



Cannes do

Indian films are beginning to make a splash on the international stage

The moment after Payal Kapadia scripted history by becoming the first Indian filmmaker to win the Grand Prix award at the Cannes film festival for *All We Imagine as Light* will be etched in cinematic memory. As the 38-year-old walked to the stage, she pulled along the three main women protagonists of her film, Kani Kusruti, Divya Prabha and Chhaya Kadam, and the four posing with the prize has become the shot of the 77th edition of the festival, definitely for Indians. Bagging the second highest honour after the Palme d'Or (which went to American director Sean Baker's *Anora*) for her trilingual debut feature, an Indo-French collaboration, which shines a light on the story of two Malayali nurses and migrants working in 'Maximum City' Mumbai, is a big win for indie cinema. The last time an Indian film was in the competition section was 30 years ago with Shaji N. Karun's *Swaham* in 1994. "Please don't wait 30 years to have another Indian film," Kapadia said in her acceptance speech. Eschewing the usual song-and-dance trope or larger-than-life heroes, Kapadia's film is about a friendship between three very different women. She said friendship is a very important relationship for her, "because it can lead to greater solidarity, inclusivity and empathy towards each other. These are the values we should all be striving for".

The other important takeaway is Kapadia's remark that "it takes a village to make a film". Thanking her cast and crew, Kapadia talked about the Indian film-making ecosystem – "There are interesting films being made in India, and I am only a product of that." She also rooted for the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), with which she had a run-in in 2015, where she said she watched world cinema. She was effusive about the strong film industry presence in most States, singling out the Malayalam film industry for its support to good cinema. India clearly made a splash at Cannes this year, with Kolkata's Anasuya Sengupta winning the Best Actress in the Un Certain Regard section for her turn in Konstantin Bojanov's *The Shameless*; British-Indian film-maker Karan Kandhari's *Sister Midnight* in the parallel Director's Fortnight selection; FTII student Chidananda S. Naik's short *Sunflowers Were The First Ones To Know* winning the top prize in the official LaCinef section, Cannes's competition for film school students; Cannes Classics releasing a remastered *Manthan*, Shyam Benegal's 1976 film, and so forth. For Kapadia, this was her third outing in Cannes – she had won the best documentary prize in 2021. With the Grand Prix prize just three years later, Kapadia will inspire young independent film-makers to tell their stories, and, hopefully, get the backing they deserve.

Maximum impact

IPL's 17th edition added a new dimension to the way cricket is played

Sunday's Indian Premier League final between Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) and Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH) at the M.A. Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai might have turned anti-climactic, but it should not deflect from what was an enthralling two months of cricket. KKR thrashed SRH by eight wickets to claim its third title – its first since 2014 – but the one-sided nature of the summit clash should not stain the latter's reputation. KKR and SRH had finished seventh and tenth, respectively, in 2023, but broke out of the rut by playing some of the boldest and most attacking cricket. Eight of the nine highest IPL totals came this season, and KKR and SRH accounted for five of those. These gargantuan scores can be attributed to the Impact Player rule, which allowed an extra batter or bowler to be drafted into the playing XI. But credit is also due to the respective teams' think-tanks that assembled such wholesome squads. KKR's stock was built on Shreyas Iyer's astute captaincy, the experience of Sunil Narine – most valuable player for a record third time – Andre Russell and Mitchell Starc, and a strong Indian core of Venkatesh Iyer, Varun Chakravarthy and Vaibhav Aroa. SRH brought in Pat Cummins to helm the side, and under the Aussie's calm leadership, Travis Head, Abhishek Sharma and Heinrich Klaasen re-defined T20 batting.

As much as KKR and SRH broadened the horizon of T20s, IPL-17 witnessed spirited attempts by others to keep pace. Virat Kohli had his second-best IPL (741 runs) and scored at a never-seen-before rate (154.70). The belligerent hitting of Jake Fraser-McGurk and Tristan Stubbs kept Delhi Capitals in Playoffs contention for long, while Will Jacks played a crucial role in Royal Challengers Bengaluru's fairytales entry into the final four despite having lost seven of the first eight games. The competition was also enriched by Mayank Yadav's searing speed, fast bowler Harshit Rana's deception and the early-career promise of batters Abhishek Porel and Nitish Kumar Reddy. What also stood out in this cricketing jamboree was the timelessness of Dinesh Karthik, and to a lesser extent, of M.S. Dhoni. Perhaps, the only discordant note was the absence of T20 World Cup-bound Indian stars – despite fine performances – in the business end of the tournament. But it can potentially work in India's favour, for a week's rest in a jam-packed calendar is a god-send. If the likes of Kohli, Rishabh Pant, Sanju Samson, Shivam Dube, Suryakumar Yadav and Jasprit Bumrah can carry their form into the biennial extravaganza that begins on Sunday, Rohit Sharma's men will have a fair chance of ending their long ICC trophy drought.

