries, research shows that no single half is stronger in any gender. Exciting learning explorations make both halves of all brains light up, irrespective of gender. To say that STEM (for Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) is for men only because of the demands of scientific rigour, is to align oneself with poorly aged Enlightenment Philosophy, which divided human beings into parts, rather than seeing them as indivisible wholes. This understanding has helped rename STEM as STEAM, with 'A' for arts.

Women in the STEAM space: There is a common perception that STEM subjects are more challenging than humanities, and that girls should opt for 'easier' subjects. This bias arises not only from an erroneous understanding of the way that male and female brains work, but also from cultural patterns of expected behaviour and lifestyle, which are mostly gendered. Women are meant to manage kitchens and raise babies, so why these four fields, the one The inclusion

with the least female participation is engineering, which is often seen as too 'technical' for women.

However, where circumstances haven't hindered them, women have performed equally or even surpassed their male counterparts. Women such as Lady Ada Lovelace, Hedy Lamarr, and Zaha Hadid are examples of women who have excelled in the fields of engineering and architecture. In India, the women behind

Mission Mangalyaan have made history.

The importance of inspiration: Providing parents with accurate information about the  $importance \ and \ benefits \ of \ STEM \ education$ for their daughters can dispel misconceptions and biases. Our school, for example,

seeks to build excitement for STEAM projects and encourage female students to take the lead on these. Project Urja, an interschool collaborative clean energy drive, was led by a female student of Grade II. Also, a group of five female students developed a put their efforts into the rigours of STEM? Of | Capstone project called Pawsitivity, aimed at

of all genders

in every field

of academia is

important for

us to empower

women

creating affordable and comfortable prosthetic paws and limbs for dogs.

In arts, too, the general belief is that women are suited for dance and music and 'informal 'arts, The serious work in visual and performance arts is the domain of men, since these spring from the realm of ideas and not emotions. Here, too, school level interventions are important. Right at their earliest

introduction to the world, young learners need to understand that people of all genders may be equally suited or unsuited to be artists. It is important for an arts programme to focus on enabling stu-

dents to see take a gender-neutral view. One approach is for a school to encourage teachers to conduct research in the classroom and challenge stereotypes in the process. Women teachers should seek to have their work published in prestigious journals and secure grants for their fieldwork. Similarly, arts teachers should be feted as artists in their own right. They need to be seen as role models by students.

Scientists: We now know that by giving creativity its due place, the journey of exploration becomes smoother and often leads better findings. Putting the 'A' of arts into a STEM project can effectively enhance the creativity of learners, helping them think radically about possibilities. A prime example of this is the work of Leonardo da Vinci, which shows a clear amalgamation of science, art and engineering. In the present era, renowned laboratories such as CERN and Fermilab emphasize the inclusion of art.

We conclude with another few lines from Gaiman's The Mushroom Hunters:

And science, you remember, is the study of the nature and behaviour of the universe, based on observation, experiment, and measurement, and the formulation of laws to describe these facts.

The race continues. An early scientist drew beasts upon the walls of caves to show her children, now all fat on mushrooms and on berries, what would be safe to hunt.

# TG formation day fete: KCR's abstention cuts no ice

TELANGANA completed 10 ■ years of its formation and has entered the 11th year. Since this also happens to be an election year, the aspirations and expectations of the people have further risen. While it took the people seven years to evaluate the performance of the previous government led by BRS and opt for the Congress party to try them for the next five years, the present government has been put on test from day one.

The present regime needs to give up the old Congress culture and be hyper active in implementing all the promises they made or else sooner than later they would find themselves in soup. Once, the Lok Sabha poll results would be announced, the honeymoon period for the government would end and the time for governance would begin.

The Chief Minister apparently understands this and also knows the hurdles he has ahead of him and thus in his public address on the occasion of formation day he announced his road map, explaining how he proposes to take the state forward. He also showed magnanimity in recognising the role of not only the martyrs but all those three women - Sonia Gandhi who took the decision to divide Andhra Pradesh; Lok Sabha speaker Meira Kumar and "Chinamma," the then leader of opposition Sushma Swaraj of BJP - who made the formation of the state a reality.

But it was disappointing to see that the leader of opposition K Chandrashekar Rao and his party decided to boycott the formation day celebrations. It would have been a magnanimous move if he had accepted the invitation of the state government that was specially extended to him and participated in the celebrations. If he had felt that there were some shortcomings or mistakes committed by the government, he should have taken the opportunity to take on the Chief Minister in the Assembly when it would soon be meeting for a full-fledged budget session to be held soon.

KCR is no ordinary leader. Whether one likes it or not, it was he who had ignited the second struggle for a separate state and continued it in a democratic manner till the goal was achieved. He

has been successful in creating and leading a massive agitation for separate state. I remember the day when he quit the assembly and was contemplating to announce the formation of Telangana Rashtra Samiti. In his very first interview to me at his residence, he said unlike the 1969 agitation this would be peaceful and would be held in a democratic manner. At that point of time, it was difficult to believe what he said. Nevertheless, he proved what he was right.

This being the background, it was disappointing to see that he decided not to participate in the formation day celebrations. He may have his own reservations regarding the government policies and the "Congress tendencies and

its poverty of sentiments," but all that could have been used as ammunition in the Assembly and the message to the people would have gone in a much effective manner. By writing a long letter explaining why he was boycotting the celebrations, he has sent a wrong impression that the BRS was unable to digest its defeat in the elections. The formation day issue should have been kept above politics.

KCR should have known that during the Republic Day and Independence Day celebrations that the opposition party leaders and former Prime Ministers, too, participate even though they do not agree with the policies of the ruling party. BRS has lost a good chance of taking on the government.

# LETTERS

## Exit polls don't excite, accuracy doubtful

↑ LL exit polls have voted for NDA to come to power At Centre. INDIA bloc hopes to gather a total of 295 seats on the basis of their state wise-assessment, taking inputs from all the leaders present at the meeting held by it in New Delhi on June 1. This bloc says this is people's survey on the strength of information given by people. It termed the exit polls as government surveys. In Telangana LS polls, BJP may get around 8 seats and rest goes into the account of Congress. Andhra Pradesh position is puzzling the public to a great extent. Most surveys are swaying towards BJP-TDP-JSP alliance while some winds are blowing towards YSRCP camp also. There were occasions that exit poll surveys resulted in fiasco.

N Ramalakshmi, Secunderabad

A LMOST all surveys have predicted NDA will form the government for third time. Whereas social media has shown that India bloc is going to win with huge margin. But in reality, the exit polls are farce and the exit polls have been used by ruling party to create a wave and hype. Henceforth, the credibility of exit polls has always been questioned. The exit polls predictions should never be blindly trusted as there is always the space for potential errors. Persons like Prashant Kishor are saying that he has not seen any negativity against Narendra Modi, but it seems the ground realities are different. Voters are definitely against BJP government and it is the silent voter in our country that can upset the median numbers coming out in these exit polls.

Zakir Hussain, Kazipet

THE exit polls have stopped eliciting any excitement been flooded with umpteen reports of poll outcome predictions, which are contradictory from one another. The only thing most of them agreed on is the return of BJP to power at the centre for the third consecutive time. The predictions about numbers and vote sharing by each party are varied significantly from one research group to other. Anyway they prepared people to eagerly wait for counting day. Dr DVG Sankara Rao, Vizianagaram

THE three party alliance (of NDA) used all avenues in-L cluding the EC to circumvent the process of free and fair polling in AP. The lead party, TDP, conducted special camps in Telangana and other states for the enrolment of voters for voting in AP. The entire State govt machinery was "managed" to work for the alliance. The EC acted upon each and every "complaint" of the alliance partners while ignoring those of the ruling YSRCP. All the events preceding the polling day point to this very clearly. The polling day and the post poll events simply confirmed that the alliance used the system to the hilt in order to defeat the ruling YSRCP. Prashant Kishor, a political strategist, also played a key role in spreading anti-Jagan news/views through all kinds of media including word of mouth. The high percentage of polling could mean a positive vote for the ruling party or the mechanations of the alliance succeeded paving way for the latter to stage a comeback to power through dubious means.

Govardhana Myneedu, Vijayawada

TF the NDA alliance registers a hat-trick, thanks to the ■ mesmerising 'Modi Mantra', the new government will effect many far-reaching changes not only in the Centre-State relationships, but also in the socio and economic relationships among the different sections of our society. They may even give a new form, force, mark, and meaning to the 'Three Pillars' of our Constitutional set-up. It doesn't mean that the Modi government will do all these in a haphazard and hurried manner overnight. On the other hand, if the I-N-D-I-A bloc realise their pipedream of forming the government, they have many populist plans and sensitive schemes up their sleeves. The first thing they would love to do is to undo all that the Modi government has done so far.

Nearer home in Telangana, the Congress Government will do in the above said period all that is possible to bury the BRS by clamping a host of serious cases on KCR, KTR and Harish Rao. This is also a defining period of time for all the politicians in AP as well. If Jagan scrapes through for a second term, it will be almost the end of the road for Babu politically. Pawan too has to face really tough times. But if the NDA alliance forms the government with Babu and Pawan as the CM and the Dy CM respectively, Jagan has to do his time coolly in the cooler for long years.

M Somasekhar Prasad, Hyderabad

thehansreader@gmail.com

# PM: New Sankalps from the Sadhana in Kanniyakumari

# Bharat's welfare benefits our planet's journey to progress as well

Narendra Modi

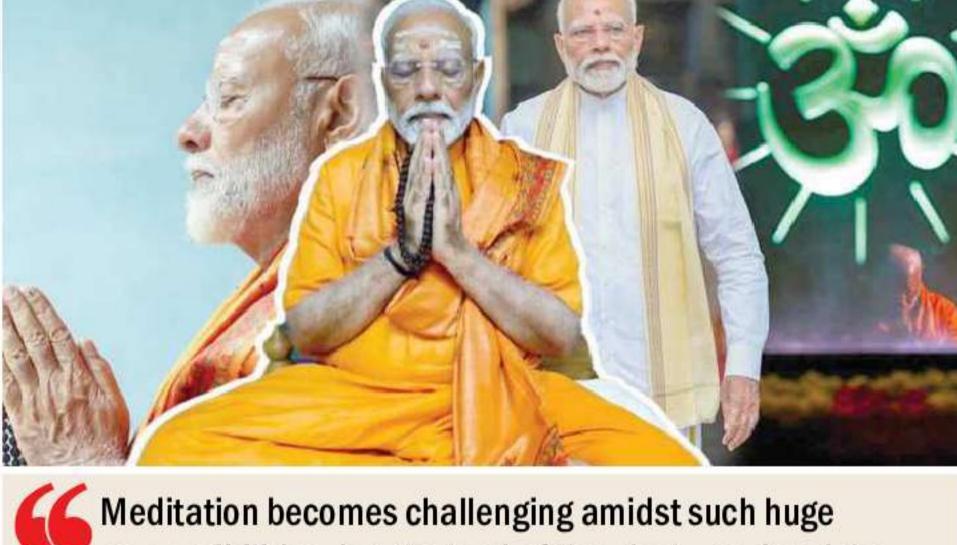
Y fellow Indians, The biggest festival of democracy, the 2024 Lok Sabha Elections, are concluding today in our nation, the Mother of Democracy. After a threeday spiritual journey in Kanniyakumari, I have just boarded the plane for Delhi. Through the day, Kashi and numerous other seats have been in the midst of voting.

My mind is filled with so many experiences and emotions... I feel a boundless flow of energy within myself. The 2024 Lok Sabha elections are the first in the Amrit Kaal. I began my campaign a few months ago from Meerut, the land of the First War of Independence of 1857. Since then, I have traversed across the length and breadth of our great nation. The final rally of these elections took me to Hoshiarpur in Punjab, the land of the great Gurus and a land associated with Sant Ravidas Ji. After that, I came to Kanniyakumari, at the feet of Maa Bharti.

It is natural that the fervour of the elections was echoing in my heart and mind. The multitude of faces seen in rallies and road shows came in front of my eyes. The blessings from our Nari Shakti...the trust, the affection, all of this was a very humbling experience. My eyes were getting moist... I entered into a 'sadhana' (meditative state). And then, the heated political debates, the attacks and counter-attacks, the voices and words of accusations which are so characteristic of an election...they all vanished into a void. A sense of detachment came to grow within me...my mind became completely detached from the external world.

Meditation becomes challenging amidst such huge responsibilities, but the land of Kanniyakumari and the inspiration of Swami Vivekananda made it effortless. As a candidate myself, I left my campaign in the hands of my beloved people of Kashi and came here. I am also grateful God for instilling me with these values from birth which I have cherished and tried to live up to. I was also thinking about what Swami Vivekananda must have experienced during his meditation at this very place in Kanniyakumari! A part of my meditation was spent in a similar stream of thoughts.

Amidst this detachment, amidst the peace and silence, my mind was constantly thinking about the bright future of Bharat, the goals of Bharat. The rising sun at Kanniyakumari gave new heights to my thoughts, the vastness of the ocean expanded my ideas, and the expanse of the horizon continuously made me realize the unity, the Oneness, embedded in the depths of the



responsibilities, but the land of Kanniyakumari and the inspiration of Swami Vivekananda made it effortless. As a candidate myself, I left my campaign in the hands of my beloved people of Kashi and came here. I am also grateful God for instilling me with these values from birth which I have cherished and tried to live up to. I was also thinking about what Swami Vivekananda must have experienced during his meditation at this very place in Kanniyakumari! A part of my meditation was spent in a similar stream of thoughts. Amidst this detachment, amidst the peace and silence, my mind was constantly thinking about the bright future of Bharat, the goals of Bharat

universe. It seemed as if the observations and experiences undertaken in the lap of the Himalayas decades ago were being revived.

Friends, Kanniyakumari has always been very close to my heart. The Vivekananda Rock Memorial in Kanniyakumari was built under the leadership of Shri Eknath Ranade ji. I had the opportunity to travel extensively with Eknath ji. During the construction of this Memorial, I had the opportunity to spend some time in Kanniyakumari as well.

From Kashmir to Kanniyakumari... this is a common identity that is deeply ingrained in the heart of every citizen of the country. This is the 'Shakti Peeth' (seat of Shakti) where Maa Shakti incarnated as Kanya Kumari. At this Southern tip, Maa Shakti performed penance and waited for Bhagwan Shiva,

who was residing in the Himalayas at the northernmost parts of Bharat. Kanniyakumari is the land of confluences. The sacred rivers of our country flow into different seas, and here, those very seas converge. And here, we witness another great confluence-the ideological confluence of Bharat! Here, we

find the Vivekananda Rock

Memorial, a grand statue of

Saint Thiruvalluvar, Gandhi

Mandapam, and Kamara-

jar Mani Mandapam. These streams of thought from these stalwarts converge here to form a confluence of national thought. This gives rise to great inspirations for nation-building. This land of Kanniyakumari gives an indelible message of unity, especially to any person who doubts Bharat's nation-

hood and the sense of unity. The grand statue of Saint Thiruvalluvar in Kanniyakumari seems to be looking at the expanse of Maa Bharati from the sea. His

My faith, devotion, and belief in the infinite and eternal power of Bharat are growing day by day. Over the past 10 years, I have seen this capability of Bharat grow even more and have experienced it firsthand. Just as we utilized the fourth and fifth decades of the 20th century to impart a new momentum to the freedom movement, we must

work Thirukkural is one of the crown jewels of the beautiful Tamil language. It covers every aspect of life, inspiring us to give our best for ourselves and for the nation. It was my great fortune

> to pay my respects to such a great figure. Friends, Swami Vivekananda once said, 'Every nation has a message to

lay the foundation for a 'Viksit

Bharat' in these 25 years of

the 21st century

deliver, a mission to fulfil, a destiny to reach.' For thousands of years, Bharat has been moving forward with this sense of meaningful purpose. Bharat has been a cradle of ideas for thousands of years. We have never considered what we have acquired as our personal wealth or measured it purely by economic or material parameters. Therefore, 'Idamna-mama' (this is not mine) has become an inherent and natural part of the character of Bharat.

Bharat's welfare benefits our planet's journey to progress as well. Take the freedom movement as an example. Bharat gained independence on August 15, 1947. At

that time, many countries around world the were under colonial rule. Bharat's independence journey inspired and empowered many of those countries to achieve

their own freedom. That same spirit was seen decades later when the world came face to face with the once in a century COVID-19 pandemic. When concerns were raised about the poor and developing countries, Bharat's successful efforts provided courage and assistance to many nations.

Today, Bharat's governance model has become an example for many countries around the world. Empowering 25 crore people to rise

Good Governance, aspirational districts, and aspirational blocks are being discussed globally today. Our efforts, from empowering the poor to last-mile delivery, have inspired the world by prioritizing individuals standing at the last rung of society. Bharat's Digital India campaign is now an example for the entire world, showing how we can use technology to empower the poor, bring transparency, and ensure their rights. Inexpensive data in Bharat is becoming a means of social equality by ensuring the reach of information and services to the poor. The whole world is witnessing and studying the democratization of technology, and major global institutions are advising many countries to adopt elements from our model. Today, Bharat's progress and rise are not just a sig-

above poverty in just 10 years

is unprecedented. Innovative

practices such as ProPeople

nificant opportunity for Bharat alone, but also a historic opportunity for all our partner countries around the world. Since the success of the G-20, the world has been increasingly envisioning a bigger role for Bharat. Today, Bharat is being acknowledged as a strong and important voice of the Global South. The African Union has become a part of the G-20 group at the initiative of Bharat. This is going to be a crucial turning point for the future of African countries.

Friends, the development trajectory of Bharat fills us with pride and glory, but at the same time, it also reminds the 140 crore citizens of their responsibilities. Now, without wasting a single moment, we must step forward towards greater duties and larger goals. We need to dream new dreams, convert them into reality and begin living those dreams. We must see Bharat's development in a global context, and for this, it is essential that we understand Bharat's internal capabilities. We must acknowledge Bharat's strengths, nurture them, and utilize them for the benefit of the world. In today's global scenario, Bharat's strength as a youthful nation is an opportunity from which we must not look back.

The world of the 21st century is looking towards Bharat with many hopes. And we will need to make several changes to move forward in the global scenario. We also need to change our traditional thinking regarding reform. Bharat cannot limit reform to just economic reforms. We must move forward in every aspect of life towards the direction of reform. Our reforms should also align with the aspirations of a 'Viksit Bharat' (de-

veloped India) by 2047. We must also understand

that reform can never be a unidimensional process for any country. Therefore, I have laid out the vision of reform, perform, and transform for the country. The responsibility of reform lies with leadership. Based on that, our bureaucracy performs, and when the people join in with the spirit of Jan Bhagidari, we witness a transformation taking place.

We must make excellence the fundamental principle to make our country a 'Viksit Bharat'. We need to work quickly in all four directions: Speed, Scale, Scope, and Standards. Alongside manufacturing, we must also focus on quality and adhere to the mantra of 'zero defect-zero effect'. Friends, we should take

pride in every moment that God has blessed us with birth in the land of Bharat. God has chosen us to serve Bharat and fulfil our role in our country's journey towards excellence. We must redefine our heritage in a modern way while embracing ancient values in a modern context. As a nation, we also need to reassess outdated thinking and beliefs. We need to free our society from the pressure of professional pessimists. We must remember that freedom from negativity is the first step towards achieving success. Success blossoms in the lap of positivity.

My faith, devotion, and belief in the infinite and eternal power of Bharat are growing day by day. Over the past 10 years, I have seen this capability of Bharat grow even more and have experienced it firsthand. Just as we utilized the fourth and fifth decades of the 20th century to impart a new momentum to the freedom movement, we must lay the foundation for a 'Viksit Bharat' in these 25 years of the 21st century. The freedom struggle was a time that called for great sacrifices. The present times call for great and sustained contributions from everyone. Swami Vivekananda had said in 1897 that we must dedicate the next 50 years solely for the nation. Exactly 50 years after this call, Bharat gained independence in 1947.

Today, we have the same golden opportunity. Let's dedicate the next 25 years solely for the nation. Our efforts will create a strong foundation for the coming generations and the coming centuries, taking Bharat to new heights. Looking at the energy and enthusiasm of the country, I can say that the goal is not far away now. Let us take swift steps...let us come together and create a Viksit Bharat.

(These thoughts were penned by PM Modi on 1st June between 4:15 PM and 7 PM during his return flight from Kanniyakumari to Delhi)

# BENGALURU ONLINE

# Confidence of crossing double digit in K'taka

BENGALURU: Loksabha Elections Exit polls have come out and almost all the polls have predicted that NDA will come to power again. Surveys have said that in Karnataka, BJP + JDS will win more seats and Congress will be limited to one. BJP leaders are happy with this. On the other hand, Congress is in double digit confidence. Exit polls have said that Congress will get only 5 to 8 seats in Karnataka. However, the state Congress leaders are not bothered about it. Instead of exit polls, they have relied on the intelligence report of the state intelligence department and are confident that they will win at least 10-12 seats.

The internal report also has the information that Congress will cross double digit. A report has given that Congress can win at least 13 seats. There is also a report that it can cross 14 to 15 positions if the guarantees take hold. Thus the state Congress leaders have placed their faith in the internal report.

Bharatiya Janata Party had no leadership in the state. The Congress has shown capable leadership. Also, the Congress leaders are of the opinion that the guarantee schemes have been worked out in North Karnataka. Also, in the last assembly elections, most of the exit polls were of the opinion that there will be a coalition government in the state. No party will get majority. Instead, some polls had predicted that the BJP would win more seats than the Congress.

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— Ramnath Goenka

## TRUMP'S CONVICTION HAS LESSONS FOR **OTHER DEMOCRACIES**

former US president's criminal conviction by a jury of common citizens sends up a bright flare for accountability. Former state leaders have been handed guilty verdicts in at least half-a-dozen nations over the past decade, in-I cluding Pakistan and Myanmar. But the global gasp at Donald Trump's conviction was of people letting it sink in that someone once considered the most powerful person in the world could be brought to book. That too in a justice system often accused of favouring pale males gliding around in gilded halls.

The presumption of innocence holds till all chances of appeal have been exhausted, which can take several months for a litigious billionaire with a battery of lawyers. The sleaze underlying this New York case was spilt long back. The felony charge was for subversion of democratic process—paying hush money to muzzle a potentially damaging exposé before a poll. The state attorney's win on that count is a reprieve in the international court of public opinion for a nation in need of one right now.

Whether the verdict will mean accountability in public life will first depend on the Republican party that is yet to formally nominate him and US adults who vote in November. Trump's scorched earth policy against detractors has ensured that a thick red line has already fallen in behind him. Legally, the 77-year-old can still run for president, though ironically he may barely be able to vote because his home state of Florida bars felons from exercising the franchise, with a loophole for those not charged in the state. Given the growing share of Americans unhappy with a rematch between the presumptive nominees, countrywide electoral intent is torn in irresolute halves. One measure of the polarisation is in Trump's claim to have raised more than \$50 million right after the verdict.

There are two lessons for the rest of the world from the sordid saga. Strong institutional frameworks can withstand even the crudest assaults on democracy. It's important to remind every generation that no one is above the law in a republic. And weakened institutions can bend established facts as pliable political putty. Which lesson nations choose to take to heart will decide the course of democracy in this global year of elections.

## **SOLVE EMBLEM DEBATE DEMOCRATICALLY**

ELANGANA and Andhra Pradesh crossed a milestone on Sunday with Hyderabad ceasing to be the common capital of both as per the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act. But it is just a technicality since Andhra shifted its government apparatus from Hyderabad soon after division of the state in 2014. It is a different matter whether Andhra will eventually develop Amaravati as its capital city or go with the three-capital formula. It will all depend on the outcome of the assembly elections.

In Telangana, which celebrated its 10th formation day, a somewhat different issue is grabbing the headlines amid the feverish speculation over the Lok Sabha election results. The Revanth Reddy government has proposed to redesign the State Emblem and came up with a State Song, which was set to tune by Oscar winning music director M M Keeravani. Though there were murmurs of dissent over having an "Andhra" music director as its composer, it was adopted and played on Sunday on the occasion of the formation day celebrations. In our view, it is unfair to tag Keervani, the music maestro as belonging to a region. He's a source of pride for the nation. Telangana, which is a modern, thriving, inclusive state, is proud of its rich heritage and Keervani's music to the inspirational song is an ode in itself to the people who fought selflessly for the cause of Telangana. The debate over the proposed emblem, however, is generating serious debate. The present one, which was designed after division of the state, has the historic Kakatiya Thoranam and Charminar representing the culture and history of Telangana. PCC president and Chief Minister Revanth Reddy has for long been opposed to it. His reasoning is that it doesn't reflect the movement that gave birth to the state. There is definitely logic in his argument. On the other hand, as BRS leaders point out, the present emblem encapsulates the rich heritage of the state. The question is whether it should be changed as per the wishes of the chief minister.

First, in a functioning democracy, it can be changed with the approval of the people—represented by the elected legislators. By the same yardstick, five years later, the successor may also want to amend it. What then? In such matters, it is pertinent to discuss and debate before arriving at a decision The state government has rightly decided to do the same in the next assembly session. It should try to achieve a consensus which is key to a vibrant democracy.

## **QUICK TAKE**

### **ELECTIONS WITH A DIFFERENCE**

N Sunday, the ruling parties in Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh—Sikkim Krantikari Morcha and BJP—were declared winners with absolute majorities in the state assemblies. Some of us may think that polls in these sparsely populated states with few Lok Sabha seats are of relatively low national significance. But unlike in other states, the importance of these polls is that the state borders to the north mark the boundary between democracy and autocracy. So they are of immense local and international significance. The fact that the people on this side—many of them with historical ties to the other side—can choose their representatives makes a difference, however imperfect our democracy is.

N May 28, President Ranil Wickremesinghe let the cat out of the bag. As political tensions increase and the demand for elections spike, the general secretary of the United National Party (UNP)—a party that has

recorded successive defeats and now stands decimated under Wickremsinghe's leadership—has proposed the postponement of both presidential and parliamentary elections by two years through a referendum, effectively permitting Wickremesinghe to continue as president to "implement economic reforms".

This call may resonate with a section of Sri Lanka's middle class, content with the absence of queues for food and fuel with no power cuts—a fake normalcy concealing the painful reality of a nation overwhelmed by external debt. Interestingly, the postponement call is an indirect acceptance by Wickremesinghe of his inability to obtain a popular mandate, no matter what his economy-fixing mantra is. People remain unconvinced of both his leadership and the economic reforms formula, primarily a prescription from the International Monetary Fund. Experts critique that without new industries and exports, privatisation and accumulation of debt to service existing debt cannot fix the island's ailing economy. In short, being wedded to the current reforms offers no guarantee of economic recovery.

The current privatisation spree does not win public trust either. The process is so opaque and lacking basic transparency that people learn about development projects or "investments" often through the media. They also fear their island home has been turned into a veritable battleground, with competing powers the United States, China and India—all staking claims. Adding to this is intense India watching, with trepidation and mistrust, as the country learns about new projects, be it green wind or railways. The same middle class that wants to place its trust in Wickremesinghe finds it impossible to write that blank cheque for the fear of the unknown future.

Back to the question of the haste to postpone polls. Sri Lanka is expected to hold both parliamentary and presidential elections in the latter part of 2024. Then there is that distasteful political history around referendums and extensions of terms. One of Sri Lanka's most dubious electoral experiments was in 1982 when Wickremesinghe's uncle, Sri Lanka's first executive president, Junius Richard Jayewardene, extended the life of parliament using the same mechanism. Unlike Wickremesing-

The call to postpone elections is an indirect acceptance by President Wickremesinghe of his inability to obtain a popular mandate, no matter what his economy-fixing mantra is

# SRI LANKA'S STRUGGLE WITH **ELECTION PHOBIA**



THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

Award-winning journalist and lawyer. She is a founder and director of the Colombo-based enter for Investigative Reporting (CIR)



he, Jayewardene in his second term was still a popular leader. During the infamous referendum held in December 1982, nearly 71% cast their vote, with 54% voting in favour of extending the life of parliament. In September 1982, Jayawardene had secured 52% of the total vote to serve a second term even though the fairness of this election remains contentious.

So, to have the UNP General Secretary Palitha Range Bandara suggest a dubious repeat comes as no surprise, with its illconcealed political intentions behind the cloak of economic reforms. He audaciously said: "If not for five years, at least for two years," and called for support from the National People's Power and the Samagi Jana Balawegaya, the two most popular political outfits at present.

What is striking is the absence of respect for public acceptance and his justifications to roll up the electoral map. First, it is democratic if it involves the passing of a resolution in parliament followed by a referendum. Second, it is necessary to continue current economic reforms. Third, it is futile to waste public funds on elections at a financially critical time. Fourth, Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike also postponed elections in the 1970s. The first he did not mention, and that was the 1982 referendum that remains a permanent black mark on the UNP's political legacy.

There is no denying that Sri Lanka needs an urgent recovery plan. It is not just economic, but deeply political. The level of external debt is also a question of financial discipline and governance, and

begs the question whether the country's politicians can be trusted to ensure recovery when in 75 years, all they have done is increase external borrowings without effective repayment models.

It is the political component of the crisis that the politicians are keen to avoid. Because that demands accountability for a multitude of promises made over 75 years, unaddressed ethnic wounds, religious tension, youth unrest and grand corruption. These issues emerged in 2022 during the popular uprising, and a key demand was to call for elections. An attempt to openly rob the people of their right to vote on the pretext of economic stability can only trigger further political tension, and how it may escalate is impossible to predict.

As for the elections, despite the propaganda and heat of the moment, popularity of candidates and parties fluctuate. Sri Lankans are also known for voting with their emotions, and this election may not be any different. A case in point is when Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga rode a wave of sympathy to be re-elected as president after she survived a suicide attack by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and lost sight in one eye.

This time around, experimentative politics will prove way too costly. It is the first time that Sri Lanka holds elections as a bankrupt nation. Admittedly, part of the island's larger malady is the ilk of present-day politicians. Suffice to say that it is not a nation with too many choices.

There had been promises to abolish executive presidency since 1994. There had been commitments and efforts, some of it half-hearted, to address the national question. The war concluded in 2009, leaving the larger question of justice and reparation unaddressed. There is little concern over the need to share power and there's no thought given to the nonimplementation of the 13th Amendment, a violation of the Constitution.

Then there are those who voluntarily lecture Colombo about transparency accountability and human rights, ad nauseum. On the question of the imminent postponement of elections, there is radio silence. Do we conclude that the people's franchise is not among the human rights they often speak of?

Sri Lanka needs a genuine attempt to resurrect the nation. Getting stuck in old political and economic models may not offer the answers the troubled island requires. It would need innovation, creativity, and even a new breed of politicians.

(Views are personal) (dilrukshi@cir.lk) (dilrukshihandunnetti@gmail.com)

# THE ROLE OF VARANASI IN **EXALTING GANGA'S IDENTITY**

LECTIONS may come and go, but the Ganga flows forever. I am strongly drawn to look again at this great river. Six headstreams, five sacred confluences, life-giver to the subcontinent's northern plains, soul waters of ancient belief, play course of adventure-seekers. A celestial entity, the hard-won fruit of steadfast human penance in theology, an ecosystem that has degenerated into the cloaca maxima or big gutter of modern India.

Spread over 1.1 million sq km, the Ganga's basin is home to a quarter of India's population. It is an intricate web of tributaries, canals, waterways and run-offs.

The Ganga basin is described by the American architect Anthony Acciavatti, a Fulbright scholar who spent a decade plotting the region, as "the world's most engineered river basin", a veritable "water machine" and "a dynamic system, closely interconnected with the monsoon". The river's cultural depths are just as complex and layered, especially at Varanasi. It is Varanasi, or Kashi, that exalted Ganga's identity across the Indic bandwidth to the extent that the mighty Mekong further east is named 'Ma Ganga', the mother river. A side note: Ganga water was the biggest kitchen expense of the Mughals since Akbar. There was a high-ranking officer who organised supply and storage of water pots from the river, reserved for the royal family.

Everyone we've grown up hearing of has come here: Shiva, Shakti, Nandi and Raja Harishchandra. Varanasi is the birthplace of four Jain Tirthankaras. The Buddha came here in the sixth century BCE and preached his first sermon to 'the Five' at Sarnath. Adi Shankara came arguably in the eighth century CE. It was Kabir's hometown in the 15th century, and in the 16th century, Goswami Tulsidas composed the Ramcharitmanas and the Hanuman Chalisa here, changing the history of religion forever across north India. Carnatic eminence Muthuswami Dikshitar came here in his teens with his guru, learnt Hindustani ragas, and went on to become a pillar of Indian musical excellence.

Kabir went to the *Upanishads*, to the earliest-known concept of a formless One who contained and pervaded all forms. The Upanishadic attempt to define the 'unknown' was expressed in many ways, and Kabir rearticulated this using phrases from the text in simple Hindi as 'Jaise til mein tel hai, jyun chakmak mein aag/Tera Sain tujh mein hai, tu jaag sake toh jaag' (Like oil in



sesame seeds and fire in flint, so your Lord lies within you, awaken Him if you can). The Sikh Gurus greatly cherished Vara-

nasi. Guru Nanak came here in 1506, went to the then Kashi Vishwanath temple, met with pandits to discuss his views and collected verses of Kabir and other local saintcomposers. The sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind, sent an emissary to spread his teachings. The ninth Guru, 'Chadar-e-Hind' Guru Tegh Bahadur, who gave his life in



Guru Nanak went to the then Kashi Vishwanath temple in 1506. In 1839, Maharaja Ranjit Singh covered the spire of the new Kashi temple with gold. This is the present structure, rebuilt in 1780 by Maharani Ahilyabai Holkar of Indore

1675 to protect religious freedom of Hindus, visited Kashi twice. His son, Gobind Rai, when barely six, came by with his mother on a journey across north India, and as Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth Guru, sent five followers to learn Sanskrit and get higher learning before sending them as emissaries of the reformist Sikh faith.

In 1839, Maharaja Ranjit Singh covered the spire of the new Kashi Vishwanath temple with gold. This is the present structure, rebuilt in 1780 by Maharani Ahilyabai Holkar of Indore. The Maharajas of Nabha and Kapurthala donated towards the founding of a Sanskrit College in 1911 and Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, founder of Banaras Hindu University, reportedly went in person to invite a greatly respected Sikh saint, Sant Attar Singh, to inaugurate it.

The Guru Granth Sahib includes verses composed by 15th century Saint Ramananda of Varanasi, an ardent follower of the inclusive Sri Vaishnava faith spread by Sri Ramanuja of Tamil Nadu. Ramananda himself was Kabir's chosen spiritual preceptor; both Ramanandi and Kabir Panthi cults cut a wide swathe across north India.

Swami Dayanand Saraswati, founder of the Arya Samaj, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa and Swami Vivekananda showed up on Kashi's ghats as a matter of course on their respective reformist missions in the 19th century. An intricate web of connections thus emanated from Kashi, weaving a warp and woof of spiritual sensibility over the Indian subcontinent across centuries and regions—a richly-textured weave of thought that included strands of both classical Hinduism and the reformist worldviews spun from deeply internalised values of Upanishadic philosophy.