Playing to the gallery can be injurious to rail safety

Believe it or not, adhering to the rules can sometimes invite disciplinary action. A few weeks ago, in one of the zonal railways, disciplinary action was sought to be taken against the pilot of a "light engine", i.e., a locomotive without a trailing load of coaches or wagons, who was tasked with clearing a train stranded in midsection as the locomotive had failed. The case was that the pilot had not spoken to his supervisor over the phone, but it was actually for not having run at a higher speed than 15 km that was permitted in the written authorisation given to him by the station master under the rules for operation in a section that is blocked by another train. Why was he asked to do this? It was to minimise the delay to passenger trains held up due to the disruption. Apparently, punctuality took priority over safety. Fortunately, with the incident gaining media attention, the proposed disciplinary action was withdrawn.

Of late, loco pilots and assistant pilots of the Indian Railways (earlier called drivers and assistant drivers), seem to be at the receiving end of an attitude of the management that can best be described as "playing to the gallery". Let me explain with two more examples.

The runaway train

On February 25, 2024, a train formation, consisting of two diesel locomotives, both unmanned, and 53 wagons, that were loaded with stone ballast, with no brake van, rolled out of Kathua station of the Northern Railway unmanned. Because of the continuous falling gradient of the terrain, the "pilotless train" in both locomotives continued its journey for over 70 kilometres before it could be finally stopped. Fortunately, by routing the runaway train through unoccupied lines along the way a major disaster was averted.

Since access to a copy of the inquiry report in this case has been denied under a restrictive clause of the Right to Information (RTI) Act 2005, this writer has had to go by the version put out in the media by one of the staff organisations. According to this version, the pilots, who were beyond their normal hours of duty, had requested to be relieved. But, instead of allowing them to proceed to their base station which was nearer, orders were issued to them to stable (park) the train and proceed by a passenger train (which had already arrived at the station) to another station further away from their base station. The insufficient time available to the pilots to ensure proper securing of the stabled load on a station with a gradient seems to have been a critical factor that led to the train rolling away. Yet, the most stringent provision of the



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discipline and appeal rules of the Railways was invoked in this case to summarily remove the pilots along with the station master and a pointsman from service.

The third case is a serious accident, a tragedy wrapped in a mystery. On October 29, 2023, at about 7 p.m., the Visakhapatnam-Rayagada Passenger collided with the rear of the Visakhapatnam-Palasa Passenger, also travelling on the same line, between Katakappalle and Almunda stations on the Howrah-Chennai line. The collision led to the death of 14 passengers, apart from the pilot and assistant pilot of the rear train and the guard (train manager) of the train in front. Fifty passengers were injured.

There was a statutory inquiry after the accident, conducted by the Commissioner of Railway Safety (CRS), South Central Circle who functions under the Ministry of Civil Aviation. The Preliminary Report of the CRS/SC Circle, which was submitted in November 2023, a little over two weeks after the accident, had concluded that the accident was caused by "errors in train working" – essentially meaning that the station staff and the crew of the train in the rear had not followed the rules of operation on a section with automatic signalling in which some signals were also defective.

The case of 'distractions'

Over four months after the accident, in early March 2024 and before the publication of the Final Report of the CRS, the Minister for Railways announced to the media (Eureka!) that an inquiry conducted by the Railway officials a day after the accident had revealed that the attention of the crew of one of the trains involved in the accident was distracted as they were watching a cricket match on a mobile phone. Based on this finding, the Minister added, for good measure, that the Indian Railways would now be installing systems which would be able to detect any distractions and ensure that the pilots and assistant pilots are focused on train working.

The Preliminary Report of the CRS, accessed by this writer through the RTI route, nowhere mentions that the attention of the crew was diverted due to their watching a cricket match on a mobile phone. On the contrary, the CRS has commented that during the 10 minutes preceding the collision, the loco pilot of the rear train had performed nine different operations testifying to his alertness.