While rejecting the ritualised classical approach to religion, such seminal Indian socio-cultural reformers upheld the inclusive philosophical core of Hinduism and its meditation, music and poetry. They honoured the centrality of Varanasi's symbolic importance in the collective consciousness, in which the spiritual and temporal interfaced through the Ganga's ghats. These physical steps to the physical water stayed the key metaphor for the journey of the soul towards its spiritual goal, in which 'Hari', 'Shiva', 'Sain' and 'Tat' ('That', the nameless and formless) often became inter-

changeable terms for the transcendental. Varanasi was the cultural crucible for a spectacular range of 'change within continuity' and was both the place of and participant in these foundational narratives. These historical figures were drawn to Varanasi by millennia of mystique invested through the river of pilgrim life. That's why almost every community and religious sect is represented in Kashi by its own temple, rest house and community hall. Every believer is supposed to make a pilgrimage to Kashi at least once and is likely to make their own emotional pact with this timeless river.

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#### MAILBAG

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### Self regulations

Ref: Redefining Brahmacharya for a new age (Jun 2). The author has covered a plethora of ills plaguing the present generation, especially the excessive use of mobiles and social media. As the author suggests, self regulation plus setting up standards as a family will go a long way to help. R Sriramprasad, email

Acquiring knowledge Brahmacharya is not only about celibacy and leading an austere life. The major focus is on learning and acquiring spiritual knowledge from gurus. Devoid of luxuries and materialistic pursuits, this is a period of deep study of scriptures to develop a spiritualistic bent of mind. Right habits, discipline and mental strength will certainly wean them away from the temptations of modern life.

### **Returned gold**

Rajarao Kumar, Bengaluru

Ref: An agenda for new parliament to propel prosperity (Jun 2) After nearly 33 years, the country is able to get back gold pledged with the Bank of England in 1991 to overcome the balance of payments crisis. Presently, the nation is sitting pretty on a pile of foreign reserves. Hope the new parliament works with a definite agenda towards making India the world's third largest economy. S K Ramesh, Ballari

### No rationale

Ref: Poll predicts exit of INDIA challenge, 3rd Modi term (Jun 2). The exit poll prediction, giving a clean sweep to the BJP-led NDA, did not come as a surprise. This is because the INDI Alliance was formed with a view to topple the government at the Centre, with no rationale except to show hate toward PM Narendra Modi. K V Raghuram, Wayanad

### Third term

According to exit polls from several media outlets and political analysts, it undoubtedly seems the BJP will secure a third consecutive term. Hopefully, the BJP will focus on addressing key issues predominantly affecting the nation's socio-economic development this term. Bishal Kumar Sahal, email

### **Voters' dedication**

The current polls highlighted the dedication of the Indian voter, who braved harsh conditions over three months to cast ballots, maintaining democratic integrity. Diverse in caste, religion and gender, voters showed unity despite differences. Notably, women's electoral influence has grown. With 968.8 million voters, India's democratic commitment remains exemplary and inspiring globally. Badruddeen Mudigere, Chikmagalur

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THOUGHT FOR THE DAY: Quality is never an accident. It is always the result of intelligent effort.

— JOHN RUSKIN

right freely in our country. The laws

on dowry prohibition, cruelty

against women in marriage, repre-

sentation of women in local govern-

ments, the 106th Amendment man-

dating reservation of seats in legisla-

tures were all enacted by unani-

mous consent. Our society, for all its

faults, has always welcomed moder-

nity. We could eradicate the evil

practices of sati and child marriage,

and legalised widow remarriage

even before Independence with rela-

tive ease. If we take caste inequali-

ties, affirmative action policies in-

cluding reservation in education

and public employment, abolition of



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## **Economy on track** for higher growth

he growth figures for the tenth and last year of the Narendra Modi government ahead of the results of the Lok Sabha poll, which most likely would usher in its third straight five-year term, came rather late for these to impact the voting in the seventh and last phase of polling. In any case, it is anyone's guess whether in a poll narrative dominated by caste, communal, reservations and other such considerations growth would directly concern a vast majority of voters. Those who take keen interest in economic growth might have already voted in the earlier phases. Nonetheless, it is good to know that the growth in 2023-24 was an impressive 8.2% due to a higher-than-expected increase of 7.8% in the last quarter. The data released by the National Statistical Office last Friday shows that the growth numbers exceeded the projections made by the NSO itself and a number of independent economists. In fact, the expansion is higher than the RBI's earlier forecast of 7%. This is the ninth time since 1961-62 that the economy has recorded over 8% growth. Notably, the two-year coronavirus interruption adversely impacted the growth record of the Narendra Modi government in the 10 years he has been in the saddle in New Delhi. Reacting to the latest GDP numbers, Modi sounded optimistic of a higher growth in the coming years, saying it was 'just a trailer of things to come...' The NSO data showed that agriculture continues to be a laggard, pulling down the overall numbers. In the third quarter of last financial year it grew at a mere 0.4% while it nudged a bit up in the last quarter at 0.6%. Erratic monsoon was cited as one of the factors for slow agri growth. Manufacturing continued to fare well, registering 9.9% growth in 2023-24. Real estate sector too fared well. A big employer, its growth meant a healthier spurt in demand for the steel and cement sectors as well. Services sector saw some moderation due to the slow growth in trade, hotels, travel, communications, etc. Meanwhile, private investment was yet to pick up steam while public spending on infrastructure was going strong. In fact, economists ascribed the higher than expected growth in the last quarter to a sharp increase in tax collections, given the gap between the GDP and gross value added (6.3%). Importantly, the growth numbers by themselves fail to get votes unless there is a real increase in the employment rate. On the other hand, there was good news for the government insofar as despite the plethora of welfare schemes, massive investment in infrastructure, defence, etc. it had managed to keep the fiscal deficit

Against the revised estimate of 5.8%, the gap between income and spending had narrowed down to 5.6%. As per the official data, for the last financial year, the fiscal deficit was Rs.16.54 trillion as against the budgeted figure of Rs.17.86 trillion. The prudent management of the economy despite pressures on spending in an election year was to be commended. RBI has announced a transfer of over 2.11 lakh crore as surplus to the government for the financial year 2023-24. Yet another report in a pink daily said that LIC and central public sector undertakings together would give over Rs 1.26 lakh crore in dividend for the last financial year. The performance of the public sector units has improved tremendously under the Modi government following a clear-cut hands-off approach adopted by it, leaving it to the professional managements to run them most efficiently. However, the challenge for the next government was to create jobs at a faster rate along with a faster rate of economic growth. A jobless growth relying on a trickle-down effect has proved woefully inadequate to meet the aspirations of the fast growing army of tens of millions of unemployed youth.

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**INDIA 75 YEARS AGO JUNE 3, 1949** 



#### CHARGE-SHEET AGAINST FRANCE

Chandernagore, June 2. Mr. Arun Chandra Dutta, member of the Administrative Council of Chandernagore in charge of Information and External Affairs, today charged the French Government with "insidious efforts to influence, prejudice and even sabotage" the referendum on the future of Chandernagore

# Despite differences, there is more that unites us

# The Road Ahead



¥ Jayaprakash Narayan

t last, the prolonged election campaign for the 18th Lok A campaign for the 1811 LOK Sabha is over. I am writing this column on June 1, and by the end of the day the seventh phase of polling will be completed and the people's choices of representatives will be revealed soon.

In the heat of political battle artful dodges, exaggerations, distortions and vilification of political adversaries are common. Increasingly, we have made our politics a noholds-barred, life-or-death struggle, Polarisation on grounds of caste, region, language and religion has become all too common, instead of reasoned debate. As French President Emmanuel Macron recently said often emotion trumps rationality in politics. And negative emotion (envy, anger, prejudice, hatred) trumps positive emotion (hope, aspiration). The scorching summer heat and the heat of political battle make a particularly difficult combination. Combine this with our enormous diversity of caste, region, language and religion, and our tortuous history, and we see how our political rhetoric seems very divisive and polarising.

But that impression of divisive

politics and polarisation could also be misleading. Acerbic comments, breathless coverage of 'the unusual and odd' ('man bites dog' is news, not 'dog bites man'!) utterances and events on TV, and the widespread use of social media where anybody can say anything without filters magnify the perception that our society is hate-filled, crime-ridden, unsafe, and obscurantist; or that our politics is retrogressive, oppressive and anarchic or fascist (depending on which end of the political spectrum you are inclined to support). Our society's emotional responses on occasion, and volatility further amplify the image that India is ungovernable and is a 'functioning an-

Take for instance, the horrific instances of sexual violence against women. The 'Nirbhaya' case is one such terrible crime that mobilised millions and touched every Indian. We need to strengthen rule of law and improve social norms to ensure that every woman is safe and has the opportunity to participate equally in our economy, politics and society. Even one act of gender violence and sexual assault is one too many. and we cannot, and should not tolerate crimes against women. But the way global media interpreted our emotional response to such crimes was devoid of facts and logic. Even the redoubtable BBC and influential CNN portrayed India as the 'rape capital of the world'! Even a single rape is reprehensible and should not be tolerated. But a simple fact-check shows that the US and the UK have twelve times the incidence of rape per unit population. Even if we assume that many rape victims do not report the crime for fear of ostracisation, the crime is much more prevalent in the 'advanced' countries than in India. We need to do a lot to enhance the freedom of our girls and women, and give them the opportunity to fulfil their potential But our rhetoric and emotion be cause of our own unique cultural factors are misinterpreted by global society and even by many among us in the country. This tragic episode illustrates how our own self-image is shaped by rhetoric and emotion,

untouchability, criminalising vio-There is life after this election. We need to bury the hatchet, stop our obsession with who wins and who loses, and focus on the future

not by evidence and logic.

There is much that is wrong with our politics and governance. Our democracy is a work in progress. and is still evolving. But we should recognise that our society, institutions of state, and political parties have in general been very progressive and forward-looking. Our legis lation on women's freedoms and affirmative action policies ending caste discrimination are excellent examples

A very liberal abortion law guaranteeing women's reproductive rights was enacted more than 50 vears ago, and women exercise that

lence or insult on caste basis, and welfare measures to help the longoppressed sections to come out of poverty and discrimination have all been embraced by all parties and institutions of state, and welcomed by our fractious society with little resistance.

We tend to exaggerate our differences, and underestimate the factors that unite us. Considering that we constitute 18% of the global population, and we have unmatched diversity, our society and polity have unified the country and promoted enlightened views and modernity in a remarkable way.

Our tendency toward self-flagellation needs to be curbed, and we need to acquire a lot more confidence in our people, our politics and our institutions.

Much of the election rhetoric was about branding and political market segmentation. There is much more that unites our parties and society than that divides us. Our voters have time and again exhibited uncommon maturity and common sense. There are many flaws in our democracy. Vast illegitimate expenditure to induce voters, excessive resort to short-term welfare at the cost of collective needs and long-term growth and investment in the future, and appeal to primordial loyalties of caste, region, religion and language weaken our democracy, society and economy. But we have many redeeming features: the voters vote freely, elections are conducted fairly, votes are counted honestly, and we all accept and embrace

the election verdicts. There is life after this election. We need to bury the hatchet, stop our obsession with who wins and who loses, and focus on the future. Inclusive economic growth, fiscal discipline, quality education and healthcare, rule of law, genuine decentralisation and ending corruption should be the minimum goals on which we unite and move forward.

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# Challenges that lie before the new government

# Ringside



Jayanta Roy Chowdhury

here is a thrill of excitement in the air as the country awaits results of its longest parliamentary polls since 1952. A new government will be sworn in sooner rather than later and it will obviously get down to the task of taking forward the country.

The new government of course will be aided by the singular fact that India reported last week a GDP growth rate of 8.2% for the financial year just gone by, making it the fastest growing economy among the top ten in the world

While it may gain some succour this achievement, nevertheless, the challenges before the government which will be sworn in will certainly remain a-plenty.

The biggest of them perhaps is that of the spectre of rising youth unemployment which threatens to negate the demographic dividend that India is enjoying with one of the youngest populations globally.

According to statistics recently relabour force by the central government, the average percentage of urban unemployed for those in the age group 15-29 in January- March 2024 stood at 17%. A dozen states reported an over 20% unemployment rate during this period with one of them reporting a 30% plus unemployment rate during this period

The causes for this dismal state of affairs are many — one principal reason has been the slowly worsening situation of the small and medium scale enterprises in India which employ nearly 111 million people. Their decline has meant fewer jobs are being created.

At the same time lack of skill training for our youth which would make them employable and replacement of workers with increasing automomation and robotisation in most large sectors of industry has meant crowding of workers in farming, the informal sector and construction, where the quality of jobs is suspect and under-employment rampant.

The rising unemployment figures have another ugly side — people smuggling out of India in search of work in places ranging from the US and Europe to Cambodia and Rus-

Finding these youth jobs, preferably quality ones, is a priority for Indian society as the alternative could range from unrest and social strife to an alarming rise in crime and political chaos on our streets.

Obviously, retraining youth to upgrade them in skills which the world wants — whether those be industry specific or in terms of general training - is a must. The Skill India misis a good step forward numbers quoted of those who have been trained or upskilled sound impressive. However, the actual results which should have seen our workplaces being flooded with trained manpower are still awaited. Anecdotal evidence shows many businesses find it increasingly hard to

find the right man or woman with the right skill sets needed for the jobs they have on hand.

The recent flurry of headline news in most newspaper and television channels that many places in India including the capital city of Delhi experienced 50 degree plus temperatures has only highlighted what many saw coming—climate change is upon us and will affect the country's life and economy in many ways in the years ahead, to the extent that it may well pose a challenge to India's growth story. In short in any top five challenges facing the next government, managing the fall-out of climate change will have to be one

India's agriculture production growth was down to 1.4% in 2023-24 down from 4.7% in the year before. A flour millers body has come out with a widely accepted estimate that India will produce 105 million metric tonnes of wheat this year, which would be significantly lower than last year's 112 mmt. Production of cereals, pulses and oilseeds have also been lower than a year ago in 2023-24.

of the biggest priorities.

This not only means price shocks will be more frequent for consumers, but also that farm production and incomes will be challenged. India had dipped into its wheat reserve stocks last year as production was challenged demand for wheat both for consumption as well as processing spiked There are reports that the country might consider the unprecedented step of importing wheat after many years to replenish stocks and cool down prices.

A similar situation in rice could be

even more disastrous, as more farmers depend upon rice cultivation to make a living and Indians consume about 102 kg of rice a year per head.

It naturally flows that the monetary policy framed by India's central banker the RBI — will be similarly challenged in trying to balance the needs of checking inflationary bursts by raising interest rates and giving cheaper loans to both businesses and agriculture. The other grave threat flowing

from climate change will be to India's power generation capacity. Hotter summers will mean more demand for cooling- both homes and workplaces. Power generation was pushed up by a huge 9.4% in April this year to meet the unprecedented demand. The growing demand in May-June has meant more frequent breakdowns in many metropolises and industrial centres. A breakdown in the stretched power supply system could be another challenge to India's growth story, similar to the one the country faced in the 1980s and '90s, when both power generation and transmission were racing to meet India's growing electricity demand.

The challenge could be met by a combination of climate mitigation measures to ensure the fight to control temperatures is addressed ss the country by extensively greening the land, conserving water and rebuilding traditional channels of water harvesting on the one hand and increasing renewable power generation capacity on the other ranging from the chain of nuclear power plants long planned, to solar and hydrogen cell power plants

among others. But to do so, technological hurdles which still makes these power sources costly as well as inertia in policy making and imple mentation has to be overcome.

Climate change and sudden climate shocks such as cyclones and intense heatwaves means that the progress that India made in healthcare will also remain challenged in the years ahead.

India is in any case in a state of epidemiological transition where the pattern of mortality and disease is slowly changing from one of high mortality among infants and children and episodic famine and epidemics to one of degenerative and human-made diseases, which itself is placing a huge transition burden on its heathcare set-up.

The new diseases unleashed by climate change or by climate episodes will mean healthcare infrastructure. especially in suburban areas, will remain more than stretched for years to come. At the same time in the absence of a functional and robust pub lic health care system, the demandsupply gap in healthcare will widen. increasing healthcare costs for the entire nation, the pinch of which will of course be felt most acutely by the elderly whose income is usually subject to the vagaries of interest payouts on their life's savings.

and the new or 'not so new' regime which gets to run the ship of India tackles these challenges and takes the nation towards its promised place in the sun. Hopefully while the sun is still shining.

The writer is former head of PTI's eastern region network

### Having your prayers answered

— Sri Sri Ravi Shankar

strong tendency to means to want it to happen keep doing something, now. In sankalpa you say, "let keep doing someuning, now. In community whether important or it happen whenever it has to." unimportant, becomes an impediment to meditation.

becomes doing it does not let ing one's arm is preceded by you settle down. All intentions, the sankalpa in the mind. The good or bad, trivial or impor- sankalpa of a weak mind is intant, need to be dropped for effective. We can make our meditation to happen.

But isn't dropping all inten- itual tions itself an intention? Yes, but this intention is the will also be strong.

last and necessary one. Dropping intentions is not an act. Just the intention to drop them itself serves the purpose. Dropping all in-**GUIDING LIGHT** tentions even for a moment

tion happens.

There is a difference between granted to me." One should apintention and desire. Desire is ply effort, work and also relax. that which gives you anger Before going to bed, and upsets you. Sankalpa is meditate for 10 minutes and having an intention. It means surrender whatever vou detaking your consciousness to sire, and sleep happily. The the universe, to the infinite; main things to follow are sadthen bringing the mind to the hana (spiritual practices and present moment, and making self effort), awareness, and a wish for something that you then abandoning of feverish-

Strength lies in the power of your sankalpa (intention). The 'Doing' starts first with an in-mind is full of sankalpa and tention and then translates vikalpa (imagination, fancy). into action. Though intention All work gets done through springs from Being, when it sankalpa. Even the act of mov-

mind strong by sadhana (spirpractices) knowledge. Then the sankalpa

> When sankalpa arises in your heart, then it helps expand your consciousness in the universe. In this <u>huge</u> universe, I want this

brings you in touch with your happen. Suppose you are ask-Self and in that instant meditaing a question to someone and While you sit for meditation question will be answered or

you have to let the world be the not, you will hesitate to ask it way it is. The repetition of or you will make errors even meditation is to habituate your in the process of asking. So the system to stop and start activi-right way of asking is, first. ty at will. The ability to conhaving that confidence in the sciously do this is a precious divine and knowing that "I

long for in your mind. Desire ness.

sankalpa you have a doubt whether this have this request and it will be

#### LETTIERS TO THE EDITOR

#### Tale of two PMs

ormer PM Manmohan Singh has accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of 'lowering the dignity of the prime minister's office with his hate speeches". During his stint as the PM. MMS was accused of having gone to the other extreme. He used to maintain silence over issues when he was supposed to speak out, and at times he even avoided controversial situations. Only time will tell which PM was the lesser of two evils. **PG** Menon

#### Keep check on gaming

 $\bigwedge$  fter Covid-19, the gaming industry has seen significant growth but also sparked worries about its impact on youth during crucial years for their studies, personal growth and other development To overcome this, the government and parents should work together to not let the negative effects of gaming take over the child. The government should create awareness and impose proper rules and regulations to mitigate the negative effects

of excessive gaming. Parents, as the primary influence on their children, should set boundaries and promote a balanced lifestyle by emphasising education and encouraging outdoor activities and realworld interactions. This approach will also benefit the economy by ensuring a healthier and more productive future workforce.

Ayushi Chouhan, Ujjain

#### Dog ban won't work

With reference to the report 'Activists push for ban on foreign dog breeds across India' (May 31), a complete ban on foreign dogs is undemocratic, and will serve no useful purpose but to drive the business underground. The problem of dogs being abandoned when they fall sick or their owners get tired of them, will not be solved and neither will the stray dog problem.

Peter Castellino

#### **Purpose of meditation**

When Swami Vivekananda swam across the gulf to meditate on the rock for three days, he wanted only to be in communion with God. The meditation helped him dedicate himself to serving

humanity. He did not inconvenience the local fishing community and the general public who visit the tip of the country to see the spectacular sunrise and sunset. But then, the Swami had no political ambitions. Yash Pal Ralhan

#### Proper upbringing is the key

This has reference to your edit 'Doctors turn criminals' (May 29). The concluding line "Far easier for the father and the grandfather would have been to bring up the boy as a law abiding citizen" is spot on. The influential father and grandfather. and even the boy's mother, colluded to get him out of the case. Whereas, in a report from Barwani, the poor father of a son who fraudulently retrieved money from an ATM turned him over to the police because he wanted to teach his son a lesson in honesty. The honest father is a brickmaker! Contrast this with the Richie Rich teenager backed to the hilt by an opulent family.

Dear reader,

We are eager to know your opinions, comments and suggestions. Write to editor.indore@fpj.co.in Using snail mail? Send your letters to Free Press, Free Press House, 3/54, Press Complex, AB Road, Indore 452008

Avinash Godboley, Dewas

**MIKA'S MATRIX** 

#### ARCHANGEL MICHAEL MESSAGE FOR THE DAY

A day of action, adventure, giving, speed and balance.

You will receive a message/ parcel or email that you have been waiting for. Do not put others first at the cost of your peace of mind. Demarcate boundaries.

Be calm and stay hydrated. Travel or travel plans will be made. I loved the blue flowers

Tip for the day: Visualise a violet flame and say "Divine Archangel Michael please uplift and remove all obstacles

from my life, this or better thank you" Lots of olivine miracles your way, Sheetal Sapan Mhotre

# thehindubusinessline.

## Well-primed

Minor blips aside, economy continues to chug along

ontinuing with its spell of surprises, India's real GDP which expanded by 7.8 per cent in the fourth quarter of FY24, once again managed to beat both official and private forecasts which were primed for 7-7.4 per cent growth. This takes the full-year growth to 8.2 per cent after factoring in National Statistical Office's (NSO) revisions to the first three quarters' data. The country managing a third consecutive year of 8 per cent-plus expansion after the shock of Covid, and that too in a world of slowing growth, is testimony to the resilience of Indian households and businesses to disruptions.



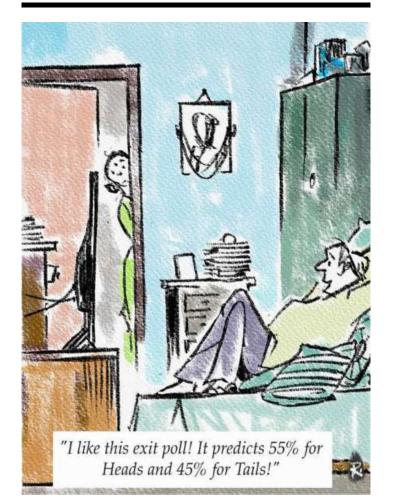
However, a 22 per cent surge in net tax mop-up has widened the gap between GDP and GVA (Gross Value Added). Therefore, it is more useful to look at GVA to gauge the momentum in economic activity. On this score, it is clear that economic activity lost speed in Q4, with GVA growth slowing to 6.3 per cent from 6.8 per cent in Q3 (8.3 per cent and 7.7 per cent in Q1 and Q2). The sectoral composition of GVA shows agriculture continuing with its lacklustre performance, with 1.1 per cent growth in Q4 the same as Q3. This is no surprise, given the erratic 2023 monsoon and precarious reservoir storage during the rabi crop. With a favourable Indian Ocean Dipole and an evolving La Nina expected to shower above-normal rains in the upcoming monsoon season, crop prospects will hopefully look up. Q4 also saw some deceleration in mining and utilities and manufacturing (8.9 per cent growth compared to 11.5 per cent in Q3). These segments could be reflecting the slowdown in private sector decision-making prior to elections. Services saw financial, real estate and professional services growing faster at 7.6 per cent in Q4 against 7 per cent in Q3, though trade, hotels etc slowed to 5.1 per cent from 6.9 per cent. Public administration, indicative of government revenue spending, picked up.

Overall, though there has been some deceleration in industry in Q4, there's not much cause for worry. With the elections done and dusted, private sector activity and capex can revive. High-frequency data showing strong bank credit offtake, expansionary Purchasing Managers Indices and good core sector growth since April, suggest a robust pace of economic activity.

Sceptics will point out that GDP growth for FY24 has received a boost from the low deflator (1.3 per cent in FY24 compared to 6.7 per cent in FY23). This is true, but is reflective of wholesale inflation being very low this year. With the pickup in primary product prices in the last few months, this supply boost will no longer be in play going forward. The large figure on discrepancies (gap between GDP calculations using the output and expenditure methods) is a function of India's large informal sector which defies accurate measurement. As both the deflator and discrepancies have been a feature of India's GDP calculations for long, they don't materially impact the reliability of the growth rates.

#### **POCKET**

RAVIKANTH



# How do we pick a new base year?

**BASE EFFECTS.** Given the Covid impact of recent years, FY19 seems the best option as base year, with updated weights



MADAN SABNAVIS

here is a consensus on the need to change the base years for our economic variables. The present base year for IIP, WPI and GDP is 2011-12 while it is 2012 for the CPI. There are two issues with the base year being outdated. The first is that there is a concern over indexing all

numbers to a base which is over 13 years The second, which is probably more important, is that the composition of production and consumption of goods has seen sharp changes every three or four years. To capture these changes,

revisions are called for, about every five

#### TIME PERIOD

years.

The choice of the time period is crucial while changing the base year. While it has to be as contemporary as possible, it needs to satisfy several criteria. This becomes a challenge because unlike the phase of Great Moderation which lasted till the Lehman crisis, the world economy has been volatile in every sense even though the emerging markets have been more insulated from these shocks. Covid was a universal phenomenon which affected all

So choosing a year which was too good or too bad has 'hangover effects in reverse' where subsequent years would look disproportionately high or low. The normal year also has to be one in which where the variables did not witness any

Today with global crude oil prices having the potential to skew inflation, the base year must be free of such disturbances.

If these principles were to be adhered to, which year would be most suitable base year? While it is tempting to pick up a contemporary year like 2021-22 or 2022-23, there is a huge decline bias still in the economy.

A quick way to understand this bias is to look at the real GDP numbers. During 2014-19 there was an increase of around ₹42-lakh crore in real terms. In contrast, post 2018-19 when Covid struck and a lockdown was imposed in March 2020, the real increase has been of the order of just ₹33-lakh crore (FY19-24).

Hence while the GDP growth rates of 9.7 per cent, 7 per cent and 8.2 per cent (as per the provisional estimates for



PRICE CONUNDRUM. The weightage for food in the CPI is now a matter of debate sushil kumar verma

FY24 released on May 31) in the last three years are impressive, they come over low number of 3.9 per cent and minus 5.8 per cent in FY20 and FY21. We are clearly not yet back to normal. This being the case, FY19 looks a better year (6.1 per cent growth).

#### INFLATION FACTOR

Also inflation has been unusually high for the last four years which will tend to depress the numbers going ahead. The inflation numbers were 4.8 per cent, 6.2 per cent, 5.5 per cent, 6.7 per cent and

5.4 per cent running up to FY24.
In FY19 it was 3.4 per cent, within the MPC target. Therefore 2018-19 fits the bill here. In fact ever since data was released on household consumption expenditure, there has been discussion on whether households are spending less on food and more on elements of core inflation.

Two related issues come up when revising these base years. The first is whether the stock indices too should be changed. While the Sensex and Nifty are privately constructed indices, their base

#### The composition of the economy has changed drastically over the years. More segments of the services sector need to be

included in the indices

years are 1979 and 1995 respectively. This realignment will make it more complete.

The second pertains to the composition of indices. Currently the WPI is a producer's price index and does not include services. With services having a larger share in GDP, the WPI  $\,$ tends to only partly capture price changes.

While the government tracks a services price index, ideally it needs to be included in the WPI. The CPI already has several elements of services like education, health and recreation. But sectors such as logistics need to be included in the WPI.

A related issue to the collection of data pertains to both GDP and IIP. There are large elements of the unorganised sector that need to be included. This pertains to the MSME segment which dominates both services and manufacturing. There definitely needs to be better representation of this sector with less recourse sought to imputations.

Here the GST data provides useful clues and can be used to impute more accurate values on the value addition in this sector. It must be remembered that when the base year of 2011-12 was introduced, there was no GST.

In case of those units outside GST, there should be surveys carried out by the MSME Ministry to get an idea of the value addition. Covid has definitely skewed the process of selection of a new

base year for these indices. Choosing a base year post FY21 can lead to bias that

can impact policymaking.
This holds especially for monetary policy where the inflation numbers could get a downward bias due to the high inflation trajectory in the last three

In fact, the household consumption survey data, if used, can also skew the weights as food has a lower share based on the data for FY23. The pent up demand witnessed post-Covid has led to households spending a lot on travel and tourism as well as consumer goods which has lent this bias to non-food items. Therefore, care must be taken when selecting the normal year.

Under these unusual circumstances there could be a case for deferring the exercise until a new normal year closer to the present day emerges. But this could be fraught with uncertainty.

Choosing a pre-Covid year of FY19 may be a bit dated as there has been a drastic change in how business is conducted post-Covid. A compromise solution is to update the base year to FY19 but look out for a new one which can be FY25 or FY26. While using FY19 as a base some of the weights can be aligned to the present when reckoning some of the indices. This would be a pragmatic way of going about the exercise.

The writer is Chief Economist, Bank of Baroda. Views

# Will the conviction bite Trump on election day?

The trial has been turned into a campaign show. But its impact on Trump's electoral prospects is still unclear

#### Sridhar Krishnaswami

nly the media headlines coming out of the US seem to be excitable: a former President now a convicted felon awaiting sentencing on July 11. Can Donald Trump run for President from a prison? Can he vote for himself on November 5? What are the implications for the Grand Old Party on the latest turn of events in Manhattan?

The first impression coming out of New York is that nothing has changed as far as Trump is concerned. He continued to rail against the trial and the verdict accusing the Biden administration of staging a political show with some Republicans in Congress in tow. The only verdict that matters, Trump argued, will be on November 5. The Trump campaign has turned the conviction on all 34 charges into a campaign donation fest raking in mega bucks, including from some first time millionaire donors.

About Trump's eligibility to continue with his Presidential quest, legal luminaries have a simple answer: the Constitution says nothing on this except that a person has to be 35 years old, citizen and resided for 14 years in the country. Going by this, Trump can run for President even from prison, if he is sent to one. And nothing prevents him from carrying on his political journey even with a suspended sentence hanging over his shoulders.

The Manhattan trial was only one of the four on the Trump list, the others pending are in Washington DC over the January 6, 2021 riots on Capitol Hill; the classified documents case in Florida and accusations of election tampering in the state of Georgia.

It is unlikely that these three trials will be concluded before the elections and in the process setting the stage for a different kind of political show should Trump get re-elected in November.

Many believed that the Manhattan trial that involved Trump and his payment of \$130,000 to an adult actress that came up during the 2016 election campaign was perhaps the weakest of the cases.

#### POLITICAL SPECTACLE

To Trump none of the legal problems mattered: he has made a political spectacle of the court hearings, being



**DONALD TRUMP.** Political stormreuters

present even when he was not obligated and indulging in rants outside the courthouse and through his social media

Irrespective of how the Judge presiding over the Manhattan trial handles the sentencing, the conviction per se could have an impact on the political fortunes of the 45th President. As it is Trump is in a statistical dead heat with the incumbent Joe Biden but is seen as having a small advantage in the swing states. The question is will the Manhattan conviction change the nature of support, the argument being that even a small drop will matter,

especially in battleground states like Wisconsin and Pennsylvania.

Media reports have it that exit polls done during Republican primaries apparently had double digit numbers of voters maintaining that they will not vote for Trump if he were to be convicted of a felony. And this April, a survey by Ipsos/ABC News showed that 16 per cent of those supporting the former President saying they would reconsider their support in such a scenario. Here again there is a word of caution: as supporters have only said they would "reconsider", not a flat out rejection of Trump.

The biggest political danger to Trump comes from Independents who have said in a Reuters/Ipsos poll this April that 60 per cent of them would not vote for him should he be convicted of a crime.

And the Trump campaign would also have to factor in the moderate Republicans and their perceptions of the Manhattan verdict. It is all dicey for Trump looking at November 5, but a lot of hard work for the Biden camp trying to cash in.

The writer is a senior journalist who has reported from Washington DC on North America and UN

#### **• BELOW THE LINE**



BJP's exit poll triumph! Seven exit polls are singing in

harmony, predicting a sweeping win for the BJP-NDA. The numbers are nothing short of

jaw-dropping. Even in Bengal, BJP's performance is set to dazzle,

potentially becoming the

single-largest party in the state. With the BJP's ambitious target of 370 seats and dreams of breaking the 400-seat barrier with allies, the stakes couldn't be higher.

In 2019, the BJP bagged 303 seats, with the NDA tallying up to 352. One is reminded of cricket legend Bradman's third test century and how it came in fewer number of balls than the earlier two centuries. So will Modi win for the third time in a row gaining more number of seats under BJP's belt than the earlier two? Tuesday's results promises to be a nail-biter!

**Meditative Masterstroke** Prime Minister Narendra Modi in

deep meditation before the statue of Swami Vivekananda have sparked both admiration and curiosity across political circles. Modi's active Twitter (now platform 'X') presence during his supposed silent retreat has raised eyebrows. As the nation waits for the election results, the juxtaposition of Modi's serene visuals and his virtual activity stirs a perfect storm of speculation and intrigue. Whatever the political fallout, Modi's blend of serenity and strategy is anything

#### but ordinary **Honest Sonia**

In a virtual message to people of Telangana on the decennial

celebrations, Sonia Gandhi, chairperson of Congress Parliamentary Committee, recollected a promise which she had made in 2004 in Karimnagar that Congress will fulfill their dream of a separate State.

This statement, she acknowledged saw dissent within her own party and some even left the party. But she said she was able to fulfil this dream because of the perseverance and patience of the people of Telangana.

**Subtle brand promotion** At Goafest 2024, on day one of the Abby One Show Awards, Zee's

Puneet Goenka was invited on

stage to speak before the final awards. He started off by saying, "I don't know why I have been called

Then he pointed to the large screen behind which had a lot of logos and said, "Oh I see my brands (Zee News, Zee Entertainment) there. Good brands. Maybe that's why I am here."

Then he turned back dramatically, pointed to the screen again and said with self deprecating humour — "Oh I see the logo of another brand I almost had. (Sony Liv) — or rather which almost had me." The

audience tittered appreciatively.

**Our Bureaus** 

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## Coping with a ban, trolls

Boria Majumdar's book on a period of despair

#### **BOOK REVIEW.**

Giraj Sharma

cricketer promises an interview to a leading sports journalist, historian and show host but keeps him waiting till late at night. This is an interview for which the journalist sets aside two other important interviews as he wanted to respect an earlier commitment to this cricketer. It's late in the evening, well past dinner time when it dawns on the journalist that he has been ghosted.

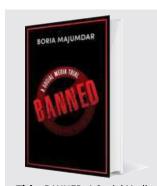
In a moment of despair and frustration, he shoots out messages that the cricketer construes as 'bullying' and all hell breaks loose. The cricketer goes to town with his sob story on Twitter (X) and a huge trial by social media begins. To add to the journalist's woes, there is the stuff that's playing in the background.

The cricketer who tweeted was Wridhiman Saha and the journalist being accused was Boria Majumdar. BCCI took cognizance of the incident and formed a three  $member\,committee\,to\,probe\,the$ threat messages sent out to Saha for declining an interview.

It resulted in the BCCI imposing a two-year ban on Majumdar. The book, Banned, is about how life changed for Majumdar and how he coped with all the insults and abuses he was subjected to on social media. Pleads Boria in the book that his messages 'may have been inappropriately worded in the frustration of the moment, but they were never ever intended as a threat, or any kind of harm'.

Credit is due to Boria for having kept quiet for two years of the ban and having respected the judgment, in letter and spirit. The toll, however, that the ban took on him and his family was heavy. Besides the trauma of trial by social media, Boria ran the risk of a huge financial impact. His company Revsportz was all about sports and here he was almost declared persona non grata by the most influential cricketing board in the world.