The Final Report of the CRS, which was released recently, essentially reiterates the conclusion of the Preliminary Report. And now, according to a report published in this daily on May 3, 2024, we are informed that "with no evidence forthcoming later in the mobile data

usage to substantiate the allegation that the loco pilots were watching cricket" on mobile phone at the time of the collision, the Railways have recalled the safety circulars issued in this context. This sordid episode – which seems to be a classic case of first formulating a theory and then later looking for evidence to support it – raises a few questions.

Troubling questions

If, as it turns out now, no evidence was forthcoming from the mobile call records to substantiate the allegation that the pilots were watching a cricket match, on what basis was an announcement made four months after the CRS submitted his Preliminary Report, by the Union Minister for Railways to that effect? Was there an attempt at the lower levels to plant a red herring? After all, watching a cricket match on a mobile phone can be blamed on a reckless crew, whereas the flouting of rules of train operation in automatic signalling territory by the station staff and the loco crew partially reflects on the administration for improper training of the staff or ineffective monitoring of train working under abnormal conditions.

The episode, unfortunately, also exposes a surprising lack of professionalism in the Railways at various levels in dealing with the investigation of a serious accident. And, what is even worse, it also shows a deplorable lack of sensitivity in handling a matter involving two deceased railway employees.

Each case recounted above is vastly different from the other. Yet, there are some common threads running through all of them. All involved loco pilots. Each case was linked to rail safety. Each case showcased an over-weening eagerness at various levels of the hierarchy to punish or blame, almost expecting approbation from "the gallery" for a tough, no-nonsense approach. The gallery varies in each case: the immediate superior, the bosses in the Ministry, or the media and the public at large.

The cases also call for some serious introspection. With nearly 10% vacancies in the cadre of loco pilots and also ever increasing volumes of freight traffic handled each year, it is a no-brainer that such record-breaking performances are made possible only by the regular breach of the rules governing the duty hours of the running staff to a significant extent. There are also other issues such as continuous night working and inadequate rest at home stations, all of which point to the need for putting in place a mechanism to give focused attention to the major issues concerning loco pilots. Meanwhile, playing to the gallery can adversely impact rail safety.

A heavy-handed approach in dealing with Indian Railway locomotive pilots can be counter productive

Chabahar's opportunities and challenges

The recently concluded contract between India and Iran, which gives New Delhi rights to invest in and operate the Shahid-Behesti terminal at Chabahar Port for another 10 years, has created many headlines. The port remains the crown project anchoring economic relations between the two countries. The deal came at a precarious time in West Asia as the war in Gaza continues unabated, Israel-Iran tensions remain critical, and the passing of Iran's President and Foreign Minister in a helicopter accident challenges domestic politics in Tehran.

Representative of India's thinking

There is no denying that the Chabahar project is an important endeavour for both economic and strategic reasons. At the core of it, Chabahar, for India, represents its thinking from the perspective of an extended neighbourhood, and not necessarily as part of its West Asia outlook. The port is a fulcrum of the International North-South Transport Corridor, a project looking towards seamlessly linking India with Central Asia and Russia, bypassing Pakistan. Beyond this, Chabahar is also astutely tuned into the 'new' realities of Afghanistan. The Taliban-led interim government in Kabul has also thrown its weight behind the port, offering an investment of \$35 million as it looks to secure alternatives and not be economically reliant on Pakistani ports such as Karachi or the China-backed Gwadar. In November 2023, Taliban leader Mullah Baradar visited Chabahar, with Shahid-Behesti visible in the background.

Bilaterally for India and Iran, Chabahar is also a symptom of challenges between the two states. While there is a lot of public championing for the project, and for good reasons, if it was not for Chabahar, India-Iran ties today would look extremely dry. The reasons are multifaceted and tied to both country's views of their national,



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regional, and geopolitical interests. Instead of expanding projects and economic cooperation beyond Chabahar, many older ones, such as the gas field Farzad-B which was discovered by Indian state-owned enterprise ONGC Videsh, have now been written off. Another old bilateral platform, the IranoHind shipping company, was dissolved in 2013 because of sanctions. Chabahar, is a legacy project, which has its foundations going back to 2003. This was an era when India was opening to developing economic assets abroad. Chabahar in Iran was one, Sakhalin-I in Russia, was another.

A reflection of diplomacy

The geopolitics today that surrounds India's play in Chabahar, and Iran's leverages, make for an interesting study. This latest iteration of the deal was signed not too long after both Israel and Iran exchanged missile fire and came critically close to a full-scale conflict. India's Adani Group, meanwhile, has also invested in a large port project in Israel. The company bought Israel's Haifa port on the Mediterranean Sea for \$1.2 billion. This was also made possible in part due to India's participation in new diplomatic and economic endeavours with the United States, Israel, and Arab partners, such as the I2U2 and India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor.

The fact that India's buy-in into Haifa was not a constraint for the Chabahar deal to go through is not only a testament to Indian diplomacy but also for the U.S. to also recognise that this kind of access which New Delhi has is beneficial, and not detrimental, to Washington.

Recent remarks from the U.S. over potential sanctions against Chabahar stand out as myopic. India's relations with Iran and the continuity of Chabahar's development, which offers access to difficult political terrain such as Central Asia, and even Afghanistan, could bring in a significant level of integration and help in building

alternatives to China-backed projects. Despite public discourse, China's heavy financial might and the 2021 strategic deal with Iran, does not automatically make Tehran subservient to Beijing. Iran is a quintessential survivalist state and plays a diverse set of cards in its playbook of geopolitics.

The Biden administration would benefit by not blindly following former U.S. President Barack Obama's doctrine on how to deal with India-Iran ties, and Chabahar, at its centre. New Delhi burnt its fingers by giving Mr. Obama too much room when it completely stopped importing oil from Iran. This took Tehran, consistently among India's top-two suppliers of oil for decades, out of the top 10. Even if India's thinking was to build influence in Washington around the nuclear deal negotiations, Donald Trump as the U.S. President and the unilateral exit of the U.S. under his watch from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2018, recalibrated how non-partisanship and the stability of critical U.S. foreign policies were to be viewed thereafter.

The bigger picture

Finally, for Chabahar, there are two main points to consider moving forward. First, the port project cannot be the singular major play in the bilateral relationship. This concentration of interests is volatile. Second, the U.S. must move towards being accommodative on sanctions against Chabahar. Viewing the port as a collateral against problematic Iranian policies in West Asia would not be an accurate understanding of the big picture of India's own outreach towards its extended neighbourhood which could benefit larger American aims as well.

This is important to be considered at a time when the U.S. itself maintains a channel with the Iranians not only through Swiss intermediaries but, increasingly, through Oman and Qatar as well.

The geopolitics around India's play in Chabahar and Iran's leverages is interesting

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Making light of fire safety

The fire accidents, at Rajkot and in a children's hospital in east Delhi, are shocking. It should be made mandatory to have a fire audit every year not only in hospitals but also in places where people congregate in large numbers. The fire service authorities should inspect and issue a certificate regarding the safety of buildings. Fire drills, the condition of fire fighting equipment and the training of staff in fire

fighting must be undertaken. The fire evacuation plan must also undergo checks. Alas, most checks are hardly followed.

Dr. (Col.) Rajamahendran (retd.),
Pillayarkulam, Tamil Nadu

At Chepauk

One hoped that the IPL final match, in Chennai on Sunday, would have kept spectators on the edge of their seats. It was not to be. Nevertheless, one cannot discount the hard work put

in by the KKR bowlers and batters. KKR's mentor Gautam Gambhir deserves praise for shaping the team into a formidable unit.

S. Ramakrishnasayee,
Chennai

In sharp contrast to the last edition, IPL 2024 proved to be an utter disappointment. It was purely one-sided and disappointing to witness SRH crumble under pressure. Overall, the sportsmanship and bonhomie exhibited by all

teams were truly commendable.

B. Suresh Kumar,
Coimbatore

Yet another edition of the Indian Premier League has come to an end. It was indeed a totally commanding performance by KKR, trouncing SRH in a one-sided final. For the past two months, the IPL has entertained fans with some high-scoring contests barring a few matches which include the final. We

now wait for the ICC Men's T20 World Cup to begin.

S. Sankaranarayanan,
Chennai

The great cricket festival came to an end in a most disappointing final. The Impact Player Rule was not very effective and one hopes that it is removed.

Mohammed Azhar V.P.,
Tanalur, Malappuram, Kerala

The IPL cricket final turned out to be a damp squib with KKR's bowling and batting

crushing SRH like a *pappad*.

Devadas V.,
Talapp, Kannur, Kerala

The final match waned as it progressed. However, the Kolkata team deserves credit for its disciplined bowling attack and committed fielding.