Banned is about closure. First there was this self-doubt in Boria's mind and the uphill tasks of picking up the pieces and moving on. Then there was a need to make his enterprise survive because there were careers of his teammates at Revsportz at stake. Coupled with it all was the agony of feeling as an outcast due to the actions of some members of his fraternity.



Title: BANNED: A Social Media

Author: Boria Majumdar

Publisher: Simon & Schuster

**Price:** ₹699

His feelings are best expressed when he asks how did professional competition become stiffer than the brotherhood one had shared? By his own admittance, writing this book was a way to channel his angst and to find solace. That Boria and his family suffered a lot is established in the initial chapters and the writing evokes empathy too but the repetition of the sufferings gets a bit too much for the reader.

#### SUPPORT FROM STARS

Of course, Banned has some little pearls nested in the text — that of sport legends' standing by Boria and supporting him and his company. There is a cute little story on how badminton guru Pullela Gopichand offered to launch Boria's book Maverick Commissioner when Boria felt that no sportsperson would touch him with a bargepole.

Then there are instances of support for his show Breakfast With Boria where stars such as Sourav Ganguly, Gautam Gambhir, and Shoaib Akhtar came on the show for the World Cup in 2023 pro bono.

Intriguingly, Boria doesn't bring up Saha's name at all and refers to him as 'The Cricketer' (Saha had not named Boria in the tweets but did so in the BCCI's committee's hearing thus the

Ás a sports aficionado one would have loved to have more insights on the things that the sports stars told Boria to lift him up — stuff that Gautam Gambhir mentions in Boria's show and is reproduced in the book. That would have lifted Banned from merely being a book for the 'truth being set free' to a book about resilience.

The reviewer is a Delhi-based brand consultant.

# Making of the Tatas' jewellery brand

How can such exquisite jewellery be crafted in such wretched circumstances? This jolted the author to help the karigars

#### BOOK EXTRACT.

Extract published from The Tanishq story: Inside India's no.1 Jewellery Brand by CK Venkataraman, Managing Director of Titan Co. Ltd. This extract is from the chapter titled Partnership.

t was in the early days of my

move into Tanishq. I was in Kolkata, sometime in late 2005 or early 2006. So far, my impression of Tanishq had been one of elegance (the jewellery), grandeur (the stores), innovation (the plant), camaraderie (the office) and professionalism (meetings with vendor partners in our own offices). I didn't realize that I was about to get jolted out of my life in the next ten

We were in Sinthi More, one of the biggest jewellery-making hubs of Kolkata. LRN, some other colleagues and myself had gone to visit the workshops where our vendors made our gold jewellery. It was summer and the temperature was in the high forties. İt was quite a crowded place with narrow streets and narrower alleys, looking like a scene from the early twentieth century. Perhaps very little has changed since then.

We entered a multistorey building. We were told that some of the rooms in this building were rented out to our head karigars, rooms in which the

The ironic thing was the smile with which they all greeted us. A smile so effulgent that it dwarfed the tube lights. Their 'nomoshkar' dissolved the gloom in that place.

bench karigars (those who make the jewellery) worked. Our vendors acted as the aggregators of such head karigars and were the bridge between the company and the centres of production, being responsible for product quality, delivery and gold safety. We climbed to the second floor. The staircase was narrow, and the walls were stained with paan spit. We reached the landing and entered a small room (10 feet x 10 feet, at best).

Even as I was entering the room, I saw a tin sheet door of a toilet on the side and felt the faint whiff of urine. Some of my local colleagues and the vendors were a bit embarrassed and were trying to form a cordon around the 'dignitaries' from Bengaluru.

It's been nearly twenty years since that visit, but I just need to close my eyes today to evoke that scene - the plaster had peeled off from the walls, there was one window which overlooked a kind of courtyard of the building and the ceiling was not beyond 9 feet high. Four small tube lights hung from the ceiling at 5 feet height and provided the light for the workshop. You had to bend a little if you didn't want to bump into the tube lights. There were two nylon ropes strung across the room at the same height on which hung lungis and shirts. Eight karigars were sitting on the floor making jewellery; there were tools and components strewn on the floor. Some of them were assembling the jewellery, some were using torches to solder parts, a few in their *lungis*, many in their underpants, almost all bare-chested to beat the heat.

The ironic thing was the smile with which they all greeted us. A smile so effulgent that it dwarfed the tube lights. Their 'nomoshkar' dissolved the gloom in that place. They showed us the Tanishq jewellery they were

Inside India's No.1 Jewellery Brand THE CK. VENKATARAMAN

Title: The Tanishq Story Author: C.K. Venkataraman **Publisher:** Juggernaut Publication

Price: ₹699

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

C.K. Venkataraman headed the Jewellery division of Titan Company

as COO from 2005 to 2012 and as CEO from 2012 to 2019. Currently he is the MD of Titan Company.

making. The beauty of each piece transported us to another place. I asked them where they have their lunch. They pointed to the dabbas in the corner and told me that, come lunchtime, they simply clear the things on the floor, have lunch and reorganise the place back for work. I nodded, thinking, what was I expecting? We looked at a few more places like this. They were no different – carbon copies

of the first - including the joy of the karigars and the beauty of the Tanishq necklaces.

As we left Sinthi More for our lunch and went back to the office, we were all understandably quiet. I kept thinking, 'How can such exquisite jewellery come out of such wretched circumstances? How can we sell a necklace for Rs 5 lakh to a lady from our elegant Camac Street showroom and still have this situation continue?' These were the questions running in my mind. I was jolted, bothered and burning to do something about this. LRN's heart and mind were equally aligned to this issue. He came up with a powerful phrase: Bring a smile to the karigar's face.

Over the years, various programmes have been created in this direction. Unnatti, Mr Perfect, Mr Perfect+, 4-P. Significant milestones are reached. Remember, this awareness came to us in 2006, when Tanishq was less than two per cent of its current scale. It was more about our burning desire to make a difference in the karigars' lives than our ability at that time to make it. It was our conscience that was impelling us, not our bank balance. It was about stakeholder capitalism.

Is an apparel company thinking about the men and women who are working for its vendor partners, making the clothes it sells? Is it bothered by the conditions in which they work? Are its leaders visiting those centres of manufacturing? How can a food delivery and ride-hail company, even a start-up, think about its delivery people and drivers? Do they sleep adequately, do they eat on time or eat hot food? Everything begins with that empathy.

Extract published with permission from Juggernaut Books

#### **NEW READS.**



Title: Let's Talk Legacy: A Financial Planner for Your Loved Ones quantity

Author: Monika Halan

**Publisher:** HarperBusiness

Monika Halan lists the key aspects of your financial life, from banking, insurance and real estate to stocks

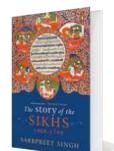


Title: Ruminate: The Sufi Saint on Mastering Life and Business

Author: Hrishikesh

**Publisher:** Bloomsbury India

This book combines Rumi's spirituality and business acumen, offering a roadmap to holistic success



Title: The Story of the Sikhs: 1469-1708

Author: Sarbpreet Singh Publisher: Penguin

Viking

The author takes the reader across the tumultuous decades of the eighteenth century, the red-hot crucible in which the Sikhs were born.

#### thehindu businessline.

#### TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

June 3, 2004

#### Chidambaram meets market players to allay fears

The Finance Minister, Mr P. Chidambaram, today assured critical sections of the financial world that the new Government was committed to economic reform and was aiming a 7-8 per cent growth in GDP. "I am here to tell key economic players that this Government has reaffirmed its commitment to reforms. My meetings with brokers and bankers have been useful. Tomorrow I will be meeting foreign institutional investors, heads of Indian industries, and the heads of RBI, LIC, GIC and UTI," Mr Chidambaram said.

#### Index heavyweights prop up market

Taking a cue from the Finance Minster's approach to provide a healthy investment climate, the stock markets maintained the positive trends. The BSE Sensex moved up 88.57 points to end at 4923.69. The NSE Nifty gained 27.30 points to end at

#### FDI capped at 49 pc for airports' revamp

The UPA Government has lowered the FDI cap to 49 per cent in the proposed modernisation and restructuring of Delhi and Mumbai airports. It has extended the last date for submission of expression of interest by prospective bidders by 45 days.

#### **Short take**

# Lessons from UK's infected blood scandal report

PT Jyothi Datta

t's taken 50 years for people affected by the infected blood scandal in the UK, to see light at the end a long and painful tunnel.

Late last month, an inquiry report into this case was submitted, and it did not hold back on calling out those who should've acted swiftly and put patient safety first.

Between 1970 and 1998, many patients who received blood or blood products, died, suffered or continue to suffer, the report said. "This was not as a direct result of the underlying condition or illness that took them to the NHS in the first place, but as a result of the

treatment itself," it added.

The report noted, "more than 3,000 deaths are attributable to infected blood and blood products. Around 380 children with bleeding disorders were infected with HIV, a third of the 1,250 people with bleeding disorders infected with HIV, with the majority also being coinfected with Hepatitis C and some with Hepatitis Band other infections as well. Three quarters of those with bleeding disorders who were infected with HIV have died. Between 80 and possibly up to about 100 people were infected with HIV through transfusions. About 85% of those have

 $Tragically, the \, affected \, included \, those \,$ getting blood transfusions for reasons varying from child-birth and surgery to

thalassemia, sickle disease, leukaemia and tissue transfer, the report notes.

Pointing out the wrongs done at "individual, collective and systemic levels", the report identified missteps from authorities, including not stopping the use of imported blood products (from dubious sources), despite warnings from different quarters. And importantly, it outlines how authorities can navigate the risk-benefit analysis in public health, calling for greater communication and transparency, besides insisting (not encouraging) on greater reporting of medical concerns.
The UK Prime Minister has apologized

for the "decades-long moral failure at the heart of our national life," according to UK media reports. The focus is also on

compensation to those affected. There's something to be said for Brian

Langstaff's inquiry and comprehensive report pointing out lapses; the Government's apology; and focus on compensation. All three actions were required for those harmed (for no fault of theirs), to not feel left behind by the State. And that's true not just for the UK, but any country including India.

Public life here is strewn with incidents that need honest inquiries, speedy redressal and tough action, to prevent similar incidents from recurring. Recently deaths have been reported from falling billboards, speeding cars, gaming zone and hospital fires - none unfamiliar incidents to an average citizen. But all in need of some strong and honest action.

#### • BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2452

#### **EASY**

**ACROSS** 02. Governed, reigned (5) 05. Head-and-shoulders

sculpture (4) 07. Snatch (4) 08. Directed one's attention (8)

09. Number, second teen (8) 11. Discover (4) 12. Put off to some future time

15. Declare to be true (4) 17. Mixing in with (8)

19. Fauteuil (8) 21. Fruit with stone (4) 22. Preserve (4)

23. Reside (5)

#### **DOWN**

01. Heat of emotion (7) 02. Polish (3) 03. Big (5)

04. Finished, dead (7) 05. Lever (3) 06. Lustre (5)

10. Happen again (5) 11. The last round (5)

13. Brassard (7) 14. Monkish hair style (7) 16. Road edge (5)

18. Look after, tend (5) 20. Drinking-vessel (3) 21. Chum (3)

#### **NOT SO EASY**

02. Got the line straight as one gave one's decision (5)

05. A female vital statistic, when over twenty-one? (4) 07. Boast about how rudely one may take it (4)

08. The man with the whistle was wrong to have turned to it

09. One of this will be twelve months into the teens (8)

11. Come across a bit of fish at the start of dinner (4) 12. Turn-coats print, and are to put it off till later (13) 15. Be wildly enthusiastic about the first last and declare it

17. Mixing Dynasty with Heather (8)

19. Comfortable seat will give president means to fight (8)

21. Something choice for Victoria, say (4)

22. A part of the castle one may save for later (4) 23. Rest attention on the West, being involved in depression

01. Zeal over complicity in mink (7)

02. There it was, for Hamlet to produce 6 perhaps (3)

03. Big spillage of beer (5)

04. Enjoyment in December with first of toys no longer with us

05. It is exclusive, where drinks are dispensed (3)

06. A woman has two ways of looking lustrous (5)

10. It will happen, not for first time, to be concerning dog (5) 11. Last match with three-fifths of flame in its construction (5)

13. Give musicians guns and make a brassard (7)

14. Shaving of crown is certain, but not up to begin with (7) 16. The very brink of what is revealed in over-generosity (5)

18. Look after the railmen's union but use no leader (5) 20. Trophy one may put one's hands together for (3)

21. Angle of the body made sitting up for a friend (3)

#### **SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2451**

ACROSS 1. Buttonholing 8. Totality 9. Apse 11. Merge 12. Ferment 13. Mock 15. User 19. Contour 20. Eight 22. Idea 23. Macaroni 24. Entertaining DOWN 2. Utter 3. Talked 4. Notify 5. Impress 6. Great Britain 7. Stamp machine 10. Fry 14. Content 16. Sow 17. Arcana 18. Detain 21. Grown



#### WORDLY WISE

WINNING OR LOSING OF THE ELECTION IS LESS IMPORTANT THAN STRENGTHENING THE COUNTRY.—

Indira Gandhi

# The Indian EXPRESS

∽ FOUNDED BY ∽ RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

# AFTER THE CONVICTION

Trump's guilty verdict — a triumph of rule of law — will also intensify polarisation in American polity and test its resilience

NTHE AFTERMATH of the conviction of former President Donald Trump last week in a New York court in a hush-money case, his supporters are accusing the Democratic Party of weaponising the courts to undermine a popular Republican leader who secured nearly half of the ballots cast in the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections. The Democrats, of course, have long demonised Trump as a reincarnation of the typical Third World dictator with American characteristics. Ignore for a moment the conservative contempt and liberal condescension towards the Third World in America. The multitude of cases slapped against Trump and his conviction in one of them just ahead of the November election points to the deepening structural crisis in the US system.

The court's decision will intensify the polarisation in the American polity and test its resilience. Those who dislike Trump celebrate the first-ever conviction of a former president as a triumph of the principle that nobody in America is above the law. But Trump's supporters see this as the blatant political targeting of a leader who promises to challenge the dominant American elites. Some in the shrinking middle recognise the importance of the law taking its course, but argue that using technical legal means to defeat Trump, who has questioned the elite consensus on a range of issues, is unwise and counterproductive. That Trump has been convicted in a case that is least political among the multitude of cases filed against him also worries some American political analysts. The charges against Trump include supporting insurrection and election interference. Focus on those issues might have lent greater credibility to the trial and conviction of Trump. The next few weeks will see a continuation of the legal drama along with the acceleration of the political calendar to choose the next president.

What about the impact of the conviction on Trump's electoral prospects? Earlier polls have suggested that a conviction would see a small percentage of supporters stay home or vote against him. New polls might give a better indication on how much support Trump might lose and what it might mean for his standing in key battleground states where he currently enjoys a comfortable lead against President Biden. For now, though, the Republican Party is rallying around Trump. Even those who challenged him for the presidential nomination of the party are characterising the conviction as political chicanery. The US establishment that constantly questions the quality of democracy in other countries and raises questions about the credibility electoral mechanics in them should, for a change, look closely in the mirror. The growing toxicity of American politics, its complex electoral processes with its unique nature of representation and procedures relating to voting and counting, the continuous need for judicial intervention in resolving disputes over electoral results, the suppression of voting by the poor and minorities, and the power of money, all demand that the US political class should preach less and reform more.

# Pro-incumbency

Arunachal and Sikkim return BJP and SKM governments to power, frame Congress's unchecked diminishment

ESULTS OF THE two Assembly elections declared on Sunday — in Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim — show that anti-incumbency sentiments had no place in the people's emphatic endorsement of a second term for the Pema ► Khandu-led BJP government in Arunachal and Prem Singh Tamang's Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM) in Sikkim. If the first is a hat tip to the BJP's ability to build a deepening connection with the people, centred around the persona of the Prime Minister and his government's schemes, and its organisational talent, the latter shows a young state figuring out a way forward. The results raise questions, too, about the Opposition's inertia in both states, and especially in Arunachal Pradesh, where its lack of focus became apparent in its inability to come up with issues that resonated with the electorate. It also reveals the Congress party's diminishing connection with a region where it was once a dominant force. It won one out of 60 seats in Arunachal Pradesh and none of Sikkim's 32 seats.

The script for Sunday's outcomes, though, has been written a page at a time over the last decade. Over this period, defections from other parties have been a major plank of the BJP's strategy in the Northeast, apart from its promises and delivery on infrastructure building. In 2016, Khandu left the Congress with 43 MLAs for the BJP, which played a part in its victory in the 2019 Assembly elections. With 46 out of 60 seats, of which 10 were won unopposed, his government has bettered its own record this time. In Sikkim, the BJP's decision to go solo after its fallout with the SKM was a gamble that did not pay off — it did not win any seat. But it does not take away from the foothold it gained as the largest opposition party after the 2019 Assembly poll in a state where regional rather than ideological concerns have traditionally shaped politics. If anything, the near-total wipeout of Pawan Chamling's Sikkim Democratic Front, that was in power for 25 years and that lost narrowly to the SKM in 2019, indicates a growing confidence among Sikkim's electorate to experiment with change.

For both governments, the real task of governance lies ahead. It would mean a focus on developing infrastructure and employment opportunities. Both are strategic border states crucial to India's Look East policy. With continuing unrest in Myanmar and China's hardening stance on territorial disputes, stability in the region remains a priority. There is also the complication of the fragile ecological balance of these Himalayan states, rendered increasingly more vulnerable by natural disasters such as landslides and glacial outburst floods. Khandu and Tamang will have to hit the ground running.

## Freeze Frame

**EPUNNY** 



# What GDP numbers say



Growth has been impressive, but for it to sustain, next government must revive jobs, boost consumption

RAJANI SINHA

INDIA'S GDP DATA was keenly awaited, coming on the back of sovereign rating outlook upgrade by S&P and just days before the union election results are out. Indeed, it has surpassed market expectations, with a growth of 8.2 per cent in 2023-24 as against 7 per cent in 2022-23. It is to be noted that the growth in 2023-24 is much higher than MOSPI's second advance estimate of 7.6 per cent released in February. While overall GDP growth is impressive, it is important to understand some of the nuances of the data to infer the sustainability of the growth this year.

While the fourth quarter growth has been strong at 7.8 per cent, there has been upward revision in the previous quarter numbers and that has strongly propped up the overall GDP growth for the year. Another important point is the sharp divergence of 1 percentage point between GDP and GVA growth in 2023-24 as against 0.3 percentage point in 2022-23. This is mainly because of sharp growth in net taxes (due to higher tax collection and lower subsidies). This has also aided in pushing up the GDP growth.

If we look at the sectoral break-up, as expected, overall agriculture value added growth has been muted, given the poor monsoon last year. Supported by lower input prices, manufacturing GVA has shown a healthy recovery, with growth of 9.9 per cent in 2023-24 (as against contraction in 2022-23). While services sector growth has been healthy at 7.6 per cent, there has been some moderation in the fourth quarter. There has specifically been a moderation in the segment of trade, hotel, transportation, and communication after strong growth in 2022-23. The construction sector has remained robust, recording a growth of 9.9 per cent in 2023-24.

If we look at the break-up of GDP from the expenditure side, we find that the overall GDP growth is not very broad-based. Private consumption, the main pillar of the economy, has grown by a feeble 3.8 per cent in 2023-24. This is the slowest consumption growth rate in the last two decades (excluding the pandemic year contraction). Investment, the other pil-

Overall GDP growth is not very broad-based. Private consumption, the main pillar of the economy, has grown by a feeble 3.8 per cent in 2023-24. This is the slowest consumption growth rate in the last two decades (excluding the pandemic year contraction). Investment, the other pillar of the Indian economy, has grown by a healthy 9 per cent. Investment in the economy has been mainly led by the government sector. While the private sector is showing signs of recovery, a strong broad-based recovery in the private capex cycle is yet to

lar of the Indian economy, has grown by a healthy 9 per cent. Investment in the economy has been mainly led by the government sector. Central government's capex has grown by a healthy 28 per cent in 2023-24, while aggregate state capex (for 19 major states) has grown by around 33 per cent in April-February. While the private sector is showing signs of recovery, a strong broad-based recovery in the private capex cycle is yet to be seen.

Exports, the third pillar of India's economy, have been muted due to weak global growth. While India's services exports have remained healthy, merchandise exports specifically felt the pinch of global slowdown.

Going forward, we expect India's GDP growth to moderate. However, it is estimated to be still healthy at around 7 per cent this year. For the growth momentum to be sustained, the most critical aspect would be an improvement in private consumption. While the higher income category has been spending, the lower income category remains cautious amidst high inflation and low wage growth. Rural demand had also been weak due to poor monsoon last year. With normal monsoon expected this year, we can expect a revival in rural consumption demand. We are already seeing some signs of improvement in rural demand as reflected by healthy growth in two-wheeler sales and recovery in FMCG sales volume in rural areas (as reflected by Nielson data). However, appropriate spatial and temporal distribution of rainfall will be critical for rural demand recovery. Moderation in food inflation will be another prerequisite for rural consumption revival. Improvement in the employment scenario will also be an important piece for consumption revival. EPFO's payroll data shows improvement in net enrolment in the second half of 2023-24. However, poor hiring by the IT sector, a major employment generator for the economy, remains a concern. Improvement in the employment situation in the unorganised sector will also be critical.

A pick-up in the private capex cycle is another important requirement for sustained growth momentum. With capacity utilisation in manufacturing at 75 per cent (close to the long-term average), and bank and corporate balance sheets in good shape, the ground is set for capex revival. The private sector is showing increasing intent to invest, as reflected by the CMIE data on investment projects announced. However, the critical aspect here will be policy certainty and confidence in global and domestic economic stability. Of course, a sustained revival in consumption demand would be most critical for private investment to pick up meaningfully.

The other important factor to watch out for is developments in the global arena. With the global growth outlook improving, India's exports are likely to improve. However, with geo-political tensions brewing, the risk of supply shocks continues to linger. The recent uptick in global commodity prices, specifically industrial metals prices, could adversely impact the Indian economy through higher input cost. Further worsening of US-China trade relations or aggravation of global debt woes could send the global economy in a tizzy, with repercussions for the Indian economy.

In a nutshell, while the Indian economy has recorded impressive growth, there is a need to exercise caution and take some quick actions to ensure sustainability. In the next few days, a new government will be formed that will have a tall task at hand to ensure high economic growth, even while moving towards fiscal consolidation. The most important challenge that the new government should take on is ensuring a broad-based consumption revival, while continuing the focus on capex-led recovery. Increasing job opportunities in urban and rural areas should be a priority. Sustained consumption growth and high capex by the government will help in the pick-up of the private capex cycle. For economic growth to be sustained, it will be important for the new government to ensure that the benefits of high growth trickle down to the lower income categories.

> The writer is chief economist Care Edge Ratings

# GANDHI BEFORE ATTENBOROUGH

The Mahatma was successfully exported a long time ago

SANDIP ROY

THE MAHATMA HAS had an unexpected cameo in Elections 2024.

The Prime Minister, while talking about the Congress government's various failings, commented that in the last 75 years it should have been our responsibility to let the world know of Mahatma Gandhi. Instead, he said "it was only after the film Gandhi that the world became curious about him."

I was a boy in Kolkata when that Richard Attenborough film came out in 1982. Our neighbours, a kindly professor couple, took the neighbourhood children to see it at Globe Theatre. We were probably more excited about the outing (and the popcorn) than the subject matter. It was not because we weren't familiar with Gandhi but because we were almost too familiar with him. His bald-headed visage was everywhere and we craved polyester not khadi. But our parents' generation had actually seen Gandhi, Nehru and Jinnah. They were

excited to see them come to life on screen. Certainly Gandhi and its eight Oscars made Mahatma Gandhi part of international pop culture's mainstream. But to say the world only became curious about Gandhi after the film is sheer mann ki baat, not fact. The big studios are not the National Film Development Corporation of India, making films on worthy subjects no one is curious about. Though Attenborough struggled for years to find the funding for what was deemed a "non-commercial" project, the reason he made the film was precisely because there was curiosity about the famous "seditious half-naked fakir" who had inspired Martin Luther King Jr and Nelson Mandela. Neither King nor Mandela

INDIAN EXPRESS

Certainly 'Gandhi' and its eight Oscars made Mahatma Gandhi part of international pop culture's mainstream. But to say the world only became curious about Gandhi after the film is sheer 'mann ki baat', not fact. The reason Attenborough made the film was precisely because there was curiosity

about the famous 'seditious half-naked fakir' who had inspired Martin Luther King Jr and Nelson Mandela.

would have been aware of Gandhi if indeed no one knew about Gandhi before 1982.

While many of India's problems can be laid at the Congress government's door, without Indira Gandhi's active cooperation, Attenborough's film would not have been made. In his book Rebels Against the Raj: Western Fighters for India's Freedom (2022), Ramachandra Guha recounts that Gandhi's associate Madeline Slade aka Mira Behn wrote to Indira Gandhi requesting her to meet Attenborough and scriptwriter Robert Bolt when they visited India in 1966. Mrs Gandhi replied, "I myself am greatly interested in the Gandhi film as I feel a good film on this subject would be of tremendous help to us, and it is probably easier for an outsider to make it.' Bolt dropped out, the project languished, the Janata government came to power. Finally, in 1980, it was Indira Gandhi — who had returned as Prime Minister — who sanctioned a large grant that helped make the film a reality.

One might ask why did an Indian filmmaker not honour the Father of the Nation? Why did it take Attenborough? But Mrs Gandhi was right. An Indian film about an Indian leader would have ultimately been local. Attenborough made it an international project. For all its flaws, it helped Gandhi find new audiences which is what had excited Mira Behn about the project.

But that's not to say Gandhi had been forgotten before 1982. He is the only Indian on stamps in scores of countries including Great Britain, even though the British Postmaster General fretted that no other overseas leader like Roosevelt or Eisenhower had received that honour. Philip Glass composed the opera Satyagraha in 1980. His statues are in cities around the world. When I first visited San Francisco, I found, to my surprise, seagulls perching on Gandhiji as he looked out at the fog rolling in across the bay. He featured thrice on the cover of Time magazine. There were impassioned debates on whether it was a travesty that he had not received the Nobel Peace prize. Albert Einstein famously had a portrait of Gandhi in his study in Princeton calling him the "greatest man of our age."

Whether he indeed was "the greatest man of our age" is a different debate. In Accra, some university professors demanded his statue be removed from the campus because of comments he had made about race. Despite those problematic views, the African American civil rights activist Bayard Rustin was so inspired by Gandhi, the "angelic troublemaker", he came to India in 1948 for seven weeks to study his philosophy of non-violence.

Even now companies like Apple and Mont Blanc pens want to use Gandhi to sell their expensive products. And everyone from Barack Obama to B2B marketers exhort us to be the change we want to see in the world. The world might be hurtling away from Gandhi's vision but if there is anything India managed to export successfully to the world other than curry and yoga, it's undoubtedly Mahatma Gandhi The New York Times game Spelling Bee refuses to accept "tiffin" as a valid word but is okay with "mahatma"!

> Roy is a novelist and the author of Don't Let Him Know

# UNE 3, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO ARMY IN PUNJAB Army out in Punjab to combat terrorism

THE ARMY HAS been called out in Punjab to help civil authorities restore law and order in the state. The decision to take the assistance of the Army was taken by the central government on the recommendation of the Punjab Governor, B D Pande. A Home Ministry announcement said that Punjab had been declared a restricted area under

# the Foreigners Act.

68 KILLED BY MILITANTS At least 68 persons were killed and over 100 injured when tribal insurgents attacked three settler villages in Chittagong Hill

tracts, nearly 150 km North of Chittagong. The insurgents known as Shanti Bahini (peace force) used Soviet-made automatic weapons and had come from across the border. The three settlements that were attacked are located within 5 km of the India-Bangladesh border in Mizoram.

## PLEA FOR DEMOCRACY

THE CHAIRMAN OF the Minorities Commission, M H Beg, a former chief justice of the Supreme Court has advocated a changeover to a "stronger system of government" in order to "discipline democracy". Votes, he said, were being sought in the name of caste and creed. The country needed to "change" to control the forces of communal frenzy and economic interests parading as religious grievances.

## HEAT WAVE IN INDIA

WHILE THE MONSOON grew in strength in Kerala with heavy rains throughout the state, the northern states had little respite from the unprecedented heat wave, now in its fourth week. The highest temperature of the state was registered in Agra and Jhansi – 45 degrees celsius. The states now under the grip of heat are Jammu and Kashmir, Delhi, Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Orissa and Bihar.

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# THE IDEAS PAGE

# political power."

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

#### "Reducing inequality has been a feature, to his credit, of Mr Gandhi's campaign. The trouble for India is that Mr Modi has a knack for turning anger and fear into - THE GUARDIAN

# We need to dream new dreams

Bharat cannot limit reform to just economic reforms, we must move forward in every aspect of life, writes the Prime Minister on board the flight from Kanniyakumari to Delhi



Narendra Modi

MY FELLOW INDIANS,

The biggest festival of democracy, the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, are concluding today in our nation, the Mother of Democracy. After a three-day spiritual journey in Kanniyakumari, I have just boarded the plane for Delhi.

My mind is filled with so many experiences and emotions. I feel a boundless flow of energy within myself. The 2024 Lok Sabha elections are the first in the Amrit Kaal. I began my campaign a few months ago from Meerut, the land of the First War of Independence of 1857. Since then, I have traversed the length and breadth of our great nation. The final rally of these elections took me to Hoshiarpur in Punjab, the land of the great Gurus and associated with Sant Ravidas ji. After that, I came to Kanniyakumari at the feet of Maa Bharti.

It is natural that the fervour of the elections was echoing in my heart and mind. The multitude of faces seen in rallies and road shows, the blessings from our Nari Shakti – the trust, the affection, all of this was a very humbling experience. My eyes were getting moist... I entered into a "sadhana" (meditative state). And then, the heated political debates, the attacks and counter-attacks, the voices and words of accusations so characteristic of an election, they all vanished into a void. A sense of detachment came to grow within me, my mind became completely detached from the external world.

Meditation becomes challenging amid huge responsibilities, but the land of Kanniyakumari and the inspiration of Swami Vivekananda made it effortless. As a candidate myself, I left my campaign in the hands of my beloved people of Kashi and came here.

I am grateful to God for instilling in me values from birth which I have cherished and tried to live up to. I was also thinking about what Swami Vivekananda must have experienced during his meditation at this very place in Kanniyakumari! A part of my meditation was spent in a similar stream of thoughts...

Friends, Kanniyakumari has always been very close to my heart. The Vivekananda Rock Memorial in Kanniyakumari was built under the leadership of Shri Eknath Ranade ji. I had the opportunity to travel extensively with Eknath ji. During the construction of this memorial, I had the opportunity to spend some time in Kanniyakumari as well...

Kanniyakumari is the land of confluences. The sacred rivers of our country flow into different seas, and here, those very seas converge. We witness another great confluence — the ideological confluence of Bharat! Here, we find the Vivekananda Rock Memorial, a grand statue of Saint Thiruvalluvar, Gandhi Mandapam, and Kamarajar Mani Mandapam. These streams of thought from these stalwarts converge here to form a confluence of national thought. This gives rise to great inspirations for nation-building. This land of Kanniyakumari gives an indelible message of unity, especially to any person who doubts Bharat's nationhood and its sense of unity...

Friends, Swami Vivekananda once said, "Every nation has a message to deliver, a mis-



C R Sasikumar

sion to fulfil, a destiny to reach." For thousands of years, Bharat has been moving forward with this sense of meaningful purpose. Bharat has been a cradle of ideas for thousands of years. We have never considered what we have acquired as our personal wealth or measured it purely by economic or material parameters. Therefore, "Idam-na-mama" (this is not mine) has become an inherent and natural part of the character of Bharat.

Bharat's welfare benefits our planet's journey to progress as well... Today, Bharat's governance model has become an example for many countries around the world. Empowering 25 crore people to rise above poverty in just 10 years is unprecedented. Innovative practices such as propeople good governance, aspirational districts, and aspirational blocks are being discussed globally today. Our efforts, from empowering the poor to last-mile delivery, have inspired the world by prioritising individuals standing at the last rung of society. Bharat's Digital India campaign is now an example for the entire world, showing how we can use technology to empower the poor, bring transparency, and ensure their rights... Since the success of the G-20, the world has been increasingly envisioning a bigger role for Bharat.

The development trajectory of Bharat fills us with pride and glory, but at the same time, it also reminds the 140 crore citizens of their responsibilities. Now, without wasting a single moment, we must step forward towards greater duties and larger goals. We need to dream new dreams, convert them into reality and begin living those dreams.

We must see Bharat's development in a global context, and for this, it is essential that we understand Bharat's internal capabilities... The world of the 21st century is looking towards Bharat with many hopes. And we will need to make several changes to move forward in the global scenario. We also need to change our traditional thinking regarding reform. Bharat cannot limit reform to just economic reforms. We must move forward in every aspect of life towards the direction of reform. Our reforms should also align with the aspirations of a Viksit Bharat (developed India) by 2047.

We must understand that reform can never be a unidimensional process for any country. Therefore, I have laid out the vision of reform, perform, and transform for the country. The responsibility of reform lies with leadership. Based on that, our bureaucracy performs, and when the people join in with the spirit of Jan Bhagidari, we witness a transformation taking place.

We must make excellence the fundamental principle to make our country Viksit Bharat. We need to work quickly in all four directions: Speed, Scale, Scope, and Standards. Alongside manufacturing, we must also focus on quality and adhere to the mantra of "zero defect-zero effect."

We should take pride in every moment that God has blessed us with birth in the land of Bharat. God has chosen us to serve Bharat and fulfil our role in our country's journey towards excellence.

We must redefine our heritage in a modern way while embracing ancient values in a modern context. As a nation, we need to reassess outdated thinking and beliefs. We need to free our society from the pressure of professional pessimists. We must remember that freedom from negativity is the first step towards achieving success. Success blossoms in the lap of positivity. My faith, devotion, and belief in the infinite and eternal power of Bharat are growing day by day. Over the past 10 years, I have seen this capability of Bharat grow even more and have experienced it first-hand.

Just as we utilised the fourth and fifth decades of the 20th century to impart a new momentum to the freedom movement, we must lay the foundation for a Viksit Bharat in these 25 years of the 21st century. The freedom struggle was a time that called for great sacrifices. The present times call for great and

sustained contributions from everyone. Swami Vivekananda had said in 1897 that we must dedicate the next 50 years solely for the nation. Exactly 50 years after this call, Bharat gained independence in 1947.

Today, we have the same golden opportunity. Let's dedicate the next 25 years solely for the nation. Our efforts will create a strong foundation for the coming generations, taking Bharat to new heights. Looking at the energy and enthusiasm of the country, I can say that the goal is not far. Let us take swift steps, let us come together and create a Viksit Bharat.

> The writer is Prime Minister of India (The full version is available online at indianexpress.com)

# From repair to growth

After focusing on the supply side, attention must be on



SAJJID Z CHINOY

THE RECENT FULL-YEAR GDP release, the conclusion of voting and the imminence of the next administration make this an opportune moment to take stock of the economy. But with GDP growth surging past 8 per cent, is there much to contemplate?

First, a caveat. The computation of GDP benefitted from significantly lower subsidies last year, which is unlikely to repeat. Therefore, Gross Value Added appears more representative of underlying dynamics and that has slowed from 8.3 per cent to 6.3 per cent over the last four quarters. For the full year, however, GVA still averaged 7.2 per cent, which is very creditworthy, and reflects the confluence of four growth drivers: A large infrastructure push by the Centre and states; a residential housing market that is flourishing; healthy financial sector balance sheets that are driving credit deepening, and a surge in service exports underwritten by Global Capability Centres that have helped white-collar job creation and consumption.

But we cannot take growth for granted. Why? Because sustained growth depends crucially on investment prospects. It's investment that creates jobs, which creates demand that validates the initial investment and attracts more, thereby perpetuating a virtuous cycle. Thus far, much of investment has been driven by the public sector. Fixed investment has risen from 31.6 per cent of GDP pre-pandemic to 33.5 per cent but more than half of this is public investment, which will eventually face fiscal constraints.

Why? Because even as the Centre sharply consolidated its fiscal deficit last year, state deficits widened, such that the combined deficit is still close to 9 per cent of GDP. Even if the combined deficit is reduced to 7.5 per cent as currently envisaged, nominal GDP growth will need to average 10 per cent — more than achieved last year — just to stabilise public debt, let alone bring it down. The implication: Even more consolidation may be required for debt sustainability.

This will make it harder for public investment to do the heavy lifting. The baton will have to pass to the private sector. Real estate investment has picked up, but what's delaying the corporate capex cycle? Quite simply, demand visibility. Balance sheets are strong corporates have deleveraged and profits are healthy. But investment requires demand visibility for corporates to commit. Where is the lack of demand showing up? In capacity utilisation rates that have been unable to break out of the 74-75 per cent range, in nominal sales growth that has been in single digits, and in soft core inflation, suggesting corporates lack pricing power. Add to this, the quantum of excess capacity that China is exporting globally, and you can see why corporates are diffident to invest.

A demand deficiency is typically met by countercyclical fiscal and monetary policy. But fiscal policy is constrained for the reasons described above. And while monetary may have some space to ease, it's likely to be limited by the high-for-long stance of the US Fed. More fundamentally, if demand is constrained by more structural factors, any cyclical response will have limited efficacy.

Therein lies the policy challenge for the next administration — to boost demand without the luxury of fiscal space. So where can that demand come from? With government spending needing to eventually retreat it will need to come from private consumption and exports.

On its part, consumption has disappointed, growing at just 4.2 per cent over the

last five years, constrained by its own duality. Upper-end consumption has been strong, but lower-end consumption – though healing in recent months — has lagged, reflecting a dichotomous labour market. But slowing consumption predated the pandemic. A consumption revival is therefore key to investment prospects.

This will need to be complemented by exports. No country without a large commodity endowment has experienced sustained growth without exports firing. Even as services exports have surged, the share of manufacturing exports to GDP has declined. For exports to move the investment needle they will need to broaden. So, what should the next administration focus on?

First, an overarching strategy to boost employment. Tepid consumption growth has its genesis in the labour market. The employment to working age population has been under pressure for at least two decades, suggesting employment has not kept pace with the demographic transition. To be sure, the ratio has improved in recent years. But the quality of jobs remains a concern, with more than half the jobs created in the last five years, for example, in agriculture.

A more holistic way to measure the ask is to look at labour's contribution to GDP growth, versus that of capital and total factor productivity. What one finds is that over the last two decades, labour's contribution is much lower than growth of the workingage population would suggest, in sharp contrast to what China and Korea achieved during their demographic transitions.

This underperformance, in turn, can be explained by manufacturing becoming progressively more capital-intensive. Strikingly, in a labour-abundant country, entrepreneurs are choosing capital-intensive techniques and sectors. Their revealed preference suggests that, once adjusted for productivity and friction, labour is a relatively unattractive factor of production. And therein lies the policy challenge — to make labour a more attractive factor of production. This will require a full-court press on both the demand and supply sides. From stepping up education, health and skilling, to rationalising labour laws, incentivising labour-intensive manufacturing and enabling small firms to grow, it will span the full ambit of policymaking.

Second, India will need to develop an "export ecosystem". This will entail doubling down on education and skilling to maintain a comparative advantage in services exports. It also means harnessing the potential of labour-intensive manufacturing exports. The to-dos are well known — reducing import tariffs, investing in coastal economic zones where factor markets and infrastructure are not a binding constraint, engaging in trade facilitation and managing the exchange rate judiciously. But all this will require large public investments in human and physical capital. Where will that fiscal space come from if deficits need to be reduced? It will have to come from higher tax revenues and asset sales. The good news is that the combined tax/GDP is expected to surpass 18 per cent of GDP for the first time in 2023-24. But more is needed. The necessary fiscal consolidation needs to occur from revenue augmentation, not expenditure compression.

In the coming weeks, a slew of policy advice will emerge for the next administration. But political capital and state capacity should not be dispersed over laundry lists of niceto-haves. Instead, the focus should be squarely on identifying the binding constraints to growth and releasing them. The last decade has been spent repairing the supply side — from the banking system, to infrastructure, to housing and bankruptcy. Now the focus must turn to structurally boosting demand through employment, consumption and exports.

Morgan. All views are personal

The writer is Chief India Economist at J.F.

# A new kind of green

To accelerate the energy transition, a different policy framework is required

We must redefine our

heritage in a modern way

while embracing ancient

As a nation, we need to

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GENERALS ARE, ON occasion, accused of preparing for the last war. The mandarins responsible for energy in the next government should not make this mistake. India is in the midst of a significant energy transition. The decision makers would be wise to create a new strategic framework for energy policy and its implementation.

OVER THE BARREL

BY VIKRAM S. MEHTA

Our energy policy is dual pronged. One prong is focused on fossil fuels. The priority here is to manage and mitigate the increasing import dependency on petroleum. The specifics of this prong are diversification of the sources of imports, strategic reserves, domestic exploration, demand conservation and efficiency and environmental protection.

The second prong is focused on accelerating the transition to clean renewable fuels. Here the specifics flow from the longer term commitment to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2070 to the shorter/medium term objectives of reducing carbon intensity of GDP and creating 500 GW of electricity generation capacity from non fossil fuels by 2030.

These two prongs are developed and implemented by functional, vertically structured ministries. The Ministry of Petroleum is responsible for the first prong. And as coal accounts for the largest share in our energy consumption basket, the Ministry of Coal is also crucially significant. The second prong has a more cluttered parentage. The Ministries of Renewables and Power predominate, but the Ministries of Heavy Industry, Mines and Minerals, IT and Information and Environment are also involved. This is because many of components required to build a green energy ecosystem fall in their jurisdiction.

Each of these government ministries is headed by a cabinet minister. They all have a phalanx of bureaucrats who operate within well defined, narrow and impermeable siloes. There is no formal executive forum for an integrated discussion on energy policy.

I have often commented on the sub optimality of such a compartmentalised decision making structure. But I do so because I believe the targets for decarbonisation and sustainability that India has publicly announced will be difficult to achieve unless decision makers view the energy value chain through one integrated lens. This is because of the international forces that bear on the green transition.

The world is once again confronted by great power competition. The US and its allies are pitted against China and Russia in a new version of the Cold War. Taiwan is the "Berlin" of this contest and technological superiority the surrogate for nuclear arms race. This Cold War has ramifications for the green agenda along three axes — supply chain resilience, domestic investment and national security.

China has a near monopoly concentration on global supplies of materials essential for green energy. It also produces the least cost solar wafers, cells, panels and wind turbines. And it has stolen a march over others on low cost green technology. Domestic manufacturers of solar, wind and EVs have been the beneficiaries. But there are national security concerns. What is supplied can also be withheld.

To mitigate this exposure, the Indian government has imposed duties on Chinese imports and introduced the PLI scheme to incentivise domestic manufacturers. It has not, however, created a strategic frame a la the Chips and Science Act legislated by the US.

The next government should consider developing such a frame. The purpose should be to weave the different strands of policy related to fossil fuels and green energy into one seamless whole and converge the current two-track energy policy onto one track. The government should, as a first step, prepare a document captioned "Energy strategy: Towards convergence, security and sustainability". Such a document should address the following issues.

One, the relationship between the hydrocarbon PSEs and other energy companies. Several of the former are now operating in the domain of the latter. The intent should be to

prevent duplicity of effort and resources. Two, IEA has forewarned that the market

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for copper, lithium, nickel and cobalt will be volatile and there will be supply shortages in the absence of additional investment in mining. India must, therefore, lay out a clear strategy for meeting its future requirements.

Three, in the face of the "China factor", the competitiveness of clean energy vis a vis fossil fuels and the ease of access to low cost green technology. The US and EU have imposed antidumping duties on Chinese EVs. The reasons are understandable. National security should take priority over economics. But there will be an impact on investors and on the pace of the green transition. These ramifications should be studied.

Four, board rooms are currently cautious about green investment. But, private capital is crucial for the transition. The government must address this risk aversion. One approach could be to identify specific sectors or activities for special incentives. Another, to step up public investment and "crowd in" private capital. The strategy document should detail the options and lay out a road map.

The next government's challenge is to reduce the share of fossil fuel against the backdrop of a polarised international geopolitical context and technological innovation.

> The writer is chairman and distinguished fellow, CSEP

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## A SIGH OF RELIEF

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'An ugly campaign ends' (IE, June 2). The average Indian will have heaved a sigh of relief that the campaign of the sevenphase-long Lok Sabha election has ended. It was marked by allegations, counter-allegations, lies and comebacks by all parties. In my 50 years as a spectator of elections, I have never witnessed such a high-level campaign being marred by hate speeches and communal statements.

**SS Paul,** Nadia

## EXIT OF EXIT POLLS

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'Exit polls forecast resounding return of BIP-led NDA with gains across South, Bengal and Odisha' (IE, June 2). Various exit polls have already given their verdict in favour of the BJP with some of the polls even suggesting that its 400 target could be achieved. The polls also agreed that

Modi's hat-trick, which would equal Nehru's record, was the stunning expansion of BJP's base in the eastern and southern states. But exit polls have not always been accurate. They are just a tool to excite the voters and may be entirely misleading. It's a business model for TV channels and other agencies involved at the end of the day.

Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

#### Trump and the law THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Felon

Trump'(IE, June 1). It is the first time that a US president has received a guilty verdict from a jury on 34 felony counts. After the criminal conviction, Donald Trump behaved unethically and threatened the jurors, witnesses and even the judges' family. Calling the trial rigged and a "political witch hunt" makes no sense. He should respect the law and remain calm and composed while going for appeal and facing other cases.

**Subhash Vaid,** New Delhi

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If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to explained@indianexpress.com

# A woman President in Mexico, a victory for gender equality



OVERNIGHT IN India, Mexicans have voted for their first woman President. The historic election features two prominent women candidates — Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo of the ruling Morena Party, and Xóchitl Gálvez Ruiz of the Fuerza y Corazón por México (Strength and Heart for Mexico; earlier known as Frente Amplio por México) opposition coalition.

The first official preliminary results were expected by 10 pm local time (9.30 am in India on Monday). The winner will take office on October 1 for a six-year term until 2030.

There is a third, long-shot candidate, Jorge Álvarez Máynez of the centre left Citizens' Movement party.

#### End of 'machismo'

The election marks a significant shift in Mexican politics by ending the 'machismo' that defined the presidency for long. The candidature of two women symbolises the progress Mexico has made in its democratisation process since 1988, when its first competitive presidential election was held. Sunday's election marked Mexico's transition from a mere functional democracy to a democracy based on strong institutional foundations.

The election sets a precedent for North America as a whole — neither the United States nor Canada has yet elected a woman as President. Mexico's next leader will be the seventh elected woman President in Latin America, after Violeta Chamorro of Nicaragua

(1990), Mireya Elisa Moscoso of Panama (1999), Michelle Bachelet of Chile (2006), Cristina Fernández de Kirchner of Argentina (2007), Laura Chinchilla of Costa Rica (2010) and Dilma Rousseff of Brazil (2011).

The current contest is a testament to the significant strides Mexico has made towards gender equality in politics. For decades, Mexican authorities, political parties, and civil society organisations have made efforts through advocacy, legislation, and campaigns to raise the representation of women in Congress and other political institutions. In 2018, the 500-member Mexican Congress achieved gender parity with 246 women and 254 men, contrasting starkly with 1991, when only 23 representatives were women.

## First efforts at democratisation

The first step towards a multi-party political system was to move away from 90 years of single-party rule. Historically, Mexico's political landscape was dominated by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (*Partido* Revolucionario Institucional, or PRI), which maintained control through authoritarian practices including dedazo, in which the outgoing President selected his successor.

An internal faction demanding democratisation challenged PRI's dominance in 1988, leading to the formation of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (Partido de la Revolución Democrática, or PRD). The ruling party declared Carlos Salinas de Gortari of PRI the winner who, upon completion of his sexenio, or six-year presidential term, admitted that the 1988 election had been rigged.

#### Reforms take root

But Salinas was the last PRI president to be selected through dedazo. His successor, Ernesto Zedillo, was chosen by a more democratic

process within the PRI, marking the beginning of substantive electoral reforms. Salinas initiated institutional arrangements to conduct fair elections. Zedillo continued the reforms, aimed at ensuring equal participation for all parties and reducing the PRI's outsize influence. In 2000, Vicente Fox of the National Action

Party (Partido Acción Nacional, or PAN) defeated candidates from PRI and PRD, becoming the first opposition leader to win the presidency. The result demonstrated the effectiveness of the reforms.

In 2006, Felipe Calderón, also of PAN, was elected President. Subsequent reforms ensured fair multi-party participation through various agencies that monitored electoral spending, campaign funding, and campaign duration.

#### Process to fruition

In 2012, PRI made a comeback as Enrique

Peña Nieto defeated Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) of PRD, providing evidence that the electoral reforms had struck roots deep enough to allow a former ruling party candidate to return to power.

A more significant shift came in 2018, when AMLO, having left the PRD to form the National Regeneration Movement (Movimiento Regeneración Nacional, or Morena), won the presidency, signalling the rise of a third force in Mexican politics.

The current contest is between Morena and FAM, an alliance comprising PRI, PAN, and PRD. Mexicans will also vote for 128 federal Senators, 500 Congress members, Governors in nine states, and numerous local officials.

Dr Ravindranathan P teaches at the Department of Geopolitics and International Relations, Manipal Academy of Higher Education

## **EXPLAINED SCIENCE**

# JWST SPOTS EARLIEST-KNOWN GALAXY: WHAT A NEW STUDY SAYS



image of the JADES-GS-z14-0 (shown in the pullout) galaxy from James Webb Space **Telescope.** NASA

galaxy, one that is surprisingly bright and big considering it formed during the universe's infancy — at only 2% its current age. JWST, which by peering across vast

cosmic distances is looking way back in time, observed the galaxy as it existed about 290 million years after the Big Bang event that initiated the universe roughly 13.8 billion years ago, the researchers said. This period spanning the universe's first few hundred million years is called cosmic dawn.

The discovery was made by an international team of astronomers, who used JWST to observe galaxies as part of the IWST Advanced Deep Extragalactic Survey (JADES) program. The study was published online last week ahead of formal peer review.

#### What do we know about the galaxy? This galaxy, called JADES-GS-z14-0,

measures about 1,700-light years across. A light year is the distance light travels in a year, which is 9.5 trillion km. The galaxy has a mass equivalent to 500 million stars the size of our Sun and is rapidly forming new stars — about 20 every year.

"The early universe has surprise after surprise for us," said astrophysicist Kevin Hainline of Steward Observatory at the University of Arizona, one of the authors of the study.

Until now, the earliest-known galaxy dated to about 320 million years after the Big Bang, as announced by the JADES team last year.

"It makes sense to call the galaxy big, because it's significantly larger than other

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ured at these distances, and it's going to be challenging to understand just how something this large could form in only a few hundred million years," Hainline said.

closed the discovery of the second oldestknown galaxy, from about 303 million years post-Big Bang. This one, JADES-GS-z14-1, is smaller

— with a mass equal to about 100 million sun-sized stars, measuring roughly 1,000 light years across and forming about two new stars per year.

## Why is the galaxy so bright?

Three main hypotheses have been adblack hole gluttony.

**REUTERS** 



galaxies that the JADES team has meas-

"The fact that it's so bright is also fascinating, given that galaxies tend to grow larger as the universe evolves, implying that it would potentially get significantly brighter in the next many hundred million years," Hainline said.

The JADES team in the same study dis-

vanced to explain the luminosity of early galaxies. The first attributed it to supermassive black holes in these galaxies gobbling up material. That appears to have been ruled out by the new findings because the light observed is spread over an area wider than would be expected from

It remains to be seen whether the other hypotheses — that these galaxies are populated by more stars than expected or by stars that are brighter than those around today — will hold up, according to astrophysicist and study coauthor Francesco D'Eugenio of the Kavli Institute for Cosmology at the University of Cambridge.

/AJIRAM & RAVI

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able to limit their fiscal deficit (the amount of money they had to borrow to bridge the gap between expenses and income) within the budgeted levels (Chart). This is a significant achievement, since over-borrowing by states adds to the Centre's over-borrowings, and ultimately leaves less money for private sector firms to borrow. Less investible funds imply higher bor-

ECONOMISTS AT the public sector Bank of

Baroda have published a report about the fi-

nances of Indian states for the financial year

rowing costs for everything from home and car loans to factory loans. It is particularly noteworthy that large states such as Gujarat, Maharashtra, Odisha, and Tamil Nadu undershot their budgeted borrowings by over 30%.

# Capital spends

**UDIT MISRA** 

NEW DELHI, JUNE 2

**Fiscal Deficit** 

The second important finding was regarding capital expenditures (capex) by state governments. This is the kind of spending that goes into making productive assets such as roads and bridges, which boost economic activity in the state. Typically, when governments try to meet fiscal deficit targets, they tend to cut on capex, which in turn, tends to undermine the ability of the state economy to grow faster.

Taken together, states managed to spend only 84% of their capex budget. (Table 1) There were four outliers (in green) — Uttar Pradesh, Telangana, Bihar and Sikkim — that either spent the full amount or went beyond the target. Three states (in pink) — Punjab, Chhattisgarh, and Nagaland – spent less than 50% of their capex budget.

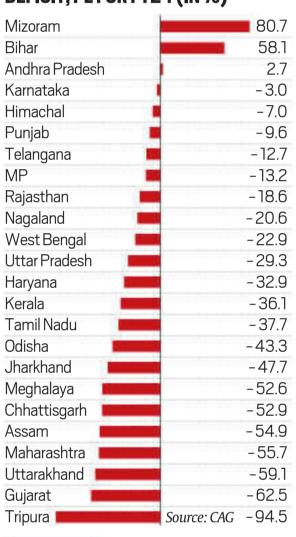
## Tax revenues

A state's total tax revenues can be broadly divided into two heads: own tax revenues (OTR), and share in Union taxes.

The researchers found that overall, OTR accounted for around 61% of tax revenues of states. Within the OTR, GST (Goods and Services Tax) collections made up the biggest chunk (almost 32%), followed by state excise and sales tax (22%) and stamp and registration (7%).

A higher share of OTR helps a state to be more fiscally resilient. Telangana had the highest share of OTR in total tax revenue (82%), closely followed by Haryana (79%), Karnataka (78%), Kerala (77%), Maharashtra (73%), and Tamil Nadu (71%).

#### DEVIATION FROM BUDGETED FISCAL **DEFICIT, PE FOR FY24 (IN%)**



### TABLE 1:

**EXPLAINED ECONOMICS** 

Consumption and voting

Data suggest a North-South and East-West consumption divide among Indian states, a proxy for income

levels. The results of the election could suggest if there is a political significance to the consumption divide

#### **CAPEX (IN RS CR) & ACHIEVEMENT AS % OF BUDGETED AMOUNT** (SELECTED STATES)

OLLEGIED STATES)				
State	Capex Budget	Capex Actual	Ratio	
JP	1,09,108	1,09,108	100.0	
Maharashtra	95,040	71,330	75.1	
Gujarat	70,326	56,409	80.2	
Karnataka	58,327	51,911	89.0	
MP	52,765	49,105	93.1	
Tamil Nadu	49,145	39,540	80.5	
Rajasthan	41,582	30,651	73.7	
Telangana	36,787	43,539	118.4	
Chhattisgarh	32,306	16,032	49.6	
Bihar	30,357	35,085	115.6	
Punjab	10,305	4,821	46.8	
Nagaland	7,986	3,129	39.2	
Sikkim	2,251	2,690	119.5	
25 states*	8,37,147	7,02,834	84.0	

Source: CAG. Total of 25 states includes states not mentioned in table.

7,029

6,572

5,822

5,210

5,197

4,994

4,764

4,645

4,440

4,156

4,154

3,885

3,185

Average for these 25 states

Punjab

Odisha

Bihar

Meghalaya

Rajasthan

Chhattisgarh

West Bengal

Assam

Tripura

**Jharkhand** 

Madhya Pradesh

Uttar Pradesh

#### CONSUMPTION PATTERNS, STATES AND PER CAPITA GST (IN RS) Per capita GST (in Rs)

State	Per capita GST (in Rs)
Sikkim	33,574
Mizoram	17,928
Nagaland	13,620
Karnataka	12,452
Telangana	12,296
Haryana	11,542
Maharashtra	11,358
Kerala	10,443
Andhra Pradesh	8,613
Gujarat	8,253
Tamil Nadu	8,096
Uttarakhand	7,235
Himachal Pradesh	7,200
	_

Source: BoB, Indian Express Research

## **Consumption divide**

TABLE 2:

It is here that the analysis throws up some interesting data. Look at *Table 2*, which tabulates the per capita GST collections for each of the 25 states analysed by the researchers.

GST is a consumption-based tax — that is, it is paid at the point where a good or service is consumed. So, if a car is made in Tamil Nadu but bought in UP, then GST is levied and collected in UP.

As such, per capita GST collection can be used as a proxy for state-wise consumption patterns. Consumption levels, in turn, are a proxy for income levels. Although a proxy, this is the latest and actual observed all-India data as against the last consumption expenditure

survey data from 2022-23, Madan Sabnavis, chief economist of Bank of Baroda, said.

"The distribution of per capita GST across states is a reflection of consumption taking place in the country," the paper says. "...Higher consuming states end up paying higher taxes like GST and sales tax/ excise duty. Those [states] where consumption capacity is constrained have to depend progressively on more transfers from the Union taxes as directed by the Finance Commission.'

*Table 2* shows the average per capita GST collection of the 25 states considered by the researchers was Rs 7,029. This level marks the point of division. If one considers only the bigger states (with at least 10 Lok Sabha

#### **NORTH-SOUTH DIVIDE:** States in

seats) two divides are visible.

North India (highlighted in yellow) fall well below the national average, while states in the South (highlighted in green) pull up the national average. Per-capita GST levels in Karnataka or Telangana are almost 3-4 times that of Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand which shows the relative lack of prosperity of the average citizen in the latter states. **EAST-WEST DIVIDE:** There is a divide

between some of the big states in the East and West. Consumption levels in Maharashtra and Gujarat (in pink) are far in excess of those in Odisha, West Bengal and Assam (in blue). There are some exceptions — such as

Haryana in the North — but a broad divide is clearly visible.

#### Political significance Counting of votes is scheduled for June 4

and the next five years are going to be critical for both the Indian economy as a whole, and for the way the economies of individual states perform.

As the political map stands today, the BIPled NDA is on a relatively stronger footing in the lower-consumption (poorer) states of the North (yellow), while the Congress-led IN-DIA is relatively better placed in the higherconsumption states of the South (green). This is interesting because the Congress is

often seen as the more left-of-centre economic alternative while the BJP is pegged as the rightof-centre party. This perception centres mainly around the role of government that each coalition sees in the running of the economy. The NDA, especially under Prime Minister

Narendra Modi, has repeatedly said it wants "minimum government", that is, to reduce the government's involvement in the running of the economy. The INDIA bloc, on the other hand, has indicated a preference for bigger government, especially with its promises to recruit more people and provide a much bigger social safety net.

Despite its more conservative economic ideology, the BJP has implemented a wide range of social welfare measures, creating a class of labharthis that has paid significant electoral dividends. It is often argued that the BJP has been able to deliver social welfare more efficiently than the Congress and its allies, which has put it ahead in the poorer states.

The East-West divide is equally interesting. Here, the NDA-INDIA positions are reversed. So, the BJP has done better in the richer states (pink) while the opposition parties such as the Trinamool Congress and BJD have been ahead in the poorer states (blue)

Maharashtra in the West and West Bengal and Odisha in the East are key battleground states that will be closely watched on June 4 In the light of the research data summarised above, it will be interesting to see whether economic well-being is an important factor in the voting decisions made by the mass of electors.

# Uncertain times: what end of ANC's dominance means for South Africa

#### **ARJUN SENGUPTA** NEW DELHI, JUNE 2

THE AFRICAN National Congress (ANC) has lost its 30-year parliamentary majority in South Africa, winning just over 40% of the national vote in the May 29 election.

The main opposition Democratic Alliance got almost 22% of the vote. Former South African President Jacob Zuma's uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK) received almost 15%, and the Marxist-Leninist Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) was able to secure more than 9% of the votes.

## ANC's decline

In 1994, the ANC under anti-apartheid leader Nelson Mandela won South Africa's

first 'all-race' election with 62.65% of the national vote. It has since dominated South African politics, so much so that its vote share in national elections never dropped below 50%.

The party that led the struggle against apartheid enjoyed the same popularity as the Congress in India in the first two decades after Independence.

But in recent years, the ANC has declined steadily, even if slowly. "Many young voters did not live through apartheid... The criteria by which they evaluate a government does not rely on liberation movements...[but] on their results in areas of health, employment, economic development...," political scientist Abdelhak Bassou wrote in a policy brief for the Policy Centre for the New South.

#### **Coalition complications** For the first time, the ANC will have to

sentation; the NA in turn

seek out coalition partners to form the government. South Africans do not directly elect their President. Their votes determine the constitution of the National Assembly (NA) by proportional repre-

elects the President by a sim-**GLOBAL** ple majority of 201 in the 400member chamber. Incumbent President Cyril Ramaphosa, 71, will want to serve a second term, but the ANC, which is almost 10% short of majority,

the DA, MK, or EFF to form the government. Former President Jacob Zuma's MK party, which was founded only in December 2023, has said it will not enter a

will need the support of at least one among

coalition with the ANC under Ramaphosa. MK is set to take power in Zuma's home province of KwaZulu Natal, where the ANC has not lost in 30 years.

Zuma, a stalwart of the anti-apartheid movement who was President from 2009-18, was removed from office **EXPLAINED** following allegations of cor-

ruption, and was barred from standing in last month's election. But he has a loyal base among poor Black South Africans, and he made campaign promises to end unem-

ployment and poverty while describing Ramaphosa as "an agent of capital". A potential ANC ally is the EFF, which was formed by the expelled ANC youth leader Julius Malema in 2013. Malema has and platinum mines, and to seize land from White farmers. As part of the ruling coalition, the EFF will push the centrist ANC to the left, which is worrying South Africa's small, largely White, capital-owning minority, as well as foreign investors.

For this group, the business-friendly centre-right DA will be the ANC's ideal coalition partner. DA leader John Steenhuisen has not ruled out a coalition with the ANC, and said he wants to save South Africa from a leftwing "doomsday coalition" of the ANC, MK and EFF.

## Challenges ahead

According to South Africa's constitution, the President needs to be elected within 14 days of the result declaration. Serious challenges await the new coalition government. promised to nationalise the country's gold

South Africa's population lives in poverty. Unemployment currently stands at 33%, and the country faces water, housing, and energy crises. Crime is common, and the homicide rate of 45 per 100,000 people is among the world's highest. Many people believe that "the death of

According to the World Bank, 55% of

ANC dominance" was necessary for the country to move in the right direction. The ANC, when it came to power in 1994, promised to uplift South Africa's poor, Black masses. It has not only failed to do so, but has refused to acknowledge its failings. Being a part of a coalition might change that.

"I think it is good... it will open new avenues for change and new avenues for accountability," political analyst Sizwe Mpofu-Walsh told *Al Jazeera*.

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# 14 IDEA EXCHANGE NEWSMAKERS IN THE NEWSROOM

Mihir Vasavda: Is there a nice way of breaking the news to a player that he won't be in the team for the Olympics? How do you handle emotions?

It's the worst part of the job. When you have a group of guys, you create synergy and trust within your squad. We started with 39 players (in the camp). Then (reduced it to) 29, 27, now it's 24, soon it'll be 19 and then it'll be 16. So it's not easy. That's why the Olympics are the pinnacle of our sport. Not everyone gets to go. It's a bonus if you do well.

There are so many variables that can happen. You try to prepare for every single eventuality; injury-wise, tactics-wise, players that get injured in the game, then who can cover and how you can still play your same rhythm, tactics and style even if you lose a player or two. So yeah, it's difficult.

For the World Cup, the selection is of 18 players including two goalkeepers. At the Olympics, it's 15 and one goalkeeper, so 16. Then there are two non-travelling players and one goalkeeper that stay outside the village but you still need to create that family environment. I think 20-30 per cent of the time, players get injured and you need to use either the 17th or 18th player. Seldom does the goalkeeper get used but the other players, definitely. You don't know when it's going to happen but it's possible, so you need them in the right frame of mind to ensure they haven't shut off.

That 17th or 18th player could be the key for a team to be very successful. That hap-

**ON HIERARCHY** 

THE MORE JUNIOR YOU

ARE AS A PLAYER, THE

LESS SAY YOU HAVE. I

HAVE TRIED TO CRACK

THAT WIDE OPEN. OF

**COURSE, YOU NEED** 

**SENIORS BUT YOU WANT A** 

SAFE SPACE WHERE

PLAYERS CAN SHARE

WITHOUT ANY WORRIES

pened with Belgium. We were in the World Cup and two players got iniured. The stand-bys came in and went all the way and won the tournament. It's a massive part of the success if you can do it right.

Mihir Vasavda: Everyone has their insecurities and ambitions, especially at a time like this when the team is getting selected. So how is the mood in the camp?

We are humans, not robots. It's not just about equipping each other with the right tools but

also about having a platform where you can open up and say 'I am struggling with this'. We have a circle of trust going around prematch, and post-competition. If you are struggling with something, speak. From a staff point of view, from a player-to-player point of view, there really needs to be a bridge of trust. It works well. The tour to Australia (in April) was tough and there was feedback post-games there. Paddy (Upton, the sports psychologist) was there and we did some good work in that space. The mood is exciting.

Sriram Veera: In your first team meeting, you drew an India map, asked the players where they are from, and you populated that graph accordingly. What was the reasoning beyond the obvious?

(Shows his laptop wallpaper where that graph is). Players come from all over; from Punjab, Manipur, Kerala, and South; it was interesting to work out what was their story, how they got into hockey, who went to the same academy, who has played junior-level hockey together, who hasn't. How did they come into hockey — was it family-based or are you an outlier spotted for your talent?

With that kind of deep information, I can know who connects with whom, the common grounds, the language challenge — who has had to learn Hindi, who speaks naturally. India's strengths are its various cultures, dialects and diversity. If I don't understand that melting pot, I am lesser of a coach. It took time but it was fascinating.

I also had a language challenge with some but we did a value-based exercise — how they wanted to play, how they wanted to be viewed, how they wanted to act in achieving that — it was done in three different languages. Everyone connected with that.

So it was fruitful and interesting not just for me but for them. Someone like Sreejesh was impressive; he comes from Kerala, down in the south — isolated if you consider the regular pockets of hockey in the country. It's interesting how he had to move around, adapt, and be so inspiring to the group.

Sriram Veera: You also delved into the castes involved and were curious about learning that early on. What is the reason behind that?

Coming from South Africa, it's a rainbow nation and you can say the same thing about India. I grew up in Apartheid and I didn't even know the details. In '84, when I moved from Zimbabwe to South Africa, I

wasn't any wiser about this stuff. When Nelson Mandela was released, I was in high school and played in a tournament when he was released. Growing up in the political system, you learn. We played the 1996 Olympics in Athens and our team was

pulled out in 2000 due to political reasons. We had qualified, we were going, and we kept the same team from '96 but we got pulled out as we didn't have enough players of colour. How is that normal? It brought big changes in the country — right or wrong. I was too young to understand.

I look at it now: India's caste, South Africa's white-black — it's all human. It was

important to understand all this. But one of the bigger problems in India



#### WHY CRAIG FULTON

The former South African hockey player came to India after turning an almost unknown world hockey team like Ireland into a side that routinely punches above its weight. After being an assistant coach for Belgium, arguably the best team of the last decade, he's taken over an Indian team that returned to the Olympic podium after over four decades. He will now take the team to Paris Olympics, with the hope of repeating – or even improving – the Tokyo Games show



# One of the bigger problems in India is hierarchy. I don't subscribe to that'

The India hockey coach on preparations for the Paris Olympics, getting the players to share their stories as a part of team-building process and understanding the country's caste system and its impact on individual performances. The session was moderated by Mihir Vasavda, Senior Assistant Editor, The Indian Express

ior you are as a player, the less say you have. I don't subscribe to that. If that's the case, you are in a flawed system. I have tried to crack that wide open: of course, you need seniors but you want a safe space where players can share without any worries. That we have achieved from my side and also from seniors, which is great.

Amit Kamath: When you first joined Hockey India as coach, what were the things that stood out in contrast to Belgium. Did you spot a difference in the

**ON INDIA'S DIVERSITY** 

INDIA'S STRENGTHS ARE VARIOUS CULTURES, DIALECTS AND DIVERSITY. IF I DON'T UNDERSTAND THAT MELTING POT, I AM LESSER OF A COACH. IT TOOK TIME BUT IT **WAS FASCINATING** 

> team culture or the way things are done in the two countries? Were there any similarities?

The number one thing that stands out is that there is no league in India. From a collective point of view, Europe is fuelled from a family club environment where clubs are well supported from juniors to whoever plays in the fifth, sixth, seventh or 20th team or whatever it is. In India, it's quite isolated as the senior squad and the U-21 team train

(hockey) is that of hierarchy. The more jun- all year round for competitions. There are the the modern era again because of astroturf through good competition. And then we **Nitin Sharma: What are your** National Games or the National Championships. That would be the league environment.

> What happened in the past was that Hockey India League came in and helped get that youth into competitions with international players from the rest of the world. I'm glad that's coming back, as it will be helpful for Indian hockey to have more competition outside of just international competition. The legacy that Indian hockey has is very different from the legacy that Belgium hockey has. It's just a different story. For the last 10-12

years, Belgium has put a lot of emphasis on... from not qualifying to being consistent in qualifying for all the Olympics and then going from London 2012 to Rio 2016 and from there to Tokyo 2020. So that was a big improvement. But at the same time, if you look at

India's track record, from finishing last in London 2012 to eighth in Rio de Janeiro to medalling in Tokyo 2020, it's been a very impactful period and the investment's been in the right place. The coaching has been done well. The investment in strength and conditioning and training facilities in SAI Bengaluru was done well. That showed on the pitch. We're in that same space. Although India is really fanatical about its hockey, it's taken a while for them to be competitive in

and sports science. It takes time to create consistency in any high-performance programme. And you're still not guaranteed a win. Look at Australia. The last time they won a gold medal at the Olympics was in Athens in 2004. They win all the World Cups or they come close to it or they're competing. But they've had a dip. At the same time, they're still very competitive. If you meet them in the quarters of semis, it's still not an easy game. It's tough to be consistent and tough to peak for the Olympics and the World Cups.

Vinayakk Mohanarangan: How did you see the 0-5 series defeat in Australia? In four matches, you had your chances to win or draw, but ultimately India didn't win any. Do you detach from results in such cases?