Satish Reddy Kanaganti,
Tipparyth, Nalgonda, Telangana

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

Where animals are dying by a thousand cuts

lections have concluded in most constituencies in Uttar Pradesh, with unemployment, inflation, and agrarian distress likely to have been the core issues motivating the voters. With more than a million abandoned cattle decimating harvests and farm-based livelihoods, however, electoral winds may blow in strange directions in this largely agrarian and electorally pivotal State. These stray cattle, or “chutta jaanwar” as they are colloquially known, were born out of the disruptions wrought on a functioning livestock economy by state policies and state-empowered vigilantes. The transport and trade of cattle without permits has been illegal in U.P. since 1955. Cattle trade, however, thrived until recently. It was enabled by a clandestine network of traders, and the tacit acceptance of communities that the meat industry is an integral part of the livestock economy.

Impact on wildlife

While the impacts of stray cattle on farm livelihoods have been widely covered, we want to highlight their toll on wildlife populations in the biodiverse Terai areas of U.P., spanning the districts of Pilibhit, Lakhimpur Kheri, and Bahraich. The U.P. Terai landscape is renowned for its thriving sugarcane agriculture and two tiger reserves that harbour populations of endangered species such as tigers, rhinoceros, swamp deer, and Bengal florican. Here, forests, grasslands, and agriculture seamlessly blend to create a vast wilderness within which people and wildlife live cheek by jowl. Paroxysmal conflicts with tigers and chronic crop losses to herbivores have been the norm across the landscape. Some people set up simple fences to protect their farms. Others, with farms adjoining protected areas, pool resources and use their influence to have fences set up along the farm-forest boundary.

With stray cattle venturing into



Sankarshan Rastogi is an ecologist. Views are personal



Rekha Warriar is an ecologist. Views are personal

In the U.P. Terai, farmers are putting up razor-wire and electric fencing to guard their farms against stray cattle. The toll these fences are likely taking on wildlife remains unaccounted for

farmlands proximate to villages and busy roads, farmers are adopting deadlier measures such as putting up razor-wire and high-voltage electric fencing. These are designed to kill or inflict debilitating injuries on anything that crosses their path. Reports of wounded cattle dying are common. But the toll these fences are likely taking on the plethora of wildlife that use these farms remains unaccounted for. In the U.P. Terai, sugarcane farmlands serve as vital wildlife movement corridors. Being able to move unhindered between protected areas is key to ensuring the survival of wide-ranging species. Ensuring this movement, while preventing and mitigating conflicts, is a huge challenge now, which is further complicated by deadly fences intended for crop-raiding stray cattle.

The potential for large populations of unvaccinated free-ranging cattle to transmit diseases such as bovine tuberculosis and lumpy skin diseases to wild populations also remains underappreciated. Multiple cases of the latter were reported recently from various districts of U.P., including parts of the Terai. The presence of large numbers of cattle within farmlands and along forest boundaries is also creating a large prey base that potentially facilitates the residence of tigers within farmlands, which creates fertile grounds for more conflicts.

Farmers recognise stray cattle as a serious menace, even as they wrestle with their beliefs in the divinity of cows. Some of their newer convictions about the extraordinariness of cows – “the only animal that inhales and exhales oxygen” – rests uneasily alongside the recognition that in terms of utility, they are outmatched by buffaloes. The ubiquitousness of tractors, the loss of grazing commons, changing aspirations, and rising input costs have made cattle rearing an increasingly impractical activity. Communities that were once pastoral have over the decades

become largely agrarian, with livestock rearing primarily supporting their household needs. High-yielding buffalo breeds, so far exempt from bans on trade and slaughter, fill this niche better than cattle do. Demand for buffaloes is denied only on account of their high purchase and rearing costs.

Building cow shelters

These dueling commitments towards one’s livelihood and ideas of cultural identity result in farmers propounding innovative ideas to solve the issue. Popular among these is the suggestion that the government needs to build cow shelters, including within protected areas, to allow cattle to enjoy the forest air and readily available fodder. These sentiments mirror those expressed towards crop-raiding wildlife species in the Terai. Like many landscapes with protected areas, communities in the Terai view the tiger reserves and wildlife as exclusive government property. It is unsurprising then that they wish to see the stray cattle, which they refer to as “Yogi-Modi ki gay (Yogi-Modi’s cows)”, be cared for within the government’s protected area where, they believe, other crop raiders owned by the government reside.