We wanted a tough competition before the Pro League because, otherwise, we're just going to train and play ourselves. That's not going to be helpful. The other thing is we need to build the depth of our squad. So, if we lost a key player in every line, how would we perform? Who would be ready to play and how? We had a squad of 27 over five

games. We played everyone and also handed a debut to Boby (Singh Dhami). It was more of a focus on squad depth

different positions. Vinayakk Mohanarangan: When India

match-costing mistake around the corner. How do you address that?

hopefully don't make the last mistake, hopefully creating enough pressure to put the opposition into that situation where they make the last mistake.

And the beauty of it is if we can learn those lessons. And I know that the coach and coaching staff know how to fix it. It's not like it's an impossible fix. The more we can learn that lesson, the more we put it into practice. Once the selection is done and we are playing the chosen team in those different positions, we are really prepared for that situation. Once we've gone through all of this, made a few mistakes, really gone down to our final selection, then we have the players who can deal with those situations. You need good players to win, but you can also lose with good players.

Tushar Bhaduri: Does India's hockey medal at the Tokyo Olympics, which came after such a long time, increase the pressure on you?

To be perfectly honest, for any team to win a medal in Covid is an exceptional achievement. It's not normal what everyone went through at that time — preparing for Olympics, the delay of a year, and everything else they went through. So, I won't say it's pressure, it's more about the focus. Realistically, every time we play in a competition, we want to win. That's my philosophy. But there's also a realistic goal and an

ideal goal. The ideal goal is to win gold in

**ON FUTURE PLANS** 

WE ARE LOOKING TO

**CONNECT HOW THE U-21S** 

PLAY COMPARED TO HOW

THE SENIORS PLAY. THE

SAME TERMINOLOGY,

TRAINING, DRILLS AND

THEN YOU ALLOW THE NEW

U-21 HEAD COACH TO PUT

HIS OWN SPIN ON IT. THAT'S

THE SUCCESSION PLAN

every tournament we play. Realistically, it's where you are ranked now, and how you are performing. That's where the next block of Pro League games comes in. We took a knock with the Australia results (India lost the five-match series in Perth 5-0), but that's a different scenario because that wasn't on tournament basis, it was a one-off series.

In this tournament environment that we have now, we have video referrals, we have everything that we would be accustomed to in the Pro League. At the same time, we want to win a medal, we want to

play up... We are, I think, ranked fifth or sixth at the moment, so there's a bit of room in getting into the top 3, and we are looking at the next seven weeks and obviously, after this Pro League, to know exactly where we stand and what we need to improve to be very competitive in our pool. So, the bottom line is that we want to do as well as we can, we want to win this competition. But realistically, where are we now? We are a little bit behind, but we have eight games in the Pro League to understand where exactly we stand, and from that point of view, I can answer this question post these eight games.

Pratyush Raj: In recent times we have seen our forwards struggling to score goals. Where do you think they can improve?

That's difficult because a lot of the teams are playing lower (block) now. They are putting nine and 10 players in and around the 25 (metre, defensive third). You have less time in the D to turn and shoot because of the zonal elements but that's been there for the past maybe five or six years. The Indian teams have scored goals in those periods. It is just about the chemistry between the players and also the mindset of the players when they are getting into the D, they are full of confidence.

Everyone tries to shoot, everyone tries to connect in the nine-yard area. There is a lot going on in the final third. There are challenges if you are making mistakes at the back in the penalty corner and then upfront if you are making a mistake, it changes the dynamic of the game. The forwards are connected and trying to get as many outcomes as possible and enjoy doing it. We are trying to convert field chances to goals and certain teams play low, certain teams don't. We are trying to get the right combinations that suit all the strikers.

thoughts on junior hockey in India? Does the junior hockey system in India need to be in sync with what the head coach thinks?

I think there is a gap between the U-21s and the seniors. We are looking to work with the Indian A team and the reason for that is we have a very strong U-21 group. And if some of those key players cannot come to the senior group, where do they go? They have had three-four years of training with the U-21s. They played in the World Cup and all of these competitions and suddenly there

was no space for them. I think they are the next best thing to come into the Indian squad and we don't have that space yet for them with a full coach and system That's in the plans. We are looking to do that. And then from the U-16s and U-18s, Indian hockey has

done a good job of trying to get them to play the same way. It's been a year since joined and we are looking out for a new U-21 coach. We are looking to connect how the U-21s play compared to how the seniors play. The same terminology, same training, same drills and then you allow the new U-21 head coach to put his own spin on it in the principle of how we need to play. That's what we are looking to do. And I think that's the succession plan.

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about the depth in the squad and covering

is playing, there seems to be a crucial

You are always one mistake away from conceding a goal? At the same time, you

would find out more about ourselves, and

what we needed to do well while playing

against Australia. But if we played Australia,

it would help expose some parts of our game

that were really good or weren't. I think we

Sometimes, Australia can get the better of

you by five, six, seven goals. In the first game,

like I said, we weren't there. It was a little bit

of a mismatch on the day from our point of

view. The other games were good but unfor-

ON THE MOOD IN THE TEAM

WE ARE HUMANS, NOT ROBOTS. IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT EQUIPPING

EACH OTHER WITH THE RIGHT TOOLS, IT'S ALSO ABOUT HAVING A

PLATFORM AND SAYING, 'I AM STRUGGLING WITH THIS'. WE HAVE A

**CIRCLE OF TRUST** 

We learned a lot. I was pleased about

the competition, but even more pleased

tunately, we couldn't get over the line.

Our deep defence was very good.

got the benefit of both.

MUMBAI | MONDAY, 3 JUNE 2024

## Building blocks

Next govt must build on macro strengths

he next Union government, which will assume office later this month, will find itself in an extremely comfortable position on the economic front. The data released by the National Statistical Office last week showed the Indian economy exceeded expectations and recorded a gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate of 8.2 per cent in 2023-24, compared to 7 per cent in the previous year. This also meant the economy expanded by 7 per cent or more for three consecutive financial years. Forecasts, including by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), suggest growth in the current year would also be around 7 per cent. Notably, the economy is growing at a healthy rate even as the government is moving forward with fiscal consolidation. The government finance data, also released last week, showed with better tax collection, the fiscal deficit for 2023-24 came at 5.6 per cent of GDP, compared to the Interim Budget's revised estimate of 5.8 per cent.

Besides growth and fiscal position, the next government would also draw comfort from the fact that inflation outcomes are improving, though the headline rate is still above the RBI's target. Further, bank and corporate balance sheets are in a good position. India's foreign-exchange reserves are also at comfortable levels, providing stability on the external front. The policy efforts to strengthen macroeconomic stability over the past several years have paid off, and the situation is significantly different from 10 years ago, when the incumbent government took office. India had narrowly avoided a balance of payments crisis a few months earlier, and the Indian economy was dealing with multiple pressure points.

Although there are some quibbles about the GDP deflator and the difference between real and nominal growth, the overall economic strength is well acknowledged. The economy grew 9.6 per cent in nominal terms, compared to 14.2 per cent in the previous year. Nevertheless, it is also critical to acknowledge that post-pandemic economic recovery has been largely driven by higher government expenditure, which will need to be contained as the government moves further with fiscal consolidation. Attaining the fiscal-deficit target this financial year, however, will not be difficult, given the RBI's higher than expected surplus transfer. Therefore, with the given comfortable position, the new government would be well advised to present a revised glide path for fiscal consolidation to reduce the fiscal deficit to 3 per cent of GDP or lower in the July Budget. This would boost market confidence and help revive private investment.

Private-investment revival will, in fact, be the most important factor driving growth over the medium term and should be the key focus for the next government. As the government consolidates its finances, the private sector will need to fill the investment gap to sustain higher growth. However, weak domestic private consumption could constrain private investment, particularly when external demand is also expected to remain relatively subdued. One of the big economic policy challenges for the next government will be to improve India's external competitiveness. This will require review and policy changes at multiple levels, including trade policy. Higher sustained export growth can help push investment, create much-needed jobs, and improve overall quality of growth. In this regard, India can benefit from geopolitical changes and become a major part of the China-plus-one shift. Overall, while the next government will perhaps get the best economic starting point ever, the challenge will be to build on it to achieve rapid and balanced economic development.

#### After the verdict

Mr Trump's conviction deepens US political friction

ormer United States (US) President Donald Trump's conviction on all 34 state felony crimes by a New York jury on May 30 is likely to magnify the fault lines in a deeply polarised political landscape. Indicators of disruptive forces emerged within hours of the verdict, which saw Mr Trump make history as the first former US President to be convicted for felony. With his base viewing the admittedly stunning verdict as evidence of a rigged system, his campaign said it had raised \$52.8 million within 24 hours of the verdict — a figure still to be verified by the Federal Election Commission — and several influential supporters flew the national flag upside down as a symbol of protest. Supporters have threatened demonstrations in key cities later this month, raising the spectre of January 6, 2021. Eight Republican senators said they would vote against any spending Bills, judicial nominees, or other Democratic legislation brought to the floor by way of protest (a symbolic move since the Democrats have a majority in the chamber). However, Mr Trump can continue to run for office because there are no rules blocking candidates with criminal records.

No less remarkable is the fact that Joe Biden has not benefited from a bump in the polls following his rival's guilty verdict. Trailing before the verdict, one of the earliest polls conducted after it by brand intelligence platform Morning Consult found the race almost tied nationally with Mr Biden at 45 per cent and Mr Trump at 44 per cent. A later poll by Reuters puts the percentages at 41 for Mr Biden and 39 for Mr Trump. This, although 54 per cent of the registered voters "strongly" or "somewhat" approved of the verdict and that 15 per cent of the Republican voters and 49 per cent of independents said Mr Trump should end his campaign (on his part, Mr Trump plans to appeal the verdict). Much will depend on July 11, just four days before the start of the Republican National Convention in Milwaukee, Wisconsin (July 15-18). Most polls show the majority of the registered voters saying he should not be jailed for this crime. It is possible that the fine margins between the contestants may change in the coming days. The elections are five months away and three presidential debates are due between September 16 and October 9, which could clarify matters. At the very least, it will offer Mr Biden, for whom doubts about his capacity to function (he will be 82 this November) and unpopularity over inflation have been compounded by his controversial management of the Israel-Hamas war, an opportunity to underline his relatively youthful opponent (at 78 years this June) status as a convicted felon.

It speaks volumes for the quality of the political discourse that the post of the most powerful leader of the free world could be reclaimed by a reality TV star and dodgy real estate mogul who was convicted in a tawdry case involving covering up hush-money payments to a porn star. It is disturbing that a man found liable for sexual abuse and defamation last year remains at the forefront of the presidential race. Most principled politicians would step aside. Should Mr Trump win, three consequential cases against him — for keeping classified documents, federal election interference, and election interference in Georgia — are likely to stall. Such a bizarre outcome would be deeply damaging for global democracy, which is already in retreat worldwide.

# We missed Industrial Revolution

Is India headed there again?



AJIT BALAKRISHNAN

e was a stout, illiterate man, son of a butcher, struggling to earn enough to feed his 13 children by weaving handloom cotton in his tiny home when he suddenly hit on an idea that could increase his earning and feed his family. The idea was to make a small improvement in his spinning wheel such that it could, for the same effort. So, he put eight different spindles that were

powered by a single wheel. This allowed him to produce eight threads in the same amount of time it previously took to produce one. He called this the spinning jenny, made a few of these contraptions, and earned a little money selling them to his neighbours. The year was 1764, the man was James Hargreaves, and he was in Lancashire, England. His invention triggered Samuel Crompton to invent the spinning mule and Charles Babbage to invent a weaving machine thus triggering what

ing machine, thus triggering what we have come to know as the Industrial Revolution.

It is this tiny invention, the spinning jenny, which had a cataclysmic effect on India's economy by reducing the number of workers needed to produce cotton cloth and thus created the impetus for the Indian Independence movement and was symbolised in the charkha symbol in the flag of that movement.

What leaves me puzzled even after digging through many thousands of web pages and books is this: If the idea of a spinning wheel with multiple spindles struck this lone man in Lancashire, why didn't a similar thought strike any one of the hun-

dreds of thousands of cotton spinners in India at that time in the 1760s?

Robert Allen, the distinguished economic historian, suggests the spinning jenny and the related Industrial Revolution occurred in Britain rather than in India because "wages were exceptionally high compared to capital prices in Britain, so the jenny was profitable to use in Britain but not else-

where. Since it was only profitable to use the jenny in Britain, that was the only country where it was worth incurring the costs of developing and using it, and that irrespective of the quality of their institutions or the progressiveness of their cultures... the Indians would have not found it profitable to mechanise cotton production in the eighteenth century".

Not inventing the spinning jenny and mechanised weaving and the other inventions that soon fol-

lowed — the steam engine, steam-powered locomotives, ships, and so on — kept India imprisoned in the pre-industrial era and Indians had to wait for the British to colonise them and then teach them about such "industrial" things.

Are there some equally disturbing things at work in India that might signal to us Indians that something wrong is under way? I can list a few and, please, dear reader, please list some others that are disturbing to you.

We set up high-quality institutions like the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), hoping that the students who graduate from there will innovate at a world-class level and bring India up to the level

of the best in the world. But horror of horrors: Tuition businesses like those in Kota lure hundreds of thousands of students to attend coaching classes and game the IIT entrance examinations. And about 200,000 students take the IIT entrance test. Of those about 10,000 are given admission... which means that 95 per cent go home disappointed.

Then there are children who cannot make it to any of the top institutions such as IITs and Indian Institutes of Management and their parents send them to study abroad, paying ₹50-60 lakh a year or more... it is estimated that last year 450,000 went abroad to study.

Let us look at another aspect of this puzzle. In the late 1980s, India had a small bunch of tech companies designing and building computers and related hardware under the protection of 100 per cent import duty on such items. Then, as Siddhartha Mukerji points out in his recent book India's Software Industry: Politics Institutions and Policy Shift: "During 1991, NASSCOM (National Association of Software and Service Companies) lobbied with the government and for the first time secured income tax exemptions on the profits of software exports. Later, due to the pressure by NASSCOM, the government lowered the import duties from a high 114 per cent to almost zero", and all of the players designing and building computer hardware perished or switched to the business of providing services workforce to foreign companies. The shift from information-technology (IT) products to IT workforce services was complete from that day onwards. Now, we as a nation are proud that we supply workforce to the worldwide IT industry: Earning a gigantic \$250 billion as revenue and employing more than 5 million young Indians... no doubt a great step forward but letting United States-based tech giants own the IT product market. Surprisingly, Indian-origin people are now increasingly dominant as senior executives/chief executive officers of these American tech giants.

Now, as the world swings into the era dominated by artificial intelligence (AI), it looks like India's role will again be to supply workforce to the new set of United States-based tech giants like OpenAI, which are set to dominate the world. What if we discover that the AI wave will dispense with the need for cheap tech workforce?

More importantly, what is in India's political economy that drives us to seek IT services revenue rather than leading in IT products? The answer to that question may tell us why the spinning jenny was not invented in India and the Industrial Revolution did not start in India.

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# Trickling down to Viksit Bharat

new government in New Delhi will shortly take over. There is a lot of hope among businessmen and stock-market participants that a third term led by Narendra Modi will transform India into *Viksit Bharat* (developed India). The question is how we measure such a transformation. The popular indicators are growth in gross domestic product (GDP), tax revenues, stock-market indices, growth in corporate profits, investment flows, and so on. An improvement in these points towards increasing prosperity for the vocal, urban and prosperous minority. They dominate the chat-

ter, so one automatically assumes these indicators will change India into a prosperous country. But will they? Over the past several years, all these markers have been extremely positive. But have they delivered rapidly rising per capita income, which is one of the most important signs of overall prosperity?

It pays to remember that India's per capita income or net national income rose from ₹72,805 in 2014-15 to ₹98,374 in 2022-23, at just a 3.83 per cent compound annual growth rate, according to the government's own data. Since the impact of actual infla-

tion is underestimated, the rise in per capita income would be even lower. The living conditions of the average population encompassing education, health, public transport, pollution, the justice system, etc. have not improved. In fact, these indicators have deteriorated. I know most readers switch off when one mentions these indicators while talking of *Viskit Bharat*, but they can't be wished away or substituted by narrow indicators like the stock market boom, growth in corporate profits, and mutual fund inflows, as measures of real prosperity.

Most readers of this paper, including those connected to the stock markets, are less interested or simply unaware of the issues facing the vast majority of India's population that lives in rural and semi-urban areas. The general elections gave us an opportunity to sample the problems they face,

when the television channels, which normally belt out screaming matches from their studios in Noida, went out and queried people about their poll choices, which spilled over to answers about their living conditions. What did these answers reveal? Captured by an otherwise pro-government media were three themes: Inflation, unemployment, and income inequality — all encapsulated in two words "rural distress".

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is certainly aware of the issue on income equality. After all, he allowed a question on inequality to be asked by a reporter

during the dozens of interviews he gave to a grateful media as part of his poll campaign. His answer was to ask a counter question: "Should everybody be poor? Everyone should be poor, then there will be no difference. This was the case in the country earlier." He went on to argue: "Now you say that everybody should be rich, so it will happen gradually, not overnight. Some will come, they will bring those who are below. Those who will come a little higher will pull up others. So there is a process." This is the

there is a process." This is the famous trickle-down theory, which works ever so slowly, keeping generations of people poor. Interestingly, when it came to examples of the trickle-down theory working, the Prime Minister drew them from the prosperous class: 125,000 startups, increased foreign travel, and huge orders for airplanes by airline companies — examples which do little to support any change in the fate of 800 million (of the 1.40 billion) living on 5 kg rations doled by the government every month.

To charge up economic growth after seven years of slow improvement, the Modi government has spent and will continue to spend ₹11 trillion every year — on railways, roads, urban transport, waterworks, energy transformation, defence production, etc — which would create millions of jobs. This will no doubt create a corporate and stock market boom,

but it should also have led to job growth. It hasn't, or not enough to make much of a difference. In a report in 2023, Knight Frank, a real estate consultancy, had forecast that India's booming housing market in its top eight cities would propel the construction sector to contribute about one-fifth to the economy by 2030, employing 100 million workers. Real estate stocks have been on a tear. The Nifty Real Estate index is up 200 per cent over the past two years. How much of this prosperity has trickled down? According to an analysis by Arindam Das and Yoshifumi Usami, between 2021-22 and 2022 23 the average daily real rural wages of construction workers declined, with female workers getting a worse deal. While there is a national minimum wage for unskilled construction workers (who form about 80 per cent of the sector's workforce), according to CEIC, a data and analysis company, 15 of the 20 states tracked didn't meet this minimum wage "sig nifying the extent of informal employment in the economy and weak enforcement".

There is another way to understand how little is trickling down. Strong trickle-down through wage growth would eventually lead to a higher consumption of essential items such as basic clothing, utensils, and personal care products like soaps. But the financial performance of companies selling these products is stagnant. Not surprisingly, the CEIC data also reveals that 10-year real-wage growth for construction workers in nine out of 20 states was negative and for four states was insignificant. Political strategist Prashant Kishor, who has travelled all over Bihar for the past two years, highlights that people are suffering acutely due to unemployment, income inequality, and inflation. Unless the government addresses these issues, protests — with or without political leadership would erupt. The irony is that if the urban elite truly want Viksit Bharat, they would have to part with their prosperity in some form or other, which they are loath to do. Trickle down and Viksit Bharat are incompatible ideas.

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# An open record of dissent



BOOK REVIEW

NILANJAN MUKHOPADHYAY

nortly before I started writing this review, an email arrived in my inbox. From the Constitutional Conduct Group (CCG), it had a prosaic subject line: "CCG Open Statement on 2024 Lok Sabha Elections". Its contents, however, were not nonaligned. It asserted that during these polls, "concerns have been raised at many points about the fairness of the elections". The CCG, at the outset of this book, declared for the umpteenth time that the group of former civil servants had "no affiliation with any political party but are strongly committed to the ideals enshrined in

the Constitution of India". The email made a painful

observation that "no Election Commission in the past has been as reluctant as the present one to discharge its duties, despite violations being repeatedly brought to its attention by responsible organisations and respected members of society". The statement sought to "remind (in humility) each of the authorities and institutions charged with the integrity of the process of democratic government formation of their paramount duty to abide and uphold the Constitution of India. We would like to remind them of the oath they have taken in this regard at the time of their assumption of office". The group came together in 2017, by

The group came together in 2017, by which time it became amply clear that India's constitutional order was being consistently undermined. Since then, the CCG responded to almost every challenge or occasion when constitutional principles and ethos were attacked either directly by the state or its institutions, or by political forces symbiotically connected with the regime, which was turning a blind eye to

various offensive acts. The response of this group, which sees itself as the conscience keeper of Indian society, has almost always been in the form of open statements or letters to various leaders holding constitutional offices. These have tended to get buried under fresh submissions voicing concern at a new set of violations of law or trampling of constitutional safeguards and may get lost amid the plethora of issues that may surface and require a reasoned response following the verdict on June 4.

This book is an attempt to record these missives in the form of a book that can act as a ready reckoner of the times since the group was established. This book enables us to revisit some of the debates which took place on these issues and how important sections of the civil society reflected on these matters. The CCG was established because its members felt that their "combined experience" would have the skills to pursue issues that periodically surfaced in an environment that was "becoming increasingly oppressive and (we) felt that we had a duty to our

conscience and the nation to speak up". However, these "chronicles of dissent" do not remain just that. These open statements and letters are classified under various issue-based sections with each of these placed under a 'lead' essay(s) written by some

Defence

Republic

of the well-known commentators and civil society activists, each of whom has been pinned one of the expletives that have been conceived over the past decade or so.

The sequence of the sections under which these interventions are classified were undeniably decided on the basis of their occurrence in the past decade. It is no surprise that the first section is for statements and letters on the subject of "communal hate and violence". While the two essays in this section are by the

noted academic and activist,
Apoorvanand and the well-known
advocate, Anjana Prakash, the
statements are a response to issues as
varied as the ongoing violence in
Manipur to the letter to the Prime
Minister on harassment of the
Christian community to one open letter
to the Chief Justice of India on the Bilkis
Bano case and a letter to corporations on
the issue of advertising on media

channels. It is

**Elections and** 

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likewise for

Republic: Upholding the Values at the Heart of India's Democracy
Editors: Deb Mukharji, Meena Gupta, Amitabha Pande & Sundar Burra
Publisher: Speaking Tiger
Pages: 437
Price: ₹599

In Defence of the

Rights of the Tribal Communities.

The essay "A Reasoned Engagement with Free Speech and Expression", by Pamela Philipose in the section of fundamental rights and freedom of speech is a compact exposition of the CCG's raison d'être and issues on which the group responded in the form of

statements and letters. The essay notes that this group of retired civil servants did not choose to "keep silent in the face of rising tyranny" and that they joined forces "driven by the need to resist through their words and collective wisdom what they saw as an 'alarming decline in the secular, democratic and liberal values enshrined in our Constitution". The essay points to the primacy the group gave to freedom of speech in an increasingly authoritarian order.

The four 'afterwords' by Harsh Mander, Aruna Roy, Julio Rebeiro and Siraj Hussain explain the "view from inside", so to speak. While for Mr Mander, a notable civil servant turned social activist and commentator, the CCG's existence is a reminder of not being alone, Ms Roy reminds readers of George Orwell's quote that in "times of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act". This compendium is indeed a record of not one but an entire series of revolutionary acts by a group who chose not to hang up their boots.

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## Editorial



#### For a consensus

Elections should not prompt politicians to break consensus on foreign policy

ith the curtains coming down on the general election 2024, every party will take stock of its campaign on issues of domestic political importance. However, it is also necessary for all concerned, particularly those forming the next government, to review the disturbing trend of revisiting questions of foreign policy. Both sides have ratcheted up the rhetoric over India's international ties and in some cases, even the re-opening of settled bilateral agreements. At the start of the campaign, the ruling party focused on the issue of the half-century-old Katchatheevu agreement, that accepted the island as Sri Lankan territory, to target the Opposition Congress and the DMK that were in power in 1974. In response, Congress leaders asked whether the 2015 Land Boundary Agreement with Bangladesh could also be reviewed for its land concessions. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has led the charge on other foreign policy fronts, especially on Pakistan, calling the Congress party a "disciple of Pakistan" and comparing its manifesto pejoratively to that of the Muslim League that founded Pakistan. U.P. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath even proclaimed that were Mr. Modi to be re-elected, he would reclaim Pakistan Occupied Kashmir "within six months". Other brash comments over India's use of its nuclear arsenal, or that the government will transgress international boundaries to kill 'terrorists threatening India', have raised eyebrows in many capitals. The clashes between the Indian Army and Chinese PLA at Galwan in 2020 that led to the deaths of 20 soldiers have often been raised by Opposition leaders in campaign rallies, as in the past as well. Meanwhile, throughout the campaign, Mr. Modi and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar accused "western powers" of attempting to interfere in Indian polls.

Such heated campaign rhetoric is meant for domestic audiences, but it would be unwise for political leaders to assume that India's international partners are not watching and listening carefully. India's ties with its smaller neighbours carry the highest levels of sensitivity, and raking up these issues and exposing India's vulnerable faultlines, just to make political capital, seems short-sighted. While domestic policy has always been deeply divisive, India's polity had for long achieved a bipartisanship when it came to foreign policy positions, and often took pride in the deployment of Opposition leaders to defend India's case worldwide, including at the UN. The proper platform for the government to assert foreign policy, or for the Opposition to air its differences with it, is not the hustings, but Parliament. It is hoped that as the dust settles, leaders will reflect on the potential damage to India's credibility from campaign propaganda, and restore a more enduring consensus on international relations.

#### Nipped in the bud

Both supply and demand sides of baby trafficking need to be stopped

riminal activity is mostly driven by a combination of socio-economic factors - poverty on one end, wealth on the other, and unmet needs or desires. The recent inter-State baby smuggling racket that was busted by the Telangana police should be seen under this lens. While news of baby smuggling rackets dominate headlines from time to time, blowing the lid off of this network has revealed chilling subterranean levels of operation, spanning several States. An inter-State gang smuggled children from Delhi and Pune and sold them to prospective parents in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. As many as 11 people were arrested for the smuggling of as many as 50 babies in the past year. As per initial reports, the gang had been 'purchasing' babies from two persons in Delhi and one person in Pune, traffick them to Andhra Pradesh and Telangana and sell to the highest bidder among childless couples in these southern States. It is learnt that the rate for a baby could be between ₹1.80 lakh and ₹5.50 lakh, netting the brokers between ₹50,000 and ₹1 lakh as commission. Three women in the gang had apparently been booked for the same offence earlier.

Further investigation will reveal how the babies were procured, but this is not the first time such rackets have been busted. There is no reason to believe that the reasons were any different: poverty of the biological parents in many cases, urging them to sell their newborns for a paltry sum, and smuggling of newborns from government hospitals where security is lax. On the other end of the spectrum are couples eager to have children, and impatient with the long waiting time to adopt a baby legally. The current waiting time to adopt a child under two years can be anywhere between two to four years. While the lengthy process is put in place to ensure that the best interests of the child are served, the nonavailability of babies for adoption has queered the pitch, allowing the demand to seek supply avenues by hook or by crook. Rounding up a gang might at best be a short-term measure in this particular situation. Children are not commodities to purchase at a premium from the free market when supply is low. The government needs to do many things at once to ensure such incidents do not occur again: provide effective poverty alleviation schemes; employment opportunities for youth; generate awareness about adoption schemes for both biological and adoptive parents; remove unnecessary bureaucratic processes in adoption, and ensure effective policing to nip such plots in the bud.

# The message from the Andhra Pradesh bifurcation

t is 10 years since Andhra Pradesh was divided into two States. A decade is a long enough time examine the political, economic and historical implications of the division of the political geography of the Telugu people, for them as well as for the Indian

#### Scant nostalgia

The vitriol that dominated the bifurcation discourse for almost half a decade prior to the actual bifurcation has now vanished without trace. The two successor states, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, are moving on. Telugu society today on both sides of the political division carries on with very little nostalgia for the nearly five and a half decades of living together in one political entity. For people from the shrunken Andhra Pradesh part, only Hyderabad from the new state of Telangana remains in their imagination. The rest of the geography of Telangana hardly figures in their consciousness. And, for the people of Telangana, no area or aspect of life from across the Andhra Pradesh side of the divide animates their political, social, cultural, or economic imagination.

This is puzzling for two reasons. These two regions were under different political authorities for only about 150 years. Before the Nizam gave away the coastal districts and the 'ceded' districts that came to be called Rayalaseema to the European powers, historically, they were ruled from Golconda and Hyderabad for a long time. And, they were together again since 1956.

However, these long years of living under one political authority could not foster enough of a sense of togetherness to prevent the resumption of their separate journeys. That parting of ways has not yet happened with the Kannada-speaking area of the Nizam's Hyderabad State, nor did it happen as yet with its Marathi-speaking area. They both joined Karnataka and Maharashtra States, respectively, after the linguistic reorganisation of States.

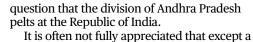
The question arises, therefore, whether the shared vision of the Telugu elites from both the regions – Madras Presidency and Hyderabad State – for unity on the basis of language is frailer compared to those of the shared visions of Kannada and Marathi elites. Or, does a similar fate await them too in the not too distant future? For, regional economic disparities, linguistic divergences, lifestyle differences, and variations in political culture are more or less the same in all the three linguistic groups across the geographies of the Presidencies and Hyderabad State.

As of now, it is only the unity of the Telugus based on language that has come unstuck. Are the other linguistic States likely to meet the same fate in the years or decades to come? Does the fate of Andhra Pradesh which has pioneered the reconfiguration of the Indian Republic's political architecture along linguistic lines also foreshadow its eventual unravelling? Does the Indian Republic eventually have to look for an organising principle other than language? That is the larger



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few States in the geographical centre of our Republic, all other States (from Assam in the east, going along the east coast to the southeast and continuing towards the west coast and up to the Punjab and Haryana in the northwest) of our Republic are organised on a linguistic basis. If the underlying organising principle of language is unlikely to hold them together as units, giving greater force to economic, political, historical and other fault lines, an alternative principle will have to be formulated sooner rather than later. Could that be the size of territory or population? Or, should it be something else? If the bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh suggested anything at all, it is that the Indian Republic cannot avoid this question for long.

Size, when translated into the number of seats in the central legislature, might eventually be a point of friction among the units of our Republic, because representation in the form of numbers determines the distribution of political power. And, the distribution of political power has the potential to exert decisive influence on the distribution of economic resources within the federal structure. There are already faint noises of unease among 10 YEARS OF the political elites in some States, especially in the south, regarding speculation about future delimitation in which some northern States could gain abnormal numbers in the central legislature.

#### Where States stand

The bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh can give us some idea as to how reconfiguration can radically alter the pecking order of States. In the united State for example, Andhra Pradesh had 42 Lok Sabha seats and was the largest State in the south India. It was as big as today's West Bengal and slightly smaller than Maharashtra. It could carry significant clout in the national political equation. But now, with a mere 25 seats, it is smaller than Tamil Nadu which has 39 seats and Karnataka that has 28 seats, effectively making it third in the pecking order. Telangana, with 17 seats, is smaller than Kerala, thus becoming fifth in the pecking order in the south. A part of the biggest State in the south is now rendered as the third and another part became fifth in the regional pecking order in terms of political clout. In our federal structure, numbers do matter in more ways than one can imagine.

If some States become smaller while others remain big, political equations among them will become unequal and may result in undesirable strains in the federal structure of our Republic. Grossly unequal sizes among the units can render some regions irrelevant and others more relevant in deciding who holds power at the Centre. Any perception that an incumbent regime is serving the political and economic interests of some States because its political base is beholden to the unequal power distribution could lead to disenchantment, dissent and alienation of those States from the mainstream of our Republic.

#### The cracks will surface

The questions that the bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh threw up and the lessons the process of division offers cannot be parried or ignored. It is unwise to take comfort from the fact that neither side has as yet sharply articulated and followed up on their grievances regarding the messy way the process of bifurcation was handled. Political expression of those grievances from both sides of the division may be delayed but is eventually inevitable. Telangana elites are still in a euphoric mood that they won their fight for a separate State and are eager to showcase the brighter side of the consequence of their victory. A glittering Hyderabad and the revenue boom it generated conceal chinks in its development path. Elites, therefore, are under no pressure yet to focus on

> issues arising out of division. Once the euphoria wears off, their perception of the omissions and commissions of the badly handled division and their political and economic implications will begin to surface.

The Andhra Pradesh side, in the first five years after the division, got bogged down in its attempt to build for itself a world-class capital to prove to the world **BIFURCATION** with a vengeance. that it would

overcome the loss of Hyderabad. And the next five years were consumed by profligate direct benefit transfer (DBT) welfarism. Alternating between these two foci will eventually bring more serious issues to the surface that could be traced to the ham-handed division of the State. The fact that both the obsessions have made the State financially anaemic is glossed over for now. But it cannot remain under wraps for long. Unfulfilled promises made by the Centre on special category status and financial help for building the capital city, inability to effect proper division of joint assets as well as other such core issues will not escape the attention of the political elites for long.

The idea of the linguistic reorganisation of India had a long incubation period. It was thought through, elaborately debated, agreed upon and then implemented. That idea was seen in the national context. But a departure from it was neither thought through nor debated. It was done as a political expediency to pacify an ongoing agitation. Therefore, from the clumsy drafting of the act, its messy passing, the placatory assurances and their half-hearted implementation characterised the departure of a six-and-a-half decade-old mature Republic from a core organising principle of its political geography. The Republic cannot afford such clumsy and thoughtless handling of major departures from its core organising principles. The Andhra Pradesh bifurcation and its fallout merit a deeper and mature examination to ensure a firm footing for our Republic.

# Forsaken, marginalised and forgotten

ajoritarian nationalism is reshaping Indian politics. Declining minority participation, particularly Muslim representation, in the corridors of power is an inevitable consequence. The general election, that has just concluded, is a veritable testimony to India's, at times enthusiastic, at others grudging, acceptance of hues of Hindu nationalism. Even as the wounds of a complete abnegation of Muslim representation in the outgoing government had not healed, a fresh stab was made at the idea of India. Muslim exclusion from electoral politics is beginning to sound real, central, and almost all pervasive. As we await the results to the 18th Lok Sabha, there is a cause for concern over the diminishing space for a section of society in the electoral fray. In the 2019 election, 115 Muslims had contested as the representatives of various political parties. This time, the number was 78, with many parties too timid to give a ticket to a Muslim candidate from anywhere except in the so-called Muslim dominated seats. It could be a reflection of our politics where a Muslim candidate is not preferred by some merely because of his or her

#### **Ground reality**

The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, despite the noises made last year by Prime Minister Narendra Modi about Pasmanda Muslims, entered a sole Muslim, Abdul Salam, from Malappuram in Kerala. Otherwise, from Punjab to Tamil Nadu, Gujarat to Nagaland, the party deemed Muslims surplus to its electoral arithmetic. The Indian National Congress did not cover itself with glory either – the number of Muslim candidates fighting on the party symbol came down from 34 in 2019 to 19 this time. What was disconcerting was the party's reluctance to put up even a single Muslim candidate from either Delhi or Mumbai,



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leading to noises of protest from the party leader Muhammad Arif Naseem Khan who said, "The party wants Muslim votes, not Muslim candidates." Mr. Khan could as well have been speaking for most non-Bharatiya Janata Party parties. The Samajwadi Party, often criticised for being MY (Muslims and Yadavs) representative, fought on 62 seats in Uttar Pradesh but put up only four Muslims in the State where Muslims comprise 19% of population. Likewise, the Rashtriya Janata Dal in Bihar fielded only two Muslim candidates; however, its ally, the Congress, did give tickets to Muslim candidates from Katihar and Kishanganj.