Protected areas in the U.P. Terai are small, fragmented, and their most productive grasslands are declining due to environmental change. The future of several imperiled species depends on sustaining and enhancing these grassland areas. Creating cow shelters within protected areas does not serve this end. While this has not yet been mooted as a possibility by the government, given recent trends, and the fact that the U.P. government spends more on feeding stray cattle than on pensions for widows and the elderly, it is not implausible.

Who will eventually reap electoral dividends from voters’ complicated relationship with stray cattle remains to be seen. In the interim, animals both domestic and wild are dying by a thousand cuts across the Terai.

An unfortunate debate in Karnataka

The narrative has shifted from rape to the question of who leaked the videos

STATE OF PLAY

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The narrative around the Prajwal Revanna case seems to have shifted in Karnataka. Initially, there was outrage against the Hassan MP, who stands accused of sexual abuse and rape, as well as his father, who allegedly attempted to prevent victims from testifying against Prajwal. Now, the debate has slowly shifted to who leaked the explicit content. This narrative suggests that the entire case is a “political conspiracy.”

Prajwal, who left India in April, said on video on Monday that he will be returning on May 31 and that the people who want to “thwart” his political growth have hatched this “conspiracy.”

Former Chief Minister and Janata Dal (Secular) State president H.D. Kumaraswamy, who is Prajwal’s uncle, has been relentlessly attacking the government in the State, accusing the ruling Congress and specifically Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar of orchestrating the leak of the sexually explicit videos. While maintaining that he is not defending Prajwal and has in fact appealed to his nephew to return home and cooperate with the Special Investigation Team (SIT) that was formed to probe his alleged crimes, Mr. Kumaraswamy has been effectively pushing the Congress to a defensive position. He has thus shifted the focus of the debate around the issue in the public.

This attempt follows Devaraje Gowda’s allegation that Mr. Shivakumar had offered him money to leak the content. Mr. Gowda, an advocate from Hassan, was the first to claim in a letter to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader-

had to deal with the trauma of these videos being freely circulated on messenger apps.

The line of attack by the JD (S) has gone to such an extent that recently, while speaking to journalists, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah asked, “Under which law of the Indian Penal Code is leaking videos a bigger crime than rape?” He said that while leaking the videos without hiding the faces of the victims is definitely a crime, rape is a bigger crime, and arguments about the former cannot be used to mask the latter.

With Prajwal absent and Mr. Kumaraswamy holding multiple press meets to push the narrative on the leak of videos, most of the local media coverage of the issue has also been dominated by the political slugfest rather than the sexual abuse, or the impunity of the MP, or the efforts made to bring him back.

To date, of more than 90 victims, only three have lodged complaints. This led to the filing of three rape cases against Prajwal. Despite professional counsellors being deployed to talk to all the victims, the women have not been forthcoming in lodging complaints. Fear of stigma and the fact that Prajwal belongs to the politically influential family of former Prime Minister H. D. Deve Gowda have prevented them from lodging complaints, according to sources. Keeping the focus on the MP’s alleged crimes and providing moral support to the victims may have given the women the confidence to complain, they added.

Members of civil society are now attempting to correct this narrative and bring the focus back to the alleged multiple instances of sex abuse and misuse of power by the MP. They have announced a ‘Hassan Chalo’ protest march and a rally in the district on May 30.

India relies on China for most electronic and electrical goods

India sources over 50% of its mobiles, automatic data processing units, and semiconductor devices from China

DATA POINT

Sruthi Balaji, Aashreya C., & Vignesh Radhakrishnan

In FY24, China once again became India’s top trading partner. This is the sixth time in the last 10 years that China has beaten the U.S. to emerge as India’s top partner. A country is designated as a top trading partner if the total value of India’s exports to it and imports from it exceeds that of any other country.

Notably, China’s status as India’s top trading partner is primarily due to the exceptionally high volume of imports from China, which overshadows the relatively low volume of exports to China by India. That is why India’s trade deficit with China has been widening the fastest, in absolute terms, compared with other partners. India’s trade relationship with the U.S. is the opposite, with India exporting more to the U.S. than what it imports. In fact, the gap between imports and exports, or the trade balance (trade surplus in this case), has been widening in recent years.

Chart 1 shows India’s export and import in \$ billion with the U.S. and China. While imports from China have surged, exports to China have remained stagnant. On the other hand, exports to the U.S. as well as imports from the U.S. have increased, though the degree of increase in exports was greater than that of the imports.