In Gujarat, neither the Congress nor the BJP put up a Muslim candidate. The story of Muslim denial was repeated by both parties in Rajasthan. In Bengal, the Trinamool Congress, despite Mamata Banerjee's robust defence of minority rights, gave tickets to only six Muslim candidates out of the 42 seats it contested in the State. Significantly, Muslims account for a little over 27% of the State's population. Bengal presents a microcosm of the country. This under-nomination is bound to result in under-representation in Parliament. The community looks at the bleak prospect of sending possibly its lowest number of Members of Parliament to the Lok Sabha when the results are announced on June 4. Forsaken, marginalised, and, probably forgotten.

#### A fading

All this is a far cry from the heydays of the 1980s when Muslims enjoyed a sizeable slice of the electoral cake. In 1980, there were 49 Muslim MPs in the Lok Sabha. In 1984, there were 46 Muslim MPs.

Pertinently, the BJP was just born in 1980 and had only two Lok Sabha MPs in 1984. As the party's fortunes rose in ensuing elections, the

fortunes of the largest minority went into a parallel decline, finishing with only 23 MPs in 2014. There was a token increase of three in 2019 a number that seems difficult to attain this time in the light of a drastic fall in the number of Muslim candidates. The Muslim MP is faced with the prospect of gradual elimination. Muslims bring up a little over 14% of India's population. but since the first election in 1951-52 to the last round in 2019, the community's share in Lok Sabha has been under 6%.

#### An attack on the idea of India

Incidentally, while Muslims have not been as visible as candidates this time, this, however, has not translated into their absence from headlines during the elections. Mr. Modi led the pack in stoking fears in the larger society, referring to the community members as "infiltrators" or "the Congress seeking to give a buffalo to a Muslim if a Hindu owned two buffaloes" to give an example or two. He was both coarse and divisive. If the data shared by the Congress president, Mallikarjun Kharge, are to be believed, Mr. Modi used the term 'Mandir-Masjid-Muslim' 421 times in his speeches. For all his bluff and bluster, he did not conceal his irreverence for the idea of India – a value system that regards all citizens as equal stakeholders in the progress of the nation. Mr. Modi's aggressive Hindutva set the benchmark for other parties. Forget the so-called Muslim vote-bank politics of yesteryears. Today, even the Centrist and Left parties remain disinclined to end Muslim political isolation.

The demographic profiles of the contestants to the 18th Lok Sabha could be a nod to Mr. Modi's concept of Bharat. Indian democracy, however, will be better served without taints of such exclusion.

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#### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

It is astounding that political parties fail to understand the futility of any discussion, debate, and argument and counter-argument over the exit poll results in the media. No doubt these 'results' arouse interest, but the fate of all the political

parties was sealed soon after the last phase of the general election. Politicians and the public have no other go but to wait for the designated day. There is no point in exchanging heated words over the 'outcome' of the exit polls.

K.V. Seetharamaiah, Bengaluru

Polling is over and the results are locked in the electronic voting machines. What purpose does it serve then to have exit poll results when the people have been waiting patiently for long for the results? Many such exit polls have gone wrong in the past. The only purpose seems to be to

increase TRP ratings of channels and also promote betting! It is amusing that newspapers give front page coverage to exit polls. Kshirasagara Balaji Rao, Hyderabad

It should be noted that most of these media houses have for some time been

affiliated to the National Democratic Alliance and its associated organisations. To project the electoral 'exit poll results' any other way would be surprising. Also, the demeanour of the anchors and the way in which they taunt the Opposition parties does not befit the status of a

democracy such as India. Ratheesh Chandran, Thiruvalla, Kerala

It is scary to have the exit poll results. If true, what happens to the idea of India? Will every institution fade away? S. Francis, New Delhi

# Anger, separation, and the aftermath

n June 2, 2014, when the composite State of Andhra Pradesh was divided into two States, the people were angry. They alleged that the United Progressive Alliance government at the Centre had passed the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act without consulting key stakeholders and after consulting a few regional parties and the Bharatiya Janata Party in secret. To make matters worse for them, Hyderabad was to cease being the capital of Andhra Pradesh from June 2, 2024.

#### A brief history

To know what has changed in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana today, it is crucial to look back. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru consented to carving out the State of Andhra from Madras State in 1953, but only after the freedom fighter, Potti Sriramulu, began a fast-unto-death for a separate State in 1952 and died in the process. At that time, the new State of Andhra, which included Rayalaseema and Coastal Andhra, did not include Hyderabad State. It was only after several deliberations that Andhra Pradesh, including Hyderabad State, came into being on November 1, 1956.

But discontent simmered between the people of Andhra and Telangana. This culminated in the violent Telangana agitation of 1969. In 1972, as a response to it, a counter movement called Jai Andhra began. It gained momentum after the Andhra Pradesh High Court and the Supreme Court upheld the Mulki rules. The rules were safeguards to ensure that Mulkis, or native residents, did not face difficulty in procuring government jobs in Telangana. The people of Coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema felt that the Mulki rules treated them as foreigners in their own land.

Though this agitation died down, the people of Telangana remained angry. This led to the agitation of 2013-14, led by K.



**Bhattacharjee** 

Telangana Rashtra Samithi, The Union government accepted the agitators demand for separate Statehood. Mr. Rao became the first Chief Minister of Telangana and Chandrababu Naidu of the Telugu Desam Party became the first Chief Minister of residual Andhra Pradesh.

Ever since Hyderabad State was merged with Andhra, the people of Telangana felt marginalised. Rich farmers from coastal Andhra Pradesh reportedly moved into Hyderabad and procured huge chunks of land. Ministers in successive Cabinets all hailed from Rayalaseema and Coastal Andhra. The people of Andhra held a grip over

industrialisation. All the key areas of the economy such as industry. agriculture, health care, and education were either under the control

of the Reddys from Rayalaseema or the Kammas from Coastal Andhra. When Mr. Naidu started developing Hyderabad as an IT destination, contracts were given to people from these regions. This did not go down well with the people of Telangana, says former bureaucrat E.A.S. Sarma.

Political observers believe that such disillusionment would not have happened if the Gentlemen's Agreement of 1956 had been followed. The Agreement was signed to provide safeguards to the people of Telangana. The safeguards included distribution of revenue and industries, representation in the Cabinet, domicile status, and importance to the local language and culture. But they were never implemented in letter and spirit. Under the agreement, Regional Standing Committees were formed independent of the Chief Minister to ensure that development is decentralised and every region in Telangana gets its share of development. But these failed too.

The failure of the Gentlemen's Agreement is evident from the fact that of the 17 Chief Ministers who

ruled composite Andhra Pradesh, 14 were from the Andhra region and a majority of them were either from the Reddy or Kamma community. Despite the share of these communities being relatively low in the State, they have ruled the political landscape.

#### **After bifurcation**

10 YEARS OF

BIFURCATION

This brings us to the question, what is the scenario post-bifurcation? The main benefit is that the people of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh now have the space to articulate their concerns

independently. The people of Telangana are now part of a separate State, which means that they are not dominated by politicians from Andhra Pradesh. Their local issues are highlighted. Issues such as riparian rights are addressed or at least

being heard. Meanwhile, the people of Andhra Pradesh who insisted that key resources from the region were being pumped into Hyderabad can no longer say that. It is the Chief Minister's job to harness the resources of a region. How well the Chief Ministers of the State have been able to do this in the last 10 years is debatable.

The greatest benefit is that though there are two separate States today, there is little animosity among the people.

There are issues too. Some of the promises made in the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014, have been implemented, but others await implementation. An Indian Institute of Technology in Tirupati, an Indian Institute of Management in Visakhapatnam, and an All-India Institute of Medical Sciences in Mangalagiri have been set up, but projects such as the South Coast Railway Zone in Visakhapatnam remain in limbo in Andhra Pradesh. And significantly, the State now does not have a capital.

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## Counting the failures of the past decade

Progress in Andhra Pradesh has been tardy on various fronts

#### **STATE OF PLAY**

G.V.R. Subba Rao subbarao.gavaravarapu@thehindu.co.in

ndhra Pradesh is a State without a capital. The Andhra Pra-Reorganisation Act, 2014, had said that Hyderabad would be the common capital of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana until June 2, 2024, following the bifurcation of composite Andhra Pradesh in 2014. While a few office spaces, an interim Secretariat, and a High Court have been established, successive governments have not been able to make Amaravati the capital.

Andhra Pradesh has also not made rapid strides from a development and economic perspective. Major projects such as the Polavaram project, the Kadapa Steel Plant, and the South Coast Rail-

way Zone in Visakhapatnam remain unrealised dreams. The Polavaram project is delayed because of technical issues and lack of funds. Expert committees have said that establishing an

integrated steel plant in YSR Kadapa district is not technically and economically feasible. Though the Centre cleared the decks for operationalising the South Coast Railway Zone, the project has not taken off. The Union government has claimed that the State has not handed over land, while the Andhra Pradesh government has asserted that 52 acres were identified at Mudasarlova in Visakhapatnam and an agreement was made in this regard.

In Parliament, both the BJP and the Congress promised Special Category Status (SCS) to Andhra Pradesh, but the



Union government turned down the proposal. The TDP walked out of the NDA in 2018 over the SCS issue and faced a drubbing in the 2019 elections. Apart from reminding the Union government every now and then about the SCS, the YSRCP has been unable to mount pressure on it.

The economy of the State has also not improved compared to States such as Maharashtra and Gujarat. Apart from Kia Motors in Anantapur, reportedly no other major players have ventured into Andhra Pradesh. Instead, Amara Raja Batteries re-

located operations to neighbouring States. The Reorganisation Act mandated the Union government to lend support to Andhra Pradesh for its resource gap for BIFURCATION 2014-15. The TDP government pegged

the revenue deficit at ₹16,078 crore, but the Union government pruned it to ₹3,979.50 crore. The revenue deficit touched ₹31,479.88 crore by March 2024 (preliminary estimates). Andhra Pradesh and Telan-

10 YEARS OF

gana still face unresolved issues post-bifurcation, including division of assets and pending power bill dues. The division of various institutions and corporations, listed in Schedule IX and Schedule X of the Reorganisation Act, has not been completed due to a lack of consensus. According to the Act, as many as 89 government companies and corporations are listed in Schedule IX. Assets belonging to nearly 245 institutions mentioned in Schedules IX and X, worth about ₹1.42 lakh crore, are yet to be divided between the two States.

The people of Andhra continue to rely on Hyderabad for health and educational facilities. Policymakers and bureaucrats are not in Hyderabad, but they are still connected to the city emotionally. This could be one of the reasons for the tardy progress in Andhra Pradesh.

In this scenario, it is important that the party which forms the next government focuses on establishing a capital in the State. The YSRCP put forth the idea of three capitals, but this may not be easy and may run into legal issues. Similarly, a grandiose capital, as planned by the TDP, will have fiscal problems if the various welfare schemes promised in the manifestos are implemented. To win investors' confidence, the government has to develop a capital with the resources it has now.

The development of infrastructural facilities gives a big boost to the industry and service sector. As the Union government is prioritising portled development, Andhra Pradesh can look for a bigger share in the pie given its coastal advantage. Its pending issues with Telangana have to be solved soon. It is also time for Telangana to pay ₹6,756 crore to Andhra Pradesh for the supply of power post-bifurcation (from June 2, 2014, to June 10, 2017). The river management boards which were supposed to be set up in Andhra Pradesh should be shifted to the State from Hyderabad. It is time for the government to make up for the failures of the last decade.

#### composite Andhra Pradesh may not have happened Chandrasekhara Rao of the

If the

Gentlemen's

Agreement of

1956 had been

followed, the

bifurcation of

# Fewer women are being hired for leadership positions

LinkedIn's Economic Graph data show that representation of women across the workforce has declined

#### **DATA POINT**

#### The Hindu Data Team

hile representation of women across the workforce has creased over the years, LinkedIn's Economic Graph data show that progress has stalled since 2022 and declined in 2024. Also, the progress that was being made in promoting women to senior and leadership roles has stagnated in recent years.

Most women in senior positions are employed in sectors such as healthcare, education, administrative, and support services. The number of women employed across all positions is poor in the manufacturing, construction, oil and gas industries. LinkedIn found these trends from self-reported data by more than 1 billion members across 41,000 skills in 68 million companies and 1,35,000 schools globally.

Chart 1 shows representation of women in the overall workforce and in senior positions over the years. Women's representation in the overall workforce increased from 23.9% in 2016 to 27.3% in 2022. It stayed the same in 2023 before decreasing to 26.8% in 2024. The 2024 data are based on the position of women in the month of January.

A similar trend was also seen in the representation of women in senior leadership positions. The promotion of women to higher roles has been snail-paced. It took four years (2016 to 2019) for the share of women in senior positions to go up by one percentage point and another four years (2019 to 2022) for it to go up by another point. If the downturn seen in January 2024 persists throughout the year, even this slow-paced increase will

The stagnation in the share of women in senior positions and the dip in January this year can be attributed to the slowdown in fresh

hires of women for leadership roles, data show. The share increased from 18.8% in 2016 to 25.2% in 2021 and declined after that. "LinkedIn Economic Graph data shows that despite progress, women still face obstacles in reaching leadership roles due to bias, societal norms, and structural barriers. However, recent focus on 'women-led development' has led to concerted efforts by both policymakers and business leaders to tackle these challenges," said Aditi Jha, LinkedIn India Board Member and Country Head, Legal and Government Affairs.

An industry-wide look at the share of women in senior leadership positions shows that even the gradual rise was limited to certain sectors. The entry and career progression of women were lowest in the oil, gas and mining, construction, utilities, wholesale, manufacturing, transportation and real estate sectors (Chart 2). In these sectors, there were just 11%-14% women in leadership roles. The oil industry had the lowest share of women in top positions - just

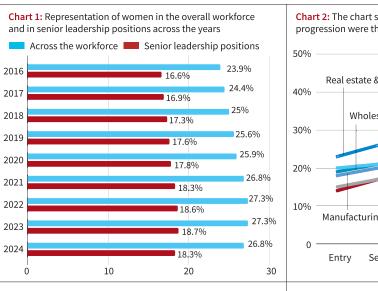
In accommodation and food services, financial services, retail, technology, and media, the representation of women in senior roles was between 15% and 20% (Chart

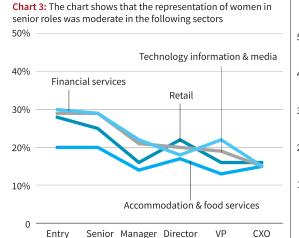
In administrative and support services, healthcare and hospitals, consumer services, government administration, and education, the share of women was between 22% and 30% (Chart 4). The share of women in senior positions was highest in the education sector

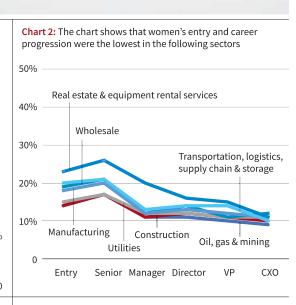
Data in the report also show that laws such as the Companies Act, 2013, which mandates women directors on company boards, are not being followed strictly. Between April 2018 and December 2023, 507 companies were fined for flouting this norm. Of them, 90% were listed companies.

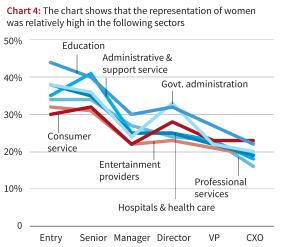
With inputs form PTI













FIFTY YEARS AGO JUNE 3, 1974

#### Bhutan King enthroned: Colourful function at Thimpu

Thimpu, June 2: King Jigme Singye Wangchuk was enthroned this morning the monarch of all Bhutan, at the ceremony at the Royal Fort Palace here to the accompaniment of elaborate and colourful religious and social rituals whose origins are lost in legend and history. The 18-year-old King received the multi-coloured traditional scarf of Royal office from the Je Khempo, the chief and incarnate Lama of Bhutan at an auspicious hour chosen by astrologers shortly after 9 a.m. The President, Mr. V.V. Giri, and the President of Bangladesh. Mr. Mohammedullah and the Chogyal of Bhutan, who is also related to the Bhutanese Royal family were the three Heads of State to honour the occasion by their presence while Nepal sent as its representative Prince Gyanendra. All the permanent members of the Security Council, including China sent their Ambassadors or Charge d'Affaires marking international recognition of the young King's ascension to the throne. The presentation of the scarf by the high priest to the King was private and secret unwitnessed and unphotographed. In the small confines of the throne room the King sat without a crown but wearing a highly decorative silken woven dress and ceremonial scarf. Before entering the private chambers for the ceremony, there were some interesting rituals in the courtyard of Tashichhodzong the Royal Fort Palace which also includes part of the Secraetariat and a huge wing for Buddhist monks.

#### A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JUNE 3, 1924

#### International emigration conference

Rome, June 2: The Emigration Conference concluded after adopting practically unanimous resolutions drafted by the committee dealing especially with general principles of treaties respecting emigration and colonisation. An important matter determined was the declaration of principle with regard to the legal status of emigrants and conditions governing the residence of workers in foreign countries. The conference passed a resolution urging states to institute compulsory medical examination of emigrants before embarkation and decided to hold a second conference in 1927, in one of the immigration countries.

# Text&Context

THEMOHINDU

#### **NEWS IN NUMBERS**

Sweltering heat triggers rise in India's power consumption

power consumption rose nearly 15% in May as compared to the year-ago period, mainly due to scorching heat. PTI

#### Terrorists stationed on launch pads across the Line of Control (LoC)

Director General of Police Rashmi Swain underscored the importance of collective efforts in guarding the border. Sustained efforts are required to reduce the enemy's ability to destabilise the area. PTI

#### Height of ash column produced by Mount Ibu eruption

Indonesia has erupted again and spewed thick, grey ash and dark clouds 7,000 meters (16,000 feet) into the air. AP

#### The proposals which led to amendments to the IHR

The 77th World Health Assembly agreed to the package of amendments to the International Health Regulations (IHR), 2005 based on proposals made by member countries. PTI

#### Number of civilians wounded by Ukrainian strikes in Russia

Six civilians were wounded as a result of the bombardment of Shebekino town. Meanwhile, a Ukrainian drone attack in the Kursk region injured three people. AFP COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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# Does inequality lead to growth?

Several argue that inequality harms democratic processes. Some inequality, others argue, is actually beneficial, since it acts as an incentive to entrepreneurs to start businesses. This view is mistaken, for inequality can have deleterious economic effects

**ECONOMIC NOTES** 

**Rahul Menon** 

ahul Gandhi's statements regarding redistribution – and the polarising rebuttal of Prime Minister Narendra Modi – have brought the topic of inequality to the forefront. Researchers from the Paris School of Economics have shown inequality in modern India to be greater than colonial times.

Several argue that inequality harms democratic processes. Some inequality, others argue, is actually beneficial, since it acts as an incentive to entrepreneurs to start businesses, thereby increasing employment and welfare for others.

This view is mistaken, for inequality can have deleterious economic effects as well. Consider one form of inequality, that of concentration of monopoly power amongst capital relative to labour. This can have negative effects on consumption, welfare, and growth. If done properly, wealth taxes and distribution can have positive effects.

Monopoly power and consumption Billionaires draw their wealth from monopoly. Their business groups are dominant players in their specific market. This allows them to set prices instead of being determined by the market. The extent of mark-ups above the cost of production is determined by their monopoly power. Thus, for any given level of money wages, real wages – which determine purchasing power – are lower in economies with strong monopolies.

These monopoly effects are currently being experienced as the cost-of-living crises affecting the developed economies. The phenomenon of "greedflation", or companies raising prices to increase profit margins in the wake of multiple demand-and-supply shocks due to the pandemic, has been pointed to as contributing to high rates of inflation in the West. Textbook economics shows us



ISTOCKPHOTO

that the profit-maximising level of output under a monopoly is less than under a competitive economy, implying a welfare loss. Thus, the presence of monopolies can lead to lower real wages and lower levels of output and investment.

**Inequality and growth** 

Assume that a company decides to set up a new factory. Before the new capital stock is created, wages are paid out to workers to build it. The income of the workers is spent on purchasing goods, which increases the income of goods-sellers, whose increased income results in purchases of other goods, and so on. The total increase in the income of workers and goods-sellers is greater than the initial investment. This process is called the 'multiplier' effect, wherein investment raises incomes by a greater proportion than the initial investment.

When companies exercise market power, mark-ups and prices will be higher. Real wages of workers are lower, and they can only purchase lesser items. However companies, because of higher margins, will enjoy the same amount of profits from the sale of a lesser amount of goods. The increase in income from a given amount of investment will be lesser under monopoly because of reduced consumption power. Thus, investment will have a weaker effect on growth under monopoly while not affecting profits.

One can argue that consumption of the rich can help boost growth. While the absolute amount of consumption of the rich is more, they consume a smaller proportion of their incomes. The multiplier process depends on the proportion of consumption from incomes. An unequal economy will put lesser incomes in the hands of those with

a greater propensity to consume, leading to weaker expansion in the economy.

Redistribution and growth

Some argue that the 'cure' of redistribution can prove more harmful than the disease of inequality by affecting job creation. Entrepreneurs would see reduced incentives for amassing wealth under a high-tax regime, resulting in a scale-back of investment and jobs.

One must make a distinction between wealth and profits. Investment occurs under the influence of future profit expectations, while wealth is accumulated past profits. As the Polish economist Michal Kalecki argued, taxes on wealth would not affect investment since it leaves expectations of future profits unchanged. For example, taxing Gautam Adani's wealth will not affect investment since expected profits from airports depends on the demand for air-travel which is independent of the value of his wealth.

No doubt, the difficulty in converting profits into wealth may deter some business-owners from undertaking investment. But an economy with high expectations of profit would ensure businesses invest even if wealth is taxed. Redistribution can generate forces to spur growth even if some billionaires pull back on investment. For one, if wealth is redistributed and increases income, the multiplier process would become stronger. Businesses would be more willing to invest where purchasing power is strong. If monopolies are curtailed, then prices would be lower and real wages higher, leading to greater demand.

Consider Thomas Piketty's proposal of taxing billionaire wealth and providing basic income. This might cause some to exit the economy, but can create a new class of entrepreneurs who can create start-ups, freed from the necessity of working for wages. Redistribution is not a silver bullet, and too high a rate of taxation can become a net drain on an economy. Used in conjunction with other policy measures, curtailing inequality can lead to a healthier economy.

#### THE GIST

Rahul Gandhi's statements regarding redistribution — and the polarising rebuttal of Prime Minister Narendra Modi — have brought the topic of inequality to the forefront.

Billionaires draw their wealth from monopoly. Their business groups are dominant players in their specific market. This allows them to set prices instead of being determined by the market.

These monopoly effects are currently being experienced as the cost-of-living crises affecting the developed

# Can domestic MFs invest in their overseas counterparts?

What does a proposed framework by SEBI put forward? What are some of the concerns?

Saptaparno Ghosh

The story so far:

he Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) on May 17 floated a consultation paper proposing a framework for facilitating investments by domestic Mutual Funds (MFs) in their overseas counterparts, or Unit Trusts (UTs) that invest a certain portion of their assets in Indian securities. Comments about the framework are solicited until June 7.

What is the framework's purpose? Noting India's strong economic growth prospects, SEBI observes that Indian securities offer an attractive investment opportunity for foreign funds. SEBI says this has led to several international indices, exchange traded funds (ETFs), MFs, and UTs allocating a part of their assets towards Indian securities. In the consultation paper, MSCI Emerging Markets Index was noted to hold 18.08%

exposure to Indian securities.

Indian mutual funds, somewhat conversely, diversify their portfolios by launching 'feeder funds' which invest in overseas instruments such as (units of) MF, UTs, ETFs and/or index funds. Other than diversification, it eases the path to make global investments. However, ambiguity remains about investments which have Indian exposures, which deters domestic MFs from investing in these instruments. SEBI's cumulative assessment sees merit in potentially allowing investments of this kind with "limited exposure to Indian securities." Within the proposed framework, the markets regulator also intends to place essential safeguards which would keep the Indian instruments "true to their label" and enable investors to take desired exposure in overseas securities. If the fund has significant exposure to Indian securities, the purpose of making an overseas investment is defeated.

What proposals has SEBI tabled? Significantly, the upper limit for

investments made by overseas instruments (in India) has been capped at 20% of their net assets. That is, overseas instruments being considered must not have an exposure of more than 20% in Indian securities. Deeming the cap "appropriate," SEBI explains that this would help "strike a balance between facilitating investments in overseas funds with exposure to India and preventing excessive exposure." The markets regulator has also sought that Indian mutual funds ensure contributions of all investors of the overseas MF/UT is pooled into a single investment vehicle. Other than this, Indian mutual funds must also ensure that all investors of the overseas instrument are receiving gains proportionate to their contribution – and in no order of preference. SEBI stresses that these investments are to be made autonomously by the manager (of the overseas instrument) without any influence from the investors or undisclosed parties. SEBI is also seeking public disclosures of the portfolios of

such overseas MF/UTs periodically for the sake of transparency. Finally, it warns against the existence of any advisory agreement between the Indian mutual fund and the overseas MF/UT. This is to prevent conflict of interest and avoid any undue advantage.

What happens when overseas instruments breach the limit?

If the overseas instrument breaches the 20% limit, the Indian mutual fund scheme which is investing in the overseas fund would slip into a six-month observance period. This period is to be utilised by the overseas instrument/fund to rebalance its portfolio adhering to the cap. Further investment in the overseas instrument would be allowed only when the exposure drops below the limit. If the portfolio is not rebalanced within this period, the MF must liquidate its investment in the overseas instrument within six months.

Are there other considerations?

The first consideration is RBI's upper limit for overseas investment by mutual funds. RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das stated that there was no proposal to increase the investment limit. In light of this, Suresh Soni, CEO at Baroda BNP Paribas Mutual Fund told The Hindu, "The changes to regulations would not have any practical impact immediately, as the overall industry limit for overseas investments is effectively exhausted." Mr. Soni says such investments provide diversification opportunities to Indian investors.

#### THE GIST

SEBI on May 17 floated a consultation paper proposing a framework for facilitating investments by domestic Mutual Funds (MFs) in their overseas counterparts.

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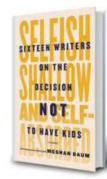
THE HINDU

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Access to all: A supporter holds up a sign during Missourians for Constitutionals Freedom kick-off petition drive on February 6, 2024, in Kansas City, AP

# The politics of womanhood: from abstinence to abortion

A closer look at literature suggests that women's experiences of unsafe, backstreet abortions are tied more intricately than they seem. Writers like Annie Ernaux have translated their pain into writing, for their own relief and of those like them, isolated by the laws

#### Nandini Bhatia

woman's body is a political playground; it always has been. Like all politics, womanhood, with its morality and many mandates, manifests into literature and unveils the inconspicuous prejudice that grows underneath the grace and tenderness of femininity. Across the world, the issue of women's rights - or rather, women's access to basic human rights - has emerged and evolved constantly; first and foremost, the right to bodily agency and by extension, the right to (safe and legal) abortion. Between France becoming the first country to grant constitutional freedom to women to have an abortion and the U.S taking a step backwards by overturning Roe vs Wade two years ago, the carousel keeps turning. A closer look at literature suggests that women's experiences of unsafe, backstreet abortions are tied more intricately than they seem.

#### 'Angel-makers'

French writer Annie Ernaux, in her first book, Cleaned Out (1974/1990), chose the comfort of fiction to confront her own horrid experience of an illicit abortion in the 1960s - she wrote about it after it had been decriminalised in France. It was only after almost 40 years that she chose to write on the topic upfront, in her memoir Happening (2000/2001) and later again, in The Years (2008/2017). Denise, the 20-year-old protagonist of Cleaned Out, finds herself pregnant and loses faith in religion and literature, much like Ernaux who briefly lost interest in academics and the socio-political

momentum of the time, occupied by the humiliation and desperation of finding a backstreet abortionist - "angel-makers" as they were popularly called. Unsupervised medication, expensive and dodgy tools, and precarious set-ups eventually lead her to a hospital, nearly dead, where the hard-hitting reality of her working-class background awaited her. "The law was everywhere," she writes. Even when seen through the distance of time, Ernaux's reflections hold true. In hindsight, one wonders along with her: "whether abortion was banned because it was wrong or wrong because it was banned." Nonetheless, she felt it her duty to translate her pain into writing, for her own relief and of those like her, isolated by the laws. The question stands, much to the plight of American women today (or German women being harassed by pro-life protestors, or Irish women a few years ago).

#### The social gaze

Simone de Beauvoir, the literary beacon of women rights, especially in France, went a step further by arguing that how women are treated depends on how they are seen by society, in The Second Sex (1949/1953). She observes the role of social, religious and political agents in determining a woman's worth as a potential carrier of future life – a vessel as opposed to an independent entity, seen in the light of "the sexual and the reproductive" function of the body. All understanding boils down to one simple truth: anything a woman chooses to do with her body – from procreation to recreation – is a threat to society and its pecking order, which is why women are

primarily placed in a position of subordination, where eliminating woman's right to choose for herself is the safest way to minimise the very threat.

Literature has more to offer on the subject but more often than not, writings on abortion go unnoticed; they remain hidden from mainstream reading, perhaps owing to the stigma it evokes, irrespective of what the law says. The word abortion itself was often left unsaid in the rooms it was performed in; "[t]his thing had no place in language," as Ernaux noted. Like Ernaux, other literary figures also underwent painful, silent and secret abortions, including Susan Sontag, Alice Walker (who elaborated on racial discrimination as a component of medical treatment) and Audre Lorde. They too, as writers, used the currency of their gender and their art, to materialise their experiences. All four writers went on to have children later in life, which speaks all the more for the need to have progressive laws on abortion. Their abortion was an exercise in reason, an exercise of choice, an act of desperation, and not, by any means, a protest against social order. Making such a choice inaccessible, by denying safe medical procedures, only worsens the condition; raising the risk of avoidable maternal deaths or perhaps even an increased number of abandoned, unwanted, infants.

#### **Humanising a debate**

A pro-choice attitude is often seen as a form of radical feminism by those who are pro-life. Two recent anthologies -Choice Words: Writers on Abortion (2020) edited by Annie Finch and Selfish,

Shallow, and Self-Absorbed: Sixteen Writers on The Decision Not to Have Kids edited by Meghan Daum (2015) – debunk this assumption by humanising the debate of a 'childless' woman (by design) from a 'childfree' woman (by choice). "People who want kids will always outnumber people who don't," notes Finch. However, such writings not only help others who undergo similar experiences feel seen, but also establish reproductive freedom as a matter of social justice.

As for where India stands, legally and historically, it can be claimed that both, the ideals of motherhood and the choice of remaining childfree, have been viable in the country, as Amrita Nandy notes, in Motherhood and Choice (2017). In her academic pursuit, she cites mythology and history. Her work complements d Beauvoir's philosophy that in society, marriage certifies a woman's sexuality, thereby "completing" her; and that in the absence of marriage, the threat magnifies. Both writers acknowledge and deconstruct the "woman-as-womb" argument which seems to favour only the female sex and not the gender, in its fluid form; a distinction that needs more discussion.

Ernaux was influenced by de Beauvoir as much as the women (and writers) of today are by Ernaux's commitment to memory-keeping, in both personal and political ways.

Literature has been and will always be a tool to process, reveal and protest the conditions of the world, especially those that contribute to the becoming and unbecoming of a woman.

Please send in your answers to

dailyquiz@thehindu.co.in

Nandini Bhatia is an independent feature writer @read.dream.repeat

### doing here? I thought this was a private event but the entire stadium is rife with photographers S. Upendran

**KNOW YOUR ENGLISH** 

What is that

busybody

You're late again!"

"Had to go to the bank, and then see that busybody, Ramesh."

"That's the first time I've ever heard anyone call Ramesh a busybody. I thought he minded his own business."

"He certainly does! Never interferes in anyone's business. But he keeps himself busy all the time. Never has time for...." "Then, he's not a busybody. A

busybody is someone who keeps poking his nose in other people's business." "In other words, someone who is very interested in other people's affairs. Wants

to know what is happening." "Not just interested, but makes it a point to meddle or interfere in them. This individual goes around giving advice even

when no one is asking for it.' "I guess the word is used to show disapproval, then?"

"That's right!" "No one took advice from Nirmala. Everyone was convinced she was nothing more than an interfering busybody."

"That's an excellent example! The plural of this word is 'busybodies'. Bharath is seldom invited to parties. He is seen as a busybody."

"I don't think he is a busybody." "You're in the minority. Tell me, why did you have to meet Ramesh? The poor

chap has had a pretty hectic week so far." "That's exactly what he said when I asked him about which shares to buy."

"As the CEO, Ramesh has to make many decisions every day! I'm sure at the end of the day, he has decision fatigue."

"Decision fatigue? Fatigue means tired. What does decision fatigue mean?

"It means being mentally exhausted because you've been making one decision after another."

"When you make many big decisions, you experience decision fatigue."

"They needn't always be big decisions. They could be a series of small decisions as well. But they all add up, and leave you mentally drained."

"And therefore, your potential to make decisions temporarily deteriorates."

"Exactly! At the end of a very busy day, my friend took me to the new coffee place. They had over twenty varieties. When the waiter asked what I wanted, I experienced decision fatigue, and just couldn't answer."

"How is the word 'r...i...f...e' pronounced?"

"It rhymes with 'life', 'wife' and 'knife'. Do you know what 'rife' means?"

"When you say that something is rife, what you're suggesting is that it is widespread. It is something common."

"That's right! It is a very common occurrence. The important thing to remember is that the thing that is rife is usually unpleasant. Good things are seldom rife. For example, rumours were rife there would be riots in the streets." upendrankye@gmail.com

Word of the day

make someone a member of the nobility

Usage: Her skill and talent ennoble her

Pronunciation: bit.ly/ennoblepro

International Phonetic

Alphabet: /ɪˈnəʊbəl/

Synonyms: dignify, entitle

confer dignity or honour; give a title to someone;

**Ennoble:** 

profession.

## Today is the 100th death anniversary of Franz Kafka, whose surreal fiction brought to

THE DAILY QUIZ

life worlds in which humans contemplated themselves in the face of the impossible that Kafka's stories don't reveal to readers

#### Vasudevan Mukunth

#### **QUESTION 1**

The name of the protagonist of Kafka's The Metamorphosis, Gregor Samsa, gives away two sources of inspiration for the story. One is a novel by Jakob Wassermann, Another is a book by X called *Venus in Furs*, where a character is named Gregor. Kafka also references the book's title through a picture in the story. Name X.

#### **QUESTION 2**

On August 13, 1912, Kafka met \_\_ \_\_. A week later, he wrote in his diary: "As I was taking my seat I looked at her closely for the first time, by the time I was seated I already had an unshakeable opinion." He dedicated his short story 'The Judgment' to her. Fill in the blanks.

#### **QUESTION 3**

Kafka's stories are famed for their use of the X literary technique. It gets its name from the fact

the moral position of some character or circumstance in a story. Instead, the reader is left to decide for themselves. Name X.

#### **QUESTION 4**

Kafka's novel \_ \_\_, featuring a protagonist named 'K.', was unfinished when he died. A friend of his heavily edited and published it posthumously. Later, the friend decided to restore the parts he'd cut, but couldn't publish the new version right away because the Nazis had banned the book. Name it.