Chart 2 shows the trade deficit/surplus of important partners of India since FY15. Among India’s partners, China and the U.S. occupy the two extreme ends. With the U.S., India has a trade surplus of \$36.7 billion, while with China, India has a trade deficit of \$85.1 billion in FY24. Both these figures are the highest ever trade surplus and trade deficit recorded with the respective countries.

With most major trade partners, India has a trade deficit. Inter-

estingly, the trade deficit with Russia has skyrocketed in recent years, from just \$6.6 billion in FY22 to \$57.2 in FY24. A majority of this is due to the import of oil at a discounted price from Russia, after the West imposed sanctions on the country. Russia is currently the chief oil source for India.

India’s trade surplus with the Netherlands has increased; this is also connected to the sanctions on Russia. About 40-45% of the crude oil sourced from Russia is converted to petrol, diesel, and other products by Indian refineries and sold to the Netherlands. The European country is sourcing petroleum products from India and not directly from Russia due to the sanctions. It then redistributes these products among its neighbours.

A majority of the items that India imports from China can be classified as electronics and electrical items. In the FY15 to FY24 period, India imported \$75 billion worth of mobiles/telephones, the biggest component in the import basket. This was followed by automatic data processing units (\$37 billion), semiconductor devices and diodes (\$28 billion), and electronic integrated circuits (\$27 billion). **Chart 3** shows the tree map of India’s top 20 imports from China in the FY15 to FY24 period. Thirteen of these 20 items were electronic or electrical items.

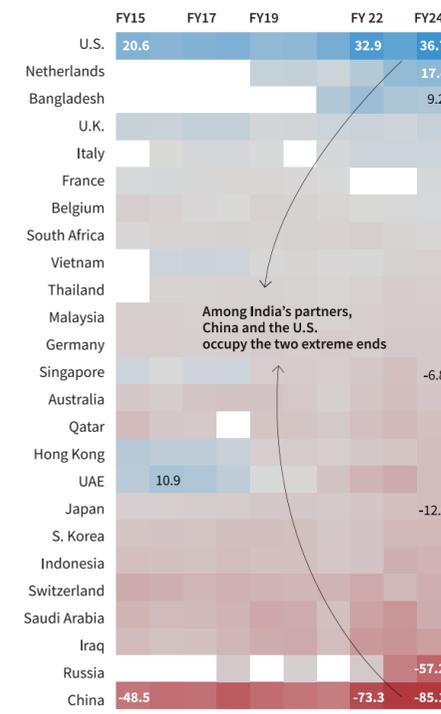
Not only is India buying electrical and electronic items from China in bulk, but also, China is the major source for most of these items, with very few alternatives. India sourced 54% of its mobiles/telephones from China in the FY15 to FY24 period. It also sourced close to 56% of automatic data processing units, about 70% of semiconductor devices and diodes, and 32% of electronic integrated circuits and micro assemblies from China in this period. **Chart 4** shows item-wise imports from China in \$ billion and India’s dependency on China for that product in percentage share.

Made in China

The data was sourced from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry



Chart 2: The chart shows the trade deficit/surplus of important partners of India since FY15 in \$ billion



Sruthi Balaji and Aashreya C. are interning with The Hindu Data team

Chart 1: The chart shows India’s export and import in \$ billion with the U.S. and China

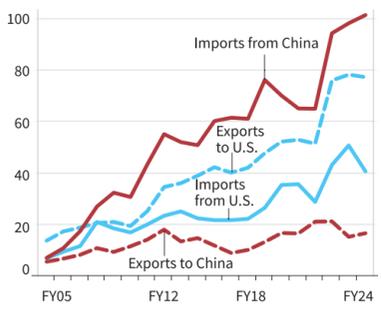


Chart 3: The tree map of India’s top 20 imports from China in the FY15 to FY24 period in \$ billion

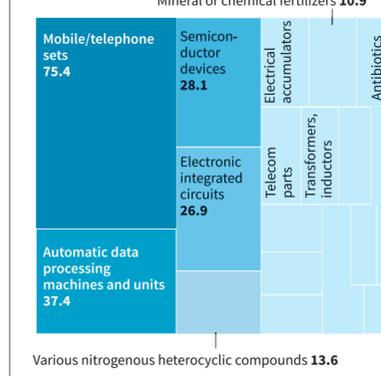
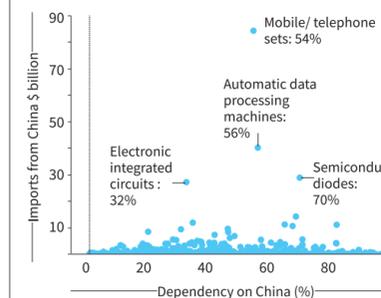


Chart 4: Item-wise imports from China in \$ billion and India’s dependency on China for that product in % share



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO MAY 28, 1974

Railmen call off 20-day strike

New Delhi, May 27: The 20-day-old strike by railwaymen has been called off with effect from 6 a.m. to-morrow (Tuesday) by the Action Committee of the National Co-ordination Committee for Railwaymen’s Struggle.