#### **QUESTION 5**

The term '\_\_\_\_', rooted in the sensation of alienation that suffuses Kafka's stories, is used to describe similar situations in the real-world. But some critics have said the term doesn't just describe such a circumstance: it also presumes that a person faced with such hopelessness fights it with all their hope. Fill in the blank.



**Visual question:** 

Name this man, a confidant of Kafka's, who introduced him to the woman in Q2 and is the friend in Q4.

#### Questions and Answers to the May 31 edition of the daily quiz: 1. John von Neumann said that the ideal length of this should be one-millionth of a century, which is roughly 52.5 minutes. Ans: Lecture 2. If 1 HP is equal to roughly 750 watt, name the term for 250 watt. Ans: Donkey power 3. This is a humorous unit of measurement used to denote a distance of around 3.08 cm. **Ans: Attoparsec**

4. Name the influential American programmer who likely founded the community known as 'hackers' and helped design the first Lisp machines. Ans: Richard

5. This English physicist was so laconic that Cambridge University invented a unit to measure the rate at which taciturn people spoke. Ans: Paul A.M. Dirac Visual: Name this political commentator.

**Ans: Thomas Friedman** Early Birds: Rajmohan. V Prashant Nain Fathima Niloofar

For feedback and suggestions for Text & Context, please write to letters@thehindu.co.in with the subject 'Text & Context'

M ND-NDE



{ OUR TAKE }

# Tempering the GDP euphoria

The economy is growing at an impressive pace, but the problem of creating jobs remains

he Indian economy grew at an impressive 8.2% in fiscal year 2023-24. This makes India the fastest-growing major economy by a (large) distance in the world. Beyond the headline number, what is the import of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) data, which was released last week?

One, the headline GDP print might be exaggerating the actual economic momentum. This is on account of a technicality rather than some inherent upward bias in the numbers. GDP is the sum of Gross Value Added (GVA) and indirect taxes less subsidies. A fall in net indirect taxes has given a big push to the GDP numbers despite GVA — it measures the growth in tangible sectors such as agriculture, industry and services — growth being lower at 7.2% and broadly in line with analyst estimates. That said, 7.2% itself is an impressive number.

Two, the broad macroeconomic story has not changed compared to what the previous numbers were telling us. Investment spending, aided by government capex, has been a big driver of growth even as private consumption continues to wait for a sustained and broad-based revival. With the government in fiscal consolidation mode, as evident in the falling subsidy spending too, it remains to be seen whether private consumption gains momentum going forward. What could complicate matters further is the fact that the Reserve Bank of India might not see any reason to bring down interest rates before a pivot by the US Fed to support growth. Minus a broad-based private consumption revival, the private capex engine would also stutter rather than fire on all cylinders.

Last but not the least is the political economy takeaway of these numbers when read with the exit polls which suggest an even bigger mandate for what will be a third Narendra Modi government. That the Modi government went to the elections without any fiscal sops suggests that its policy outlook will continue to prioritise macroeconomic stability over populism, at least in the medium term. This is good news as far as financial markets and foreign investors are concerned. However, the justified economic euphoria can only take India so far in dealing with the structural challenges of generating quality mass employment.

It is on this question that the economic policy establishment should focus its long-term sights on. Consolidating the gains of the macroeconomic sweet spot to address bigger challenges rather than complacency has to be the approach going forward.

### In Arunachal, Sikkim, a problem of ecology

n Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh, parties in government have been voted back with enhanced mandates. In Sikkim, the Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM) has near-swept the elections. In Arunachal Pradesh, the Bharatiya Janata Party, which won 10 seats unopposed, has won a comfortable majority. The pattern is that Arunachal Pradesh prefers to vote for the party in office at the Centre while the ruling regime in Gangtok tends to ally with the government in Delhi. Though the two states are insignificant in the larger political matrix, they are important because of their sensitive geography and location: China looms large in both the Himalayan states. As border states, physical infrastructure in both has received adequate upgrades in recent years. However, the main challenge for the incoming government in Gangtok and Itanagar will be to reconcile aspirations of development and ecological concerns

Both states have a history of landslides and floods, which have been exacerbated in recent years due to the climate crisis and government policies insensitive to local topography. For instance, both see an economic opportunity in promoting hydropower through big dams despite warnings from ecologists. In October last year, a glacial lake outburst in the upper reaches of the Teesta led to the destruction of the Teesta III dam—at least 40 people died and the floods devastated towns such as Chungthang. Around the same time, a landslide threatened the under-construction Lower Subansiri project in Arunachal Pradesh. Clearly, the large projects mooted in the Teesta basin (Sikkim) and on the Subansiri, Dibang and Lohit (Arunachal Pradesh), all tributaries of the Brahmaputra, need re-evaluation. Gangtok and Itanagar, pioneers in pushing progressive environment policies (ban on plastic, for instance), will now need to address this contradiction of promoting big dams while being aware of the precarity of their ecology in the face of the climate crisis.

{ GRAND STRATEGY } Happymon Jacob



# India needs to think like a great power

The government must formulate a national security strategy document keeping in mind the country's longterm objectives and the strategic environment it must operate in

rising India must build a grand strategy. Without a grand strategy, our thinkers, politicians, and policymakers will continue to plan for the short-term, act ad hoc, and have the various arms of the government working in divergent directions. With a new government taking office this month, this is an opportune moment to begin thinking about a grand strategy for the country.

But what is a grand strategy? Simply put, a grand strategy would be having some of the following characteristics. A dynamic assessment of medium- to long-term geopolitical trends, clarity on long-term national objectives, an all-of-government approach to achieving those objectives, and a synergy between national capabilities and objectives. A grand strategic approach functions as a guide rather than a dogma, and must adapt to major external changes.

Three sequential steps are foundational in the conceptualisation of a grand strategy. First, the determination of primary objectives and primary challenges (or contradictions) as different from secondary objectives and contradictions. The second step is to identify and synergise the means to achieve those objectives, which may consist of external geopolitical opportunities and internal material capacity. The third step is to link one's strategic objectives and challenges to

available geopolitical opportunities. In developing a grand strategy for India, the first step is to undertake an objective assessment of the world we live in. The current world order is marked by four key features: Instability induced by the transition from one order to another; sharpening United States (US)-China rivalry and the emergence of a bipolar world; the rise of tech competition and emerging tech divides; and the rise of China as a potential next superpower.

The second step is to tailor a grand strategy around India's most fundamental, or primary, objectives. These are, of course, subjective and different governments may approach them differently. In the Indian case, there are at least three primary objectives: Achieving rapid economic growth; being prepared to defend against external aggression; and contributing to building a multipolar Asia in which India is a pole. Each of these grand objectives could have more specific policy objectives. For instance, utilising geo-economic opportunities in the Indo-Pacific would support India's economic growth.

Third, identify the primary and sec-

ondary contradictions that come in the way of achieving the grand strategic objectives. As for India's primary contradictions, an aggressive and unaccommodating rise of China tops the list considering two of India's primary objectives, as identified above, are complicated by China. More so, several of India's challenges in the neighbourhood, some of its problems with Pakistan, and the potential Chinese hegemony in Asia flow from the China contradiction. The logic of primary contradiction also suggests that the country must focus on resolving its secondary contradictions so as to free up resources to focus on the primary contradiction. Reaching out to the neighbourhood and achieving a rapprochement with Pakistan is. for instance, useful in dealing more effectively with the China challenge. Secondary contradictions include challenges from Pakistan, South Asian States using China to balance India,



Contemporary India, far more confident than ever before, must articulate its vision for the world and its place in that world

and the impact of Ukraine on India. However, focusing on those challenges without addressing the primary contradiction might produce suboptimal results.

The final step is to ask: What opportunities exist to address these contradictions and achieve the grand strategic objectives? Some opportunities include the growing US-China competition, a chaotic international system, the global focus on the Indo-Pacific, a positive international view of India, and changes in the international system. If so, India must make use of these opportunities to deal with its most consequential challenge or primary contradiction, China.

A grand strategy must also be translated into specific actionable strategies keeping in mind the country's grand strategic objectives. To achieve this, consistent development of a long-term perspective and routine strategic stock-taking within the government must be assiduously encouraged. The incoming government must, therefore, consider formulating a national security strategy document keeping in mind the country's long-term objectives and the strategic environment it must operate in. As part of a comprehensive national security strategy document

or as additions to it, New Delhi must also develop, in consultation with various departments, industry bodies, the private sector and thought leaders, well-thought-out policies on the Indo-Pacific, neighbourhood, global governance, multipolar Asia, etc. Some of these strategies could have public and confidential versions with the former more visionary and the lat ter more policy specific.

For far too long, India merely reacted to the pulls, pressures, and vagaries of international politics. Neither non-alignment nor strategic autonomy were grand strategies; they were at best inchoate organising prin ciples of a still underconfident India They communicated to the world what India did not want, and would not do, as opposed to what India wanted, or would do. A far more confident India must articulate its vision for the world and its place in that world in the form of a grand strategy. If India wants to be a great power, it must start thinking like one.

Happymon Jacob teaches India's foreign policy at Jawaharlal Nehru University Delhi, and is the founder of the Council for Strategic and Defence Research, a New Delhi-based think tank. The views expressed are personal

# A citizen of the world in his time and ours

Raimohan

Gandhi

hen, following Narendra Modi's claim that "nobody knew about" Gandhi until Richard Attenborough made his 1982 film, I was asked to write on "Gandhi the global citizen", my first wish was to write instead on the alarming ignorance behind the claim. Recognising, however, that many in today's India believe whatever Modi might say, I have put together some chronological Gandhi-related information for them.

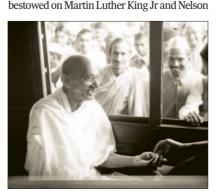
In 1893-94, when Gandhi was 23 and in South Africa, he wrote a tiny handbook called Guide to London, which was based on his three years (1888-91) as a law student in the empire's capital. text can be found in the first volume of the Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi. "Who should go to England?" asks Gandhi, and answers: "All who can afford should go to England." Why? Because "in England the student is alone, no wife

to tease or flatter him, no parents to indulge, no children to look after, no friends to disturb (him), (and) the invigorating climate is by itself a stimulus to work". The handbook raises and answers a range of questions regarding life in the United Kingdom, including about food, exercise, cooking, cleaning, clothes, haircuts, transport, and the theatre. Gandhi recommends walking, temperance and vegetarian food, but

he also provides helpful information for Indian students aiming for England, Interestingly, the young author twice quotes Leo Tolstoy without knowing that he and the Russian novelist would have a significant correspondence before the latter's death in 1910.

In 1906, Gandhi and Winston Churchill met for the first and the last time. Churchill was under-secretary for the colonies, and Gandhi, sent to London by South Africa's Indians, called on Churchill and asked for their rights to be protected. Two years later, Churchill's book, My African Journey, was published, in which he expressed fears that "Asiatics" might "teach the African natives evil ways". This was a direct comment on Gandhi's success in mobilising South Africa's Indians to defend their rights.

John Dube (1871-1946), a co-founder of the African National Congress, was Gandhi's neighbour in Phoenix, near Durban, in South Africa's Natal region. Both Gandhi and Dube ran centres in Phoenix, and for a while, a journal started by Dube was printed at Gandhi's "ashram" there. which was also bringing out Gandhi's *Indian Opinion.* One of the students at Dube's centre in Phoenix, Chief Albert Luthuli (1897-1967), later served as president of the African National Congress, from 1952 to 1967. For his struggle for justice in South Africa, Chief Luthuli won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1961, well before the award was



African Americans were speaking and writing about Gandhi from 1917

Mandela. Everyone knows that Mandela and King acknowledged their struggles' links to Gandhi's satyagrahas in South Africa and India, but Luthuli's earlier battles, and their connection to Gandhi, also merit remembrance. In his Conversations with Myself, Mandela would write that "Chief (Luthuli) was a passionate disciple of Mahatma Gandhi.

During his South Africa years (1893-1914), Gandhi's Indian Opinion kept an eye on the situation of blacks in the US and their experience of slavery. In a 1905 article, Gandhi spoke of Abraham Lincoln as "the greatest and the noblest man of the last century" for his willingness to defy white fellow Americans over sla September 9, 1911, Indian Opinion wrote of the African American intellectual, WEB Du Bois: "Dr Du Bois is a great man amongst the world's great men." On their part, African Americans were speaking and writing about Gandhi from 1917, if

not earlier, i.e., almost four decades before King burst upon the American scene. For example, in 1921, Marcus Garvey, a major modern figure in the African American story, spoke of Gandhi's success in forging a Hindu-Mus-lim alliance for India's freedom, adding: "If it is possible for Hindus and Mohammedans to come together in India, it is possible for (African-Ameri-

cans) to come together everywhere." In July 1929, the journal The Crisis, edited by Du Bois, published on its front page a signed message for African Americans from Gandhi that it had sought, which said: "Let not the 12 million (African Americans) be ashamed of the fact that they are the grandchildren of slaves. There is no dishonour in being slaves. There is dishonour in being slave-owners." In that July 1929 issue, The Crisis called Gandhi "the greatest colored man in the world, and perhaps the greatest man in the world." The original article can be seen at http:// credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums.

The 1930 Salt March, which triggered all-India eruptions against British rule, drew from Churchill the comment before the House of Commons on March 12, 1931, that the fighters led by Gandhi had "inflicted such humiliation and defiance as has not been known since the British first trod the soil of India". Despite this defiance of British rule, when, in 1931, Gandhi went to London to talk to the imperial government, the British people gave him a cordial welcome. This was true even in Lancashire, where India's boycott of British textiles had added to the woes of the Great Depression of the time. Albert Einstein never met Gandhi although he and Nehru seem to have talked to each other about the Mahatma. Einstein's widely known line that "generations to come" would "scarce believe" that someone like Gandhi was once around was written in 1939, nine years before Gandhi was killed

Shortly before India's Independence, when many of Asia's leaders gathered in Delhi in April 1947, Gandhi told them: "All the Asian representatives have come together. Is it in order to wage a war against Europe, against America or against non-Asians? I say most emphatically 'No'. Recalling Zoroaster, the Buddha, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, Gandhi called them "Asia's wise men", and added: "I (am) an inheritor of the message of love that these great unconquerable teachers left for us. I want you to go away with the thought that Asia has to conquer the West through love and truth.

Rajmohan Gandhi's latest book is Fraternity: Constitutional Norm and Human Need (2024). The views expressed are personal

## DONG JUN } DEFENCE MINISTER, CHINA The Chinese People's Liberation Army ... will act resolutely and forcefully at all times to curb the independence of Taiwan

{ STRAIGHTFORWARD }

Shashi Shekhar



# Robust electoral process pressing need of the hour

he final phase of voting for the 18th Lok Sabha has concluded, and now the world's largest electorate eagerly awaits the results. People abroad, who have varied reasons for their interest in New Delhi's political landscape, are keenly watching the outcome of the election. Over the years, when each election ends, I am reminded of Winston Churchill, the British Prime Minister during World War II who once arrogantly claimed that democracy in India would not survive beyond the third general election. But India's so-called "men of straw" have delivered a fitting response to such colonial assertions

India's elections are unique. Each election reveals different colours and attitudes. This time, for instance, more than 50% of votes were cast on average in the Kashmir Valley. In Anantnag, once a stronghold of terrorists, the turnout reached 55.4%. Previous elections in Kashmir were often marred by irritants, but this time, hope and enthusiasm were clearly evident.

Every election since the 1980s, except this one, has seen separatists claim that voters were forcibly brought from their homes and made to stand at polling booths. This was the first general election in the Kashmir Valley since Article 370 was repealed on August 5, 2019. Previous experiences demanded that the Election Commission of India (ECI) use extreme prudence. This was also accomplished. As a result, not even minor incidents of violence occurred in the Valley. Kashmiris have clearly grasped that if their voices need to be heard in Delhi, the only way to do so is to elect representatives and send them to the country's largest panchayat. Should we believe that the days of Pakistani deceit are over? The situation has undoubtedly improved, but we must be alert. In this region, the relationship between democracy

and the people has often proved to be fragile. If there was enthusiasm in the Valley, it should also have reflected in the national Capital. But only 55.43% of voters in New Delhi fulfilled their democratic duty. Decades from now, won't researchers examining these numbers suggest that the trends in New Delhi and Anantnag were similar? Not only Delhi but also Mumbai and other major cities also disregarded the call of the times in

this regard. Indian democracy has been upheld more by the rural populations than by the "white-collar" demographic.

Let me present another figure for your consideration. The first general election in 1951-52 had about 173.2 million eligible voters, of whom 44.87% exercised their franchise. Currently, 970 million people are registered to vote in the country. Data from the ECI suggests that the voter turnout is lower this time compared to the last election.

Another noteworthy fact is that the first general election spanned five months, whereas this time it lasted one-and-a-half months, making it the second-longest election in the country's history. During this period, an unprecedented heatwave hampered both campaigning and voting. It's no surprise that many politicians and eminent personalities have appealed to the ECI to shorten the duration of the general elections and avoid holding it during extreme heat or winter. Also, the concept of "one nation, one election" is being strongly advocated.

Also, once again during the election campaign, the people endured the disrespectful language of their leaders with a sense of sadness and disbelief. Such discourse undermines the trust of voters, as evidenced by the low voter turnout in the sensitive Hindi belt. Our leaders, while making unfounded statements, seem to forget that they are under the omnipresent scrutiny of social media. Countless memes mocking absurd statements made by leaders have gained popularity this time around. It begs the question: Why don't political parties and politicians of India vatch what they say?

The ECI faced criticism this time, too, over issues such as delays in collecting voting data and not curbing the use of foul language by leaders. This overshadowed the ECI's commendable efforts in ensuring violence free elections in such a vast country. Another notable point is that West Bengal witnessed more violence than Jammu and Kashmir. One hopes that the Commission will evaluate both its shortcomings and successes. Improving the electoral process is the most pressing need of the hour.

Shashi Shekhar is editor-in-chief, Hindustan. The views expressed are personal

newindianexpress • com

# EDITORIAL MONDAY 03.06.2024**CHENNAI**

THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

INDIAN EXPRESS IS NOT AN INDUSTRY. IT IS A MISSION.

— Ramnath Goenka

## TRUMP'S CONVICTION HAS LESSONS FOR **OTHER DEMOCRACIES**

former US president's criminal conviction by a jury of common citizens sends up a bright flare for accountability. Former state leaders have been handed guilty verdicts in at least half-a-dozen nations over the past decade, in-I cluding Pakistan and Myanmar. But the global gasp at Donald Trump's conviction was of people letting it sink in that someone once considered the most powerful person in the world could be brought to book. That too in a justice system often accused of favouring pale males gliding around in gilded halls.

The presumption of innocence holds till all chances of appeal have been exhausted, which can take several months for a litigious billionaire with a battery of lawyers. The sleaze underlying this New York case was spilt long back. The felony charge was for subversion of democratic process—paying hush money to muzzle a potentially damaging exposé before a poll. The state attorney's win on that count is a reprieve in the international court of public opinion for a nation in need of one right now.

Whether the verdict will mean accountability in public life will first depend on the Republican party that is yet to formally nominate him and US adults who vote in November. Trump's scorched earth policy against detractors has ensured that a thick red line has already fallen in behind him. Legally, the 77-year-old can still run for president, though ironically he may barely be able to vote because his home state of Florida bars felons from exercising the franchise, with a loophole for those not charged in the state. Given the growing share of Americans unhappy with a rematch between the presumptive nominees, countrywide electoral intent is torn in irresolute halves. One measure of the polarisation is in Trump's claim to have raised more than \$50 million right after the verdict.

There are two lessons for the rest of the world from the sordid saga. Strong institutional frameworks can withstand even the crudest assaults on democracy. It's important to remind every generation that no one is above the law in a republic. And weakened institutions can bend established facts as pliable political putty. Which lesson nations choose to take to heart will decide the course of democracy in this global year of elections.

## **SOLVE EMBLEM DEBATE DEMOCRATICALLY**

ELANGANA and Andhra Pradesh crossed a milestone on Sunday with Hyderabad ceasing to be the common capital of both as per the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act. But it is just a technicality since Andhra shifted its government apparatus from Hyderabad soon after division of the state in 2014. It is a different matter whether Andhra will eventually develop Amaravati as its capital city or go with the three-capital formula. It will all depend on the outcome of the assembly elections.

In Telangana, which celebrated its 10th formation day, a somewhat different issue is grabbing the headlines amid the feverish speculation over the Lok Sabha election results. The Revanth Reddy government has proposed to redesign the State Emblem and came up with a State Song, which was set to tune by Oscar winning music director M M Keeravani. Though there were murmurs of dissent over having an "Andhra" music director as its composer, it was adopted and played on Sunday on the occasion of the formation day celebrations. In our view, it is unfair to tag Keervani, the music maestro as belonging to a region. He's a source of pride for the nation. Telangana, which is a modern, thriving, inclusive state, is proud of its rich heritage and Keervani's music to the inspirational song is an ode in itself to the people who fought selflessly for the cause of Telangana. The debate over the proposed emblem, however, is generating serious debate. The present one, which was designed after division of the state, has the historic Kakatiya Thoranam and Charminar representing the culture and history of Telangana. PCC president and Chief Minister Revanth Reddy has for long been opposed to it. His reasoning is that it doesn't reflect the movement that gave birth to the state. There is definitely logic in his argument. On the other hand, as BRS leaders point out, the present emblem encapsulates the rich heritage of the state. The question is whether it should be changed as per the wishes of the chief minister.

First, in a functioning democracy, it can be changed with the approval of the people—represented by the elected legislators. By the same yardstick, five years later, the successor may also want to amend it. What then? In such matters, it is pertinent to discuss and debate before arriving at a decision The state government has rightly decided to do the same in the next assembly session. It should try to achieve a consensus which is key to a vibrant democracy.

## **QUICK TAKE**

### **ELECTIONS WITH A DIFFERENCE**

N Sunday, the ruling parties in Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh—Sikkim Krantikari Morcha and BJP—were declared winners with absolute majorities in the state assemblies. Some of us may think that polls in these sparsely populated states with few Lok Sabha seats are of relatively low national significance. But unlike in other states, the importance of these polls is that the state borders to the north mark the boundary between democracy and autocracy. So they are of immense local and international significance. The fact that the people on this side—many of them with historical ties to the other side—can choose their representatives makes a difference, however imperfect our democracy is.

N May 28, President Ranil Wickremesinghe let the cat out of the bag. As political tensions increase and the demand for elections spike, the general secretary of the United National Party (UNP)—a party that has

recorded successive defeats and now stands decimated under Wickremsinghe's leadership—has proposed the postponement of both presidential and parliamentary elections by two years through a referendum, effectively permitting Wickremesinghe to continue as president to "implement economic reforms". This call may resonate with a section of

Sri Lanka's middle class, content with the absence of queues for food and fuel with no power cuts—a fake normalcy concealing the painful reality of a nation overwhelmed by external debt. Interestingly, the postponement call is an indirect acceptance by Wickremesinghe of his inability to obtain a popular mandate, no matter what his economy-fixing mantra is. People remain unconvinced of both his leadership and the economic reforms formula, primarily a prescription from the International Monetary Fund. Experts critique that without new industries and exports, privatisation and accumulation of debt to service existing debt cannot fix the island's ailing economy. In short, being wedded to the current reforms offers no guarantee of economic recovery.

The current privatisation spree does not win public trust either. The process is so opaque and lacking basic transparency that people learn about development projects or "investments" often through the media. They also fear their island home has been turned into a veritable battleground, with competing powers the United States, China and India—all staking claims. Adding to this is intense India watching, with trepidation and mistrust, as the country learns about new projects, be it green wind or railways. The same middle class that wants to place its trust in Wickremesinghe finds it impossible to write that blank cheque for the fear of the unknown future.

Back to the question of the haste to postpone polls. Sri Lanka is expected to hold both parliamentary and presidential elections in the latter part of 2024. Then there is that distasteful political history around referendums and extensions of terms. One of Sri Lanka's most dubious electoral experiments was in 1982 when Wickremesinghe's uncle, Sri Lanka's first executive president, Junius Richard Jayewardene, extended the life of parliament using the same mechanism. Unlike Wickremesing-

The call to postpone elections is an indirect acceptance by President Wickremesinghe of his inability to obtain a popular mandate, no matter what his economy-fixing mantra is

# SRI LANKA'S STRUGGLE WITH **ELECTION PHOBIA**



Award-winning journalist and lawyer. She is a founder and director of the Colombo-based enter for Investigative Reporting (CIR)



he, Jayewardene in his second term was still a popular leader. During the infamous referendum held in December 1982, nearly 71% cast their vote, with 54% voting in favour of extending the life of parliament. In September 1982, Jayawardene had secured 52% of the total vote to serve a second term even though the fairness of this election remains contentious.

So, to have the UNP General Secretary Palitha Range Bandara suggest a dubious repeat comes as no surprise, with its illconcealed political intentions behind the cloak of economic reforms. He audaciously said: "If not for five years, at least for two years," and called for support from the National People's Power and the Samagi Jana Balawegaya, the two most popular political outfits at present.

What is striking is the absence of respect for public acceptance and his justifications to roll up the electoral map. First, it is democratic if it involves the passing of a resolution in parliament followed by a referendum. Second, it is necessary to continue current economic reforms. Third, it is futile to waste public funds on elections at a financially critical time. Fourth, Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike also postponed elections in the 1970s. The first he did not mention, and that was the 1982 referendum that remains a permanent

black mark on the UNP's political legacy. There is no denying that Sri Lanka needs an urgent recovery plan. It is not just economic, but deeply political. The level of external debt is also a question of financial discipline and governance, and

begs the question whether the country's politicians can be trusted to ensure recovery when in 75 years, all they have done is increase external borrowings without effective repayment models.

It is the political component of the crisis that the politicians are keen to avoid. Because that demands accountability for a multitude of promises made over 75 years, unaddressed ethnic wounds, religious tension, youth unrest and grand corruption. These issues emerged in 2022 during the popular uprising, and a key demand was to call for elections. An attempt to openly rob the people of their right to vote on the pretext of economic stability can only trigger further political tension, and how it may escalate is impossible to predict.

As for the elections, despite the propaganda and heat of the moment, popularity of candidates and parties fluctuate. Sri Lankans are also known for voting with their emotions, and this election may not be any different. A case in point is when Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga rode a wave of sympathy to be re-elected as president after she survived a suicide attack by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and lost sight in one eye.

This time around, experimentative politics will prove way too costly. It is the first time that Sri Lanka holds elections as a bankrupt nation. Admittedly, part of the island's larger malady is the ilk of present-day politicians. Suffice to say that it is not a nation with too many choices.

There had been promises to abolish executive presidency since 1994. There had been commitments and efforts, some of it half-hearted, to address the national question. The war concluded in 2009, leaving the larger question of justice and reparation unaddressed. There is little concern over the need to share power and there's no thought given to the nonimplementation of the 13th Amendment, a violation of the Constitution.

Then there are those who voluntarily lecture Colombo about transparency accountability and human rights, ad nauseum. On the question of the imminent postponement of elections, there is radio silence. Do we conclude that the people's franchise is not among the human rights they often speak of?

Sri Lanka needs a genuine attempt to resurrect the nation. Getting stuck in old political and economic models may not offer the answers the troubled island requires. It would need innovation, creativity, and even a new breed of politicians.

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# THE ROLE OF VARANASI IN **EXALTING GANGA'S IDENTITY**

LECTIONS may come and go, but the Ganga flows forever. I am strongly drawn to look again at this great river. Six headstreams, five sacred confluences, life-giver to the subcontinent's northern plains, soul waters of ancient belief, play course of adventure-seekers. A celestial entity, the hard-won fruit of steadfast human penance in theology, an ecosystem that has degenerated into the cloaca maxima or big gutter of modern India.

Spread over 1.1 million sq km, the Ganga's basin is home to a quarter of India's population. It is an intricate web of tributaries, canals, waterways and run-offs.

The Ganga basin is described by the American architect Anthony Acciavatti, a Fulbright scholar who spent a decade plotting the region, as "the world's most engineered river basin", a veritable "water machine" and "a dynamic system, closely interconnected with the monsoon". The river's cultural depths are just as complex and layered, especially at Varanasi. It is Varanasi, or Kashi, that exalted Ganga's identity across the Indic bandwidth to the extent that the mighty Mekong further east is named 'Ma Ganga', the mother river. A side note: Ganga water was the biggest kitchen expense of the Mughals since Akbar. There was a high-ranking officer who organised supply and storage of water pots from the river, reserved for the royal family.

Everyone we've grown up hearing of has come here: Shiva, Shakti, Nandi and Raja Harishchandra. Varanasi is the birthplace of four Jain Tirthankaras. The Buddha came here in the sixth century BCE and preached his first sermon to 'the Five' at Sarnath. Adi Shankara came arguably in the eighth century CE. It was Kabir's hometown in the 15th century, and in the 16th century, Goswami Tulsidas composed the Ramcharitmanas and the Hanuman Chalisa here, changing the history of religion forever across north India. Carnatic eminence Muthuswami Dikshitar came here in his teens with his guru, learnt Hindustani ragas, and went on to become a pillar of Indian musical excellence.

Kabir went to the *Upanishads*, to the earliest-known concept of a formless One who contained and pervaded all forms. The Upanishadic attempt to define the 'unknown' was expressed in many ways, and Kabir rearticulated this using phrases from the text in simple Hindi as 'Jaise til mein tel hai, jyun chakmak mein aag/Tera Sain tujh mein hai, tu jaag sake toh jaag' (Like oil in



sesame seeds and fire in flint, so your Lord lies within you, awaken Him if you can). The Sikh Gurus greatly cherished Vara-

nasi. Guru Nanak came here in 1506, went to the then Kashi Vishwanath temple, met with pandits to discuss his views and collected verses of Kabir and other local saintcomposers. The sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind, sent an emissary to spread his teachings. The ninth Guru, 'Chadar-e-Hind' Guru Tegh Bahadur, who gave his life in



Guru Nanak went to the then Kashi Vishwanath temple in 1506. In 1839, Maharaja Ranjit Singh covered the spire of the new Kashi temple with gold. This is the present structure, rebuilt in 1780 by Maharani Ahilyabai Holkar of Indore

1675 to protect religious freedom of Hindus, visited Kashi twice. His son, Gobind Rai, when barely six, came by with his mother on a journey across north India, and as Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth Guru, sent five followers to learn Sanskrit and get higher learning before sending them as emissaries of the reformist Sikh faith.

In 1839, Maharaja Ranjit Singh covered the spire of the new Kashi Vishwanath temple with gold. This is the present structure, rebuilt in 1780 by Maharani Ahilyabai Holkar of Indore. The Maharajas of Nabha and Kapurthala donated towards the founding of a Sanskrit College in 1911 and Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, founder of Banaras Hindu University, reportedly went in person to invite a greatly respected Sikh saint, Sant Attar Singh, to inaugurate it.

The Guru Granth Sahib includes verses composed by 15th century Saint Ramananda of Varanasi, an ardent follower of the inclusive Sri Vaishnava faith spread by Sri Ramanuja of Tamil Nadu. Ramananda himself was Kabir's chosen spiritual preceptor; both Ramanandi and Kabir Panthi

cults cut a wide swathe across north India. Swami Dayanand Saraswati, founder of the Arya Samaj, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa and Swami Vivekananda showed up on Kashi's ghats as a matter of course on their respective reformist missions in the 19th century. An intricate web of connections thus emanated from Kashi, weaving a warp and woof of spiritual sensibility over the Indian subcontinent across centuries and regions—a richly-textured weave of thought that included strands of both classical Hinduism and the reformist worldviews spun from deeply internalised

values of Upanishadic philosophy. While rejecting the ritualised classical approach to religion, such seminal Indian socio-cultural reformers upheld the inclusive philosophical core of Hinduism and its meditation, music and poetry. They honoured the centrality of Varanasi's symbolic importance in the collective consciousness, in which the spiritual and temporal interfaced through the Ganga's ghats. These physical steps to the physical water stayed the key metaphor for the journey of the soul towards its spiritual goal, in which 'Hari', 'Shiva', 'Sain' and 'Tat' ('That', the nameless and formless) often became inter-

changeable terms for the transcendental. Varanasi was the cultural crucible for a spectacular range of 'change within continuity' and was both the place of and participant in these foundational narratives. These historical figures were drawn to Varanasi by millennia of mystique invested through the river of pilgrim life. That's why almost every community and religious sect is represented in Kashi by its own temple, rest house and community hall. Every believer is supposed to make a pilgrimage to Kashi at least once and is likely to make their own emotional pact with this timeless river.

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#### MAILBAG

WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

### Self regulations

Ref: Redefining Brahmacharya for a new age (Jun 2). The author has covered a plethora of ills plaguing the present generation, especially the excessive use of mobiles and social media. As the author suggests, self regulation plus setting up standards as a family will go a long way to help. R Sriramprasad, email

Acquiring knowledge Brahmacharya is not only about celibacy and leading an austere life. The major focus is on learning and acquiring spiritual knowledge from gurus. Devoid of luxuries and materialistic pursuits, this is a period of deep study of scriptures to develop a spiritualistic bent of mind. Right habits, discipline and mental strength will certainly wean them away from the temptations of modern life.

### **Returned gold**

Rajarao Kumar, Bengaluru

Ref: An agenda for new parliament to propel prosperity (Jun 2) After nearly 33 years, the country is able to get back gold pledged with the Bank of England in 1991 to overcome the balance of payments crisis. Presently, the nation is sitting pretty on a pile of foreign reserves. Hope the new parliament works with a definite agenda towards making India the world's third largest economy. S K Ramesh, Ballari

### No rationale

Ref: Poll predicts exit of INDIA challenge, 3rd Modi term (Jun 2). The exit poll prediction, giving a clean sweep to the BJP-led NDA, did not come as a surprise. This is because the INDI Alliance was formed with a view to topple the government at the Centre, with no rationale except to show hate toward PM Narendra Modi. K V Raghuram, Wayanad

### Third term

According to exit polls from several media outlets and political analysts, it undoubtedly seems the BJP will secure a third consecutive term. Hopefully, the BJP will focus on addressing key issues predominantly affecting the nation's socio-economic development this term. Bishal Kumar Sahal, email

### **Voters' dedication**

The current polls highlighted the dedication of the Indian voter, who braved harsh conditions over three months to cast ballots, maintaining democratic integrity. Diverse in caste, religion and gender, voters showed unity despite differences. Notably, women's electoral influence has grown. With 968.8 million voters, India's democratic commitment remains exemplary and inspiring globally. Badruddeen Mudigere, Chikmagalur

### THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

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# **The Edit Page**

# Election Quality Has A Quantity of Its Own

Voters, too, can demand more from politicians

Any election in India is seen solely as a numbers game. The obsession with rally size, voter turnout, number of campaign rallies, vote shares, seats won, etc, is especially big deal in Lok Sabha elections. But now that the hurlyburly's done — and the battle's almost lost and won — it's time to look beyond the nose of quantity and think of whether the quality of this democratic exercise may be strained. Election 2024 was particularly rife with what can only be described as incivility and digressions. This meant candidates appealing to atavistic, divisive, even inflammatory issues that play little part in the Viksit India story. The usual 'We are like this only' reasoning won't do.

EC may have wagged a finger at 'star campaigners' who needed to be reined in. But the fact that campaigning, for a great part, appealed to bad-mouthing oppone-



nts, preaching fire and brimstone sermons, rather than dealing with real issues pertaining to a citizenry's needs and wants, has left the world's largest democratic exercise looking a tad infantile. This needn't be the case. Viksit elections could mean making everyday life for citizens easier, providing

better jobs, creating better access to opportunities and 'selling' healthcare solutions. Instead, much of poll campaigning was pretty much about rah-rahs and unsavoury put-downs. Doubly unfortunate is that voters seem to have accepted such tactics as par for the course.

'Recovery' will require politicians across the board to disagree without being disagreeable, to be critical, engaging and constructive. Voters, too, need to demand more of the political class and go beyond sharing images of their inked fingers as evidence of 'job done'. One would hope that once the heat and dust of the gigantic exercise to elect members of the 18th Lok Sabha dissipates and settles down, both the supply and demand side of governance will mature in quality, and not just in quantity.

#### **MACROECONOMICS**

# Setting Up Shop For Turbo Policy

India's economic growth of 8.2% in 2023-24 is notable on three counts. First, it surpasses the 8% hurdle rate seldom breached in India's post-Independence history. Second, it reinforces a strengthening of India's economic momentum after the Covid shock. Third, it speaks to the rising correlation between policy continuity and economic performance. The 2023-24 number pulls up average growth during the NDA decade closer to the preceding UPA decade. Both regimes experienced global economic shocks and bounced back, emphasising the role conservative regulation has played in keeping the economy on an even keel. The Indian economy has gained in resilience and can now aspire to raise its growth trajectory.

Numbers from the last quarter of 2023-24 show consumption to be growing slowly, while manufacturing exports are sprinting ahead. Investment growth tapered, but this is a transient



effect of national elections and can be expected to revive with policy continuity. Government spending stopped shrinking, and tax collections made an oversized contribution to fourth-quarter growth. Manufacturing and construction were the main drivers of growth replacing services during 2023-24. The role of the gov-

ernment is visible here in production incentives for manufacturing and stepped-up infrastructure spending. The outstanding performance of manufacturing exports during the last quarter provides corroborative evidence of the effectiveness of policy intervention.

An incoming government could not expect a better economic report card under the circumstances. The capital account deficit is in check, and the fiscal deficit is on course to accelerated correction. Tax revenue is buoyant and state-owned enterprises are poised to deliver handsome dividends. Expenditure control has improved, and the nature of government spending has become more capital-intensive. These create the fiscal headroom to increase the economy's potential growth rate. The external environment is also becoming more benign, which could act as a tailwind.



# A prize has been announced looking for real-life Doctor Dolittles

# Have a ChatGPT With Your Dog or Cat?

A cool \$10 mn prize has been announced by the Jeremy Coller Foundation and Tel Aviv University for anyone who can crack the code of inter-species two-way communication using generative AI. Which means being able to understand your dog or cat when she tells you that she wants her tug-toy, and not the ball to play with.

For those of you able to comprehend inter-human communication, the Babel fish in Douglas Adams' novel, The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, should be familiar as the small, yellow fish that, when placed in an ear, will allow the 'wearer' to hear any language translated into their first language. But this prize is to find a real-life Doctor Dolittle, the vet in Hugh Lofting's children's books who can speak to animals. Researchers have already used ML algorithms to translate bat squeaks and understand pig grunts. For domesticated animals, however, scientists should first listen to pet parents. A peek at social media will reveal why. Many pet parents and their wards actually already yap away. They know that a 'puppy face' means 'Feed me NOW!' It may actually be tougher for us to understand fellow humans.

Whichever way you cut it, the economy's booming and is a welcome gift for the incoming gov

# Now, Bat On a Great Wicket



Mythili Bhusnurmath

asically, it's booming!' JPMorgan CEO Jamie Dimon was responding to a question posed at the Economic Club of New York in late April on the resilience of the US economy. But he could as well have been talking of India. National Statistics Office (NSO) data released last Friday show the Indian economy is, well, booming.

At 8.2%, GDP growth for 2023-24 is streets ahead of the most optimistic estimates, and far, far ahead of RBI's estimate of 7% till as late as December 2023. Sure, there could be distortions due to the way the GDP deflator is computed, as this is then used to arrive at the real (from nominal) GDP numbers, and also because of changes in the 'net taxes' figure - GDP is GVA (gross value added) plus taxes less subsidies. But whichever way you dice the numbers — nominal or real GDP growth, GDP or GVA — there's no getting away from the fact that the Indian economy is shining.

The news has, of course, been greeted with 'ra-ras' from the ruling BJP and nitpicking by the Opposition, even as it has left the aam janta cold. This is for two reasons.

At best of times, NSO's quarterly releases on GDP — and opinion columns parsing them — don't grab too many eyeballs, as Oped writers well know. But when these estimates come just a day after the last day of campaigning for Lok Sabha elections, and a day before the last day of polls, no-

NSO's 2nd AE in Feb of 7.6% growth implied a 5.7%

expansion in Jan-March quarter. What we got, instead, was an eye-popping 7.8%, powering annual growth to 8.2%

ChatGPT

Sh**ai**ri

OF THE DAY

In the whole country,

it was perfectly clear,

The election results that

we'll soon get to hear.

But we're pretending

and smile,

In our patent

devious style,

'Who'll win?' We keep

asking with a sneer.



T2024-25 favourites

thing the NSO pulls out of its hat can possibly compete for attention with the cacophony of exit polls and sus- to account growth numbers for the pense of waiting for the results now a first three quarters of FY24(8.2%, 8.1% day away.

After all, the outcome of elections will have a far greater bearing on the future trajectory of the economy—and its politics — than any inference one can draw from NSO's numbers.

> With that caveat in mind, let me turn to the estimates. But instead of parsing them to see which sectors are growing, and at what rate, it might be better to look at them from the perspective of the challenges and opportunities they present to the new government. What, if anything, do these cheery numbers mean?

> > A great deal. The economy is, undoubtedly, on a strong wicket. Statistically speaking, the NSO's second advance estimate of 7.6% growth made in

Almost 50% of internet traffic comes from non-human

Research report. Bad bots, in particular, now comprise

nearly one-third of all traffic. Traffic levels of such bots

Share of web traffic caused by bots (in %)

rose for the fifth consecutive year, indicating an alarming trend...

Harmful bots

sources, according to the 2024 Imperva Threat

**Bad Bot Traffic** 

Harmless bots

13.1

15.2

Source: Imperva, Statista, techtarget

2020

form of malware. Normally, bots operate over a network

February implied a 5.7% expansion in the Jan-March quarter, after taking inand 8.4% respectively). What we got, instead, was an eye-popping 7.8%, powering annual growth to higher-thananticipated 8.2%.

For starters, the new government will be able to steer the economy without having to worry unduly about the biggest bogey of all in public finance: fiscal deficit. As against GoI's RE of 5.8% in the interim budget presented in February, FY24 is likely to end with a lower deficit of 5.6%, making BE of 5.1% for the current fiscal seem well within reach.

For another, higher GDP numbers bode well for tax collections, especially when numbers suggest the manufacturing sector is finally looking up. At 9.9%, full-year manufacturing growth is way above the 2.2% contraction seen in 2022-23.

Given that manufacturing, along with trade, hotels, transport and communications, as well as construction, which grew at 6.4% and 9.9% respective-

• •

32.0

17.6

30.2

2022

ly, are the three sectors that contribute most to employment, we can hope that we've turned the corner, with jobless growth giving way to growth and jobs.

Does this mean everything is hunky-dory? Not quite. Remember, disaggregated data show the farm sector where large numbers continue to be engaged, and contributes close to 15% of GDP—is still struggling. Sure, growth has turned marginally positive (0.6%) in Q4, after contracting for two consecutive quarters. But annual growth at 1.4% is the lowest among all sectors, and is way below the decadal average of over 4%. This explains why private consumption has grown at a glacial pace of little over 3% for the past many quarters, and also has huge implications for welfare.

NSO data only tells you how

the economy has performed in the past. For the future, we will have to look to high-frequency indicators



Also, at the end of the day, NSO data only tells you how the economy has performed in the past. For the future, we will have to look to high-frequency indicators. By that count, India's economy seems to have got off to a flying start in 2024-25. According to the Economic Activity Index (EAI), constructed by extracting the common trend underlying 26 high-frequency indicators of economic activity in RBI's May bulletin, activity rebounded in April.

Of course, geopolitical tensions and volatile global commodity prices, especially of petro products, as well as an erratic monsoon and resurgence of inflation, could play spoiler. But, for now, we are on a good wicket.

That's welcome news for any new government. And if the incumbent government is voted back, a vindication that its economic policies are on the right track.

R Prasad

**Bell Curves** 

# THE SPEAKING TREE

# The Court of

Conscience

#### **SUMIT PAUL**

There is a higher court than the courts of justice - the court of conscience. It supersedes all other courts, Persian moralist and mystic Shaikh Saadi wisely asserts that there exists a higher court than the human institutions of justice, namely, the court of conscience. He suggests that true justice is not merely a matter of legal judgments or the enforcement of laws but a sincere evaluation of one's actions in accordance with one's moral compass.

The court of conscience supersedes all other courts, as it is the ultimate arbiter of right and wrong, guiding individuals to make ethical decisions and holding them accountable. It's always the voice of conscience that guides and regulates humans. 'Har shakhs agar apne zameer ki sune/In adalaton ki iahan mein darkaar na raheif every individual listens to the voice of his/her conscience/ The courts in the world shall become redundant.

Our life is a chariot, conscience its charioteer: A conscientious person keeps evolving all the time because conscience and human evolution are like Siame se twins. An evolved human needs no external guidance to steer the ship of his life. He has a conscience as his greatest steward. To be a human is to be conscientious. Nature has endowed all of us with conscience. Let conscience remain forever awake, alive and active. Mankind will collectively evolve, and all crimes, pettiness, bloodshed and differences will vanish in a jiffy.

## **Chat Room**

## Let's Now Make India Great Again

Apropos the exit poll coverage 'Exit Polls See Modi Hattrick' (Jun 2), what one likes about the exit polls is the reaction they generate in political circles and the media in general. For two days or so, there will be innumerable comments on the predictions of exit polls. As soon as the results are announced, the defeated politicians and political parties will talk about the increase in their vote share, which is a poor consolation in a democracy such as ours. Nevertheless, the new government has a great task on hand —to make India achieve rapid strides in all fields.

SRAMAKRISHNASAYEE Chennai

## HelpTampDown The Temp Up

This refers to the Edit, 'Heat is a Real Damp Squib for Productivity' (May 31). India has a large number of workers in unorganised sectors such as construction, farm, marketing, mines, labour, etc, who are directly exposed to sun and heat. The heatwaves put these people at great risk of exposure to various adversities. With no organised



sector-like benefits, when their productivity decreases, these workers either abstain from work, resulting in wage deduc-

enact strict legislation to reduce working hours and ensure regular breaks from work during heatwaves, along with providing protective wear such as sunglasses, caps, cotton clothes and gadgets, which will ultimately improve productivity.

tion, or are paid less. GoI should

**VEENA SHENOY** Thane

## He's a Jolly Good Felon

Apropos the news report, 'A Dubious First: Trump Guilty on All Counts in Hush-Money Trial' (Jun 1), Donald Trump has become the first-ever former US president to be convicted on criminal charges, adding another tag to his ignominy as the only former president to stand trial. However, the conviction will not prevent Trump from contesting the November election. He has a knack for playing victim to ensure that his campaign revolves around his court cases. The oldest democracy is still in progress and the law is not definitive in the US.

**GREGORY FERNANDES** 

Mumbai Letters to the editor may be addressed to

editet@timesgroup.com

# Pill for China Plus One MELODY FOR MONDAY

2021

Bot - short for robot - is a program that is used to simulate a human activity

Used to replace repetitive tasks, they can also be malicious and come in the



Seema Sirohi

It's been four years since the pandemic hit and jolted awake the world to its over-dependence on China for all manner of things, most crucially, medical supplies. That it was also China where the coronavirus originated made for macabre irony as Beijing tried to use the people's suffering for geopolitical gains.

of reliance—fatal attraction, rather was a national security threat. They devised a new lexicon to stay awake. 'De-risking', 'China plus one', 'friendshoring', 'resilient supply chains', 'trusted partners' and 'reliable geographies' became buzzwords. While progress was made to deny China the edge in semiconductors and critical minerals, focus on health security has been sporadic.

World leaders recognised that the scale

that pharma supply chains are too concentrated in one country and the need for diversification is urgent. But little has been done to address the issue. A partnership on health security similar to the one forged on critical and emerging technologies could be an idea. Good thing is the building blocks are already in place.

Both the US and India acknowledge

Consider the facts. The US is the world's largest buyer of medicines and India one of its largest

suppliers of generics. ► In 2022, of the 9.7 bn prescriptions filled in the US, 90% were for generics, of which 47% came from India, according to a study by IQVIA Institute for Human Data Science.

► In the top 10 therapy areas by prescription volume, Indian companies supplied more than 50% of drugs for five, including hypertension, mental health and lipid regulators.

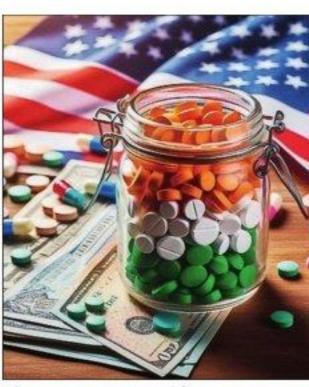
Overall savings to the US healthcare system was to the tune of \$219 bn. That's not nothing.

What's needed is a bilateral governmental framework to expand what already exists. The US could also bring some method in the health sector madness, especially in the procurement system. A few wholesalers and distributors dominate, constantly driving down prices for generics and forcing

companies out of business. An April white paper by the US Department of Health and Human Services blamed 'market failures', and acknowledged a 'broad lack of transparency' and 'concentration among middlemen' resulting in brittle supply chains. Serious rethinking is required now, not

when the next health crisis hits. Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance (IPA), a grouping of 23 leading companies, recently proposed a US-India Affordable Medicine Partnership to address the 'monopolistic dominance' of China in supply chains. The idea is to work together, utilise each other's strengths and start with 500-plus medicines listed by WHO as essential.

Indian pharma CEOs met senior officials in FDA and other key agencies to start a conversation. Even if a little late,



Pharm up a partnership

given the looming presidential election, the proposal deserves attention. The basic idea is to capitalise on India's expertise and infra for manufacturing through financial incentives, tech sharing, collaborative research and tech transfers

to expand production in both WASHINGTON countries. Pursue onshoring in America and friendshoring in India to reduce dependence on China. And aggregate US, Indian and European demand for certain drugs, as IPA secretary general Sudarshan Jain told me.

China dominates early parts of medicine supply chains, from basic materials to chemicals needed for processing. It can exercise strategic control on medical supplies if it wants, something that Beijing's proxies suggested when the US imposed tariffs on Chinese products. China not only provides 40% of the

global supply of active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs), or the precursors that give drugs their desired effects, it's also the primary producer of key starting materials (KSMs) and 'intermediates' that go to make APIs. India itself depends on China for 70% of APIs, including for critical antibiotics such as penicillin. There was a time when India produced APIs for penicillin. But, soon, China undercut with lower prices and higher volumes.

India is trying to get back into the game of domestic production of basic ingredients for 41 products through PLI schemes. But small companies are finding it hard to meet government requirements. Meanwhile, in the US, big pharma and its many powerful arms have been at work for some time to show Indian companies in a bad light by highlighting their shortcomings, on the one hand, and encouraging lawsuits against them on the other. Indian pharma does need to clean up its act — literally — and get up to international standards.

The pharma landscape is littered with mines. But it must be navigated with an eye to future collaboration. As they say, health security is economic security is national security.

#### God Save the Queen The Sex Pistols

Can't say if it's half full

or half empty. But it's

definitely half boiled.

The Sex Pistols' 'God Save the Queen' - not to be confused with the British national anthem before a man sat on that country's throne two years ago - is a searing, seminal counter-anthem. Released in 1977 during Elizabeth 2's silver jubilee, it's a defiant critique of a nation's establishment, infused with a sense of anger and disillusionment.

From the opening power chords, the track grabs the listener's attention with its unapologetic sound. John Lydon a.k.a. Johnny Rotten's snarling vocals deliver biting lyrics that challenge the status quo and express fru-



feeling betrayed by their govern-

earlier lines, 'Oh when there's no future/ How can there be sin/We're the flowers in the dustbin', reek of an angry sadness of those left behind. Musically, 'God Save the Queen' is a masterclass in punk simplicity. The driving guitar riffs by Steve Jones, pulsating basslines from Glen Matlock, and relentless drumming of Paul Cook create a ferocious backdrop that perfectly complements Rotten's provocative delivery. The production is raw, enhancing the song's authenticity and urgency. It's a classic song that tells you that riling people up can be fun.



## **CONTRAPUNTO**

Climate change isn't something people get to choose to believe or not: it's happening -MATT GAETZ

# Degree Of Duty

Polling personnel shouldn't have to die from heatwaves. Neither should workers. EC, govts take note

Tomorrow, almost certainly, as election results come in, one number will find no mention – 25, that's the number of polling personnel who died on duty in UP and Bihar, working through a heatwave. Tragic as it is, it's made worse by the fact that such tragedies should have been anticipated. As early as April, IMD had warned of an unusually hot summer, flagging the high probability of "above normal" heatwaves lasting 10-20 days, a sharp rise from the usual 4-8 days. EC did take steps to protect voters and polling staff from heat, issuing advisories and providing Assured Minimum Facilities (AMFs) at polling booths. But no matter the bandobast, polling personnel were always going to be vulnerable given the nature of their job, which involves being out and about for long hours over several days.

Rethink the calendar | Let's remind ourselves that, say, unlike those in armed forces, polling officials had not signed up for a hazar-



dous job. Polling duty is mostly performed by govt employees on 'special duty', whether they are teachers, officials, or clerical staff. And it is EC's responsibility to keep them out of harm's way. And the best way to do that is for EC to rethink the calendar of Lok Sabha elections - don't spread elections over peak summer. More so, because climate change is expected to make things worse in the future. When govts can advance elections owing to

political considerations, there is no reason the same cannot be done by EC for the well-being of polling personnel and voters at large.

**HAPs need a push** Of course, there's also the vulnerability of the general population in extreme weather conditions. That's the job of govts. Heat Action Plans (HAPs) have been adopted by 23 states. But there are questions about implementation. It's true that since it drew up a national plan in 2015 and set the target of zero heatwave deaths, GOI has been successful in reducing casualties. But, as this summer has shown, this is a work in progress. The shift from response-centric management to advance planning is the key. Indians who die from heat are mostly those who have to work outside. As we saw in Delhi, HAP didn't help many of them. Without proper financing and robust oversight, HAPs will remain mere guidance documents. Scorching summers are now a certainty. Heatwave deaths needn't be.

# Big Tree Wobbles

Like India's Congress, ANC's decline in South Africa shows no dominant party can take its status for granted

n a watershed election for Africa's most industrialised economy, the unchallenged reign of African National Congress (ANC) in South African politics appears to be at an end. ANC only managed to garner around 40% of the vote – the first time it hit such a low since the post-apartheid election of 1994 – forcing it to look for coalition partners to form the next govt.

Militant past, questionable future | ANC's anti-apartheid revolutionary moorings had elevated it to an exalted status in the Rainbow nation. It had never secured less than 50% of the vote in elections till now. But this also bred complacency, sclerotic party structures, corruption and an overbearing top brass that failed to



provide space to younger, energetic members. Note that ANC was hurt most in the latest polls by former president Jacob Zuma's MK Party and expelled ANC youth icon Julius Malema's Economic Freedom Fighters that won around 14% and 9% of the vote, respectively.

Failing to read pulse | ANC's antiapartheid legacy has also lost much traction among young South Africans. According

to World Bank, 55% of the country's population lives in poverty, unemployment rate is a whopping 33%, and homicide rates are among the highest in the world. Add to this acute water, housing and energy crises. ANC's failure to address these has led to major disaffection.

Parallels with India's Congress | This mirrors the fate of India's Congress that too saw unchallenged political dominance for three decades as the party that secured the country's Independence. However, multiple splits, the Gandhi family's dynastic role, complacency and eroding ground presence saw the party reach a historic low of 44 seats in 2014 Lok Sabha polls. Just as with ANC's anti-apartheid legacy, Congress's Nehruvian socialism has little traction today. Both parties' decline is a story of what happens to oncedominant parties that refuse to adapt to changing circumstances. That's also the beauty of democracy.

# Take a step backward

Retro-walking is a fad. It's also unnerving

# Milind Ghatwai



Taking a step back is equal to putting one's best foot forward. Or so insist, those walking backwards, especially in a park full of people. It's not exactly a new fitness fad or a social media challenge, but many are getting into it. When they loom in the distance, it takes a while to figure out whether they are walking towards you or away. Also called retro-walking, those practising it look over their shoulders, or from the corner of their eyes.

First-timers give the impression they are walking on eggshells. Veterans walk as if they have eyes on the back of their heads. All have safety on their minds. Irrespective of when they took their first baby steps backward, they all swear by its benefits: strengthening core and leg muscles; improving focus, balance, memory; and even decision-making. Some try it for sheer novelty, having walked straight for years without any tangible change.

They don't go to town to talk about its benefits though. But you can make out they have looked up the net for positive evidence. Or heard from a practitioner they first saw in the park, ridiculed him, and quietly followed in his footsteps. Those using the treadmill miss out on the fun parks provide. Some argue older people tend to benefit from walking backward more, and they rightfully mind their steps.

An occasional family insists on doing a group backward walk. Such a family can't stay together in public parks because they have to walk one after the other. The smartest member avoids leading the backward procession. Those ahead, or is it, behind, ensure his safety.

When youngsters take a fancy to it, they become unguided missiles.

When everybody is doing similar sets of exercises, walking backward stands out. A stranger can leave you unnerved in a park if he suddenly gets in the mood, appearing to take one long look at you in retreat. Those a little away can't even be happy to see his back because he's walking towards them.

Retro-walk enthusiasts are better served if they choose familiar terrain and daylight. Mortals grown on the staple of ghosts with backward feet are likely to miss a beat or two when they see an aficionado in the dark. Wonder why shoe companies haven't come up with products suitable for such walking. After all, traditional shoes are meant to take you forward.

# Private Message For Next Govt

GDP data & early economic indicators show growth may be brisk in short term. Sustaining it needs more India Inc investment. Enabling that should be GOI's priority

#### Dharmakirti Joshi



India's growth continues to surprise on the upside, beating both earlier estimates and current expectations.

The First Advance Estimates in Jan pinned GDP growth for 2023-24 at 7.3% and the Second Advance Estimates in Feb ratcheted it up to 7.6%.

The number announced on Friday came a good 0.60 percentage points higher at 8.2%, because the Jan-Mar quarter clocked a solid 7.8%. Notably, this is despite a poor showing by agriculture, which, at 1.4%, grew well below the decadal average of 4.4%. On the other hand, non-agriculture sectors surged 8.3%.

To be sure, the May 31 provisional estimate of GDP offers a better handle because of updated data, and the next one from National Statistical Office (NSO) will come only in 2025. This estimate, therefore, has a long shelf life.

Covid's loss narrows | Although the real GDP level last fiscal is still around 7.5% below where it would have been sans the Covid-19 disruption, domestic strengths and policy efforts, especially the ongoing infrastructure buildout, have put the economy on a solid growth trajectory. That is helping trim the permanent loss of GDP incurred during the pandemic.

From a demand perspective, private consumption, which accounts for around 55% of GDP, grew at a feeble 4% last fiscal - half the rate of overall GDP growth, while investments grew faster.

Rural India's struggles | Anecdotal data from last fiscal suggests rural areas trailed urban private consumption growth. Momentum in the services sector benefits urban areas more and high food inflation hits rural consumers harder because food has a higher weight in rural consumption.

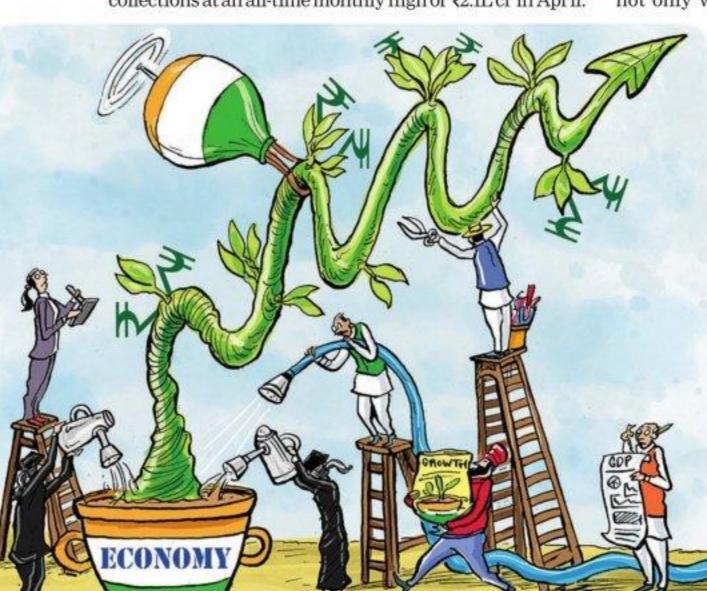
Additionally, high-value items have seen strong demand compared with entry-level goods - be they automobiles or housing. For example, the share of utility vehicles in passenger vehicle sales rose from 52% to 60%, while that of small cars fell from 42% to 34% in past two fiscal years.

**Silver lining visible** That said, some signs of a rural recovery are visible in the fourth quarter; FMCG sales have improved, and rural wages have also

shown signs of a pick-up.

However, demand pick-up for rural dependent sectors is not broad-based yet. Two-wheeler sales vroomed 29% in the fourth quarter and this April as well, while tractor sales continued to decelerate.

**Growth momentum intact** This fiscal has kicked off on a strong note, with Goods and Services Tax (GST) collections at an all-time monthly high of ₹2.1L cr in April.



Since the Purchasing Managers Index (PMI) for manufacturing and services too was in the strong expansion zone, robust growth appears to be the key driver of GST collections in addition to improved compliance. PMI's strong run continued in May as well.

**But pace will slow** | We expect growth to moderate to 6.8% this fiscal, with high interest rates and lower fiscal spur tempering demand in non-agricultural sectors. Govt aims to bring down fiscal deficit to 5.1% this fiscal.

But there could be some upside to growth if govt chooses to use a part of the surprisingly humongous dividend payout from Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to boost physical infrastructure-related spending in the full budget for this fiscal expected in a few weeks.

Agri will bounce back | Agriculture seems braced for a rebound this fiscal on the back of a normal monsoon season and the low-base effect of last fiscal. India Meteorological Department (IMD) has predicted above-

normal monsoon this time around. It arrived in Kerala two days ahead of schedule. If rains pan out to be normal in terms of overall precipitation and distribution over time and geography,

not only will it push up agricultural GDP and rural demand, but will also ease stubborn food inflation. That would pave the way for reporate cuts by RBI in the second half of

> current fiscal. The current heatwaves haven't hit agriculture the way they did in 2022 because this time the rabi crop has already been harvested. Still, this will need close monitoring because inflation in vegetables has been stubbornly high due to weather-

> related supply disruptions. RBI, in its annual report published last week, noted, "Recurrent supply shocks from adverse climate events and geopolitical hostilities pose upside risks to the disinflation process."

**Private investment, the key** | Investments growing at 9% in fiscal 2024, continue to be the propeller of economic growth. The post-pandemic recovery saw investments driven by the household sector and infrastructure buildout by both GOI and states.

For sustaining high growth, it is critical that the private sector picks up the investment baton from govt. This'll be important to improve the economy's supply side and help GOI in fiscal consoli-

dation. Domestic strengths emanating from healthy balance sheets of corporate houses and banks provide an enabling environment for private corporate investments to prosper.

Govt's infrastructure buildout and revival of housing demand have lent impetus to private investments in the steel and cement sectors. The Production-Linked Incentive scheme supports not just private investments in strategic areas but also affords an opportunity to latch on to global supply chains as global majors de-risk.

The challenge remains private corporate investments, where we are seeing only a gradual uptick. The incoming govt must address the reasons precluding a broad-based lift. The current growth sprint can then metamorphose into a growth marathon.

The writer is chief economist, Crisil

# Voter's Dozen: 13 Takes On 13 Wordies

June 4 will tell us all. But throughout a 44-day cacophonous campaign, politicians told us plenty. Here's a measure of the campaign by words that stayed top of mind

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400-paar | The number that started BJP's campaign. You set a target, you defend it. To beat Congress's record, BJP went out on a limb with a 400+ seats claim to victory. In phase 1, INDIA parties exploited the claim - the

Constitution gambit-and caught up with BJP on use of online and social media. BJP halted flaunting the number, then re-floated it, and wound down again. It couldn't be cast in stone, and sometimes it hit the optics game. Exit polls have refloated 400-paar. Tomorrow we'll know.

Mandir | Ram temple a reality, BJP in Jan targeted the euphoric temple vote. Ahead of the ceremony, Modi's poll arrow pierced through the north-south divide, as he went holy-dipping in Rameshwaram waters, touring places in the south associated with Ram. Temple politics reignited BJP's goal. Temples-as-development is BJP in mission mode. Ram hovered, never too far from the rally cry.

Katchatheevu | Who was to know in Jan that Rameshwaram would soon be in the news again? By end-March, out of the Palk Strait blue between Sri Lanka and India, rose a long-settled nugget from half a century ago. BJP tried to make a poll issue of a 1974 GOI decision to give Sri Lanka an uninhabited islet. It caused a few ripples, but sank back into the sea once TN's election was over.

**Sanatan** The other issue with roots in the south that climbed its way into the Deep North, was the 'sanatan' quotient. Udaynidhi Stalin's critique of Hinduism was cannon fodder for BJP, and had INDIA parties ducking for cover north of Vindhyas. Many a turncoat leaving INDIA parties waved 'insult to sanatan' to go join BJP.

Guarantee | From Modi sarkar ki guarantee to Modi guarantee, 2024 saw BJP concentrate its promise of

governance in PM. In UP, Yogi may be warranty, but guarantee is Modi's. For 543 seats, one message – Modi. Labharthi is so 2019. Beneficiary is so Covid-time. Interestingly, Congress first used 5 guarantees during Karnataka assembly election campaign in May 2023. By Dec 2023, the claimant to 'guarantee' was BJP.

**Haq** Call for a caste census fired INDIA's war cry, 'jitni

abadi, utna haq', even as party generals battled over seat-sharing, arguing exactly that: jitna clout, utna haq. INDIA's running theme, 'haq' is integral to Congress's nyay manifesto.

Mangalsutra | One emotive recrafting of 'haq' by BJP was its pitch that INDIA would take away hard-earned assets, inheritance, and property. The metaphor for which was the mangalsutra: the ornamental announcement of a woman's changed stature once married. It's made of not just any gold - but the gilded chain that binds a woman to family 'honour'. The comeback from INDIA was equally emotional.

Khatakhat | Campaign rhetoric moved swiftly, like when Rahul Gandhi used this word to pledge delivery of services from Day One. Rapidfire

comeback from Modi was to say INDIA will be out khatakhat...just as swiftly. This K-pop morphed into ads and slogans till the end - khatakhat, khatakhat.

**Tempo** | Competitive corruption allegations are a poll staple. Modi said tempos loaded with allegedly ill-gotten wealth were being sent to opposition parties. That triggered a social media storm of memes of SUVs and planes as tempos. The counters took a life of their own to give tempos...renewed tempo, as it were.

Kidney waali beti | Lalu campaigned for daughter Rohini Acharya, RJD candidate in Saran contesting against BJP's Rajiv Pratap Rudy. In his all-worldly style, Lalu reiterated she was the "kidney dene wali beti". In a country where doctors despair that married women are expected

> to "spare" kidneys only for transplants that marital family members may need, Rohini was a Lalu message.

**ED** Netas went to voters, ED went to netas. Probe agencies were a campaign theme, and they didn't seem to mind it, swooping down on opposition politicians. Self-preservation instincts reportedly informed many a neta's switch.

M for? | Modi, of course - everything

in the election was, in effect, all about him. But M is also for Mamata, and her ma, maati, manush. BJP, targeting opposition parties, went with mutton, madrasa, mafia, misrule, and, talking about itself, mission mode. There was M for Muslim League, too, as well as Ma Kali and Mahakal.

K holds the key | Finally, K factor rang out strongly. A both-sides battle on the 'real' Kerala Story, sporadic whipping up of the Khalistan frenzy, Kashmir's Art 370. Khandan (dynasty) mattered, as did kamai (earnings). Kharge's open letters to PM pushed several buttons; Kejriwal didn't stay off the airwayes at all. And then there was Kashi, where 'Kyoto waale' - an INDIA moniker for Modi who's promised to build up the temple town like the old Japan capital - was the candidate.

# **Calvin & Hobbes**



# **Sacred**space



That's been one of my mantras – focus and simplicity. Simple can be harder than complex: You

have to work hard to get your thinking clean to make it simple. But it's worth it in the end because once you get there, vou can move mountains.

Steve Jobs

# Mantra Is A Tool For Transformative Living

## James Anderson

ake mantra your lifeline; it will add substance to your life. ▲ However, once initiated, there is no turning back. We must see it to the end. Once discovered, life becomes simpler. Over time, it gathers momentum, sustaining us in life. Infuse it with the greatest consciousness and your life will become rich beyond measure. It will go through peaks and troughs and the intensity will vary. Stay with it always; the mantra will expand your being. Our consciousness needs continuous tending and when the mantra comes to the front, it holds the consciousness together. Make it your exercise in living.

The Word rises from the very depths of our being. Let it choose you. It starts with aspiration. You sincerely ask the Divine for a key. It is yours alone. It may one. Allow it to align your being.

be sudden or gradual, but it will surely settle in your being. It is not a mental selection. It rises from the heart. Deep within, resonance is there. Sometimes, it is given by the guru, but one can spontaneously access the inner guide by going within. This vibration will define you until you die. With persistence, it shapes every movement inside. It is your aspiration and the Force behind the words

steers you to your destiny. The mantra clears the mind. Often filled with repetitive thoughts, the mind endlessly revolves in circles. The Word provides a counterweight, leaving the space uncluttered, vast and free. Witness too, the Word gradually making your inner and surface parts become

that give the mantra its

power. It embodies and

With sustained practice, the mantra starts to internally repeat itself. When that happens, it purifies, instilling and then reinforcing the reign of soul over nature. You will carry this unique vibration always. Allow it to preside

> over every activity of the day. It will protect you from mishaps and accidents. Let it accompany your work. It helps one focus on what is at hand. Keep repeating it

> > through the day's actions until

words are continuously present, the mantra acts as a reflex, consciously addressing whatever situation is at hand. It becomes a panacea.

THE SPEAKING TREE you sleep at night. When the

The mantra can also be a single syllable. It is a repetition of the sacred name, japa. Whatever form it takes, as we evolve, we become conscious of its unique vibration, constantly in the

Japa is the ballast that holds our being together. Whenever things go awry, one goes back to it and normalcy returns. When synchronised with the breath, it paves the way for continuous practice. It brings endless aspirations into action. Japa resonates strongly with the body. The Mother used it exhaustively in her Yoga of the Cells, "... because only a japa has a direct action on the body."

background yet nourishing our being.

Repetition of the Divine Name unties the habits of the physical consciousness. The body is the crucible of transformation, and japa can accompany it to the threshold of this divine change.

Once we discover our mantra, life changes for the better. An indelible link is created, and an imprint is laid upon

our souls. The author is coordinating editor of NAMAH, the Journal of Integral Health