The Action Committee, in a resolution adopted to-day, said: “Having given deep consideration to the strike situation on all the zonal railways and in other railway establishments and aware of the economic consequences of further prolonging the action, and conscious of the responsibility thrust on it in the circumstances, the Action Committee resolves unilaterally to call off the strike with effect from 6 a.m. on Tuesday.

“The committee also calls upon all railwaymen to return to work from that hour and do everything within their power to bring normalcy to the movement of trains.”

After the President, Mr. V.V. Giri’s appeal yesterday to the railwaymen to withdraw their strike and resume work which would be a gesture to help the Government to deal with questions of victimisation, etc., in a responsive manner, Mr. Fernandes, Convener of the Action Committee, and his colleagues, who are in Tihar jail, felt that the strike should be ended forthwith. They communicated this desire to the other members of the committee but there was no immediate response.

It is learnt that the Action Committee members, who are outside the jail, wanted to have a full discussion of the subject before they accepted the advice of Mr. Fernandes.

Late last night, some of the trade union leaders met Mr. Qureshi, Deputy Minister for Railways, and sought an assurance from him that there would be no victimisation after the withdrawal of the strike. The leader claimed to-day that Mr. Qureshi assured them that the Government would consider the request favourably and sympathetically.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MAY 28, 1924

Latest telegrams

Ootacamund, May 27: The Hon’ble Sir Arthur Knapp, Home Member had a private discussion yesterday with the Agent and Engineer of S.I. Ry. the Collector of Malabar and a few others with regard to the question of employing Moplah prisoners in Ry. construction. It is understood that the matter is now being investigated.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

J&K records the highest combined voter turnout

58.5 in percentage. This is the highest voter turnout for a Lok Sabha poll in 35 years. The Kashmir Valley witnessed a 30 percentage point jump in poll participation compared to 2019. PTI

The one-day rainfall recorded in Kolkata due to cyclone Remal

150 in mm. The neighbouring Salt Lake city received 110 mm of rain during the same time frame. Around 68 trees were uprooted in Kolkata, and another 75 in the Salt Lake and Rajarhat area. PTI

Number of eligible voters in South Africa's general election

27.6 in million. The vote could prove a historic turning point if, as opinion polls predict, the African National Congress loses its absolute parliamentary majority for the first time. AFP

The death toll recorded by Health Ministry in Gaza

36,050 The death toll has surpassed 36,000 in the seven months of war between Hamas and Israel. This includes 66 deaths in the last 24 hours. AFP

Worth of military deal to be inked between Ukraine and Spain

1.1 in billion euros. The deal encompasses patriot missiles and Leopard tanks, a substantial increase from Spain's prior €330 million commitment. AFP

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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Menstrual hygiene in Indian prisons

What are the various policies and schemes introduced by the Indian government with respect to menstrual hygiene management? What did a study in a Maharashtra prison reveal about women prisoners and their access to water and sanitation facilities?

EXPLAINER

Himani Gupta
M. Sivakami

The story so far:

India has witnessed a promising shift in the landscape of menstrual hygiene management over the years. The fifth round of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS 2019-2020) revealed that about eight out of 10 young women aged 15-24 years are now using safe menstrual hygiene products. While urban areas and certain demographics have seen improved usage of menstrual hygiene products, the plight of one of the most marginalised populations – women in Indian prisons – remains overlooked. In a society where prisoners are deemed unworthy of fundamental rights, female prisoners face an even greater injustice. Society clings to an unrealistic standard of female purity, refusing to accept that women, too, can commit crimes. This bias has led to a systemic oversight and neglect of female prisoner's basic needs, including menstrual hygiene.

What is the status of menstrual hygiene in prisons?

According to the National Crime Records Bureau, there are 23,772 women in Indian prisons. Of them, 77% are in the reproductive age group (18-50 years) and are likely to be regular menstruators. However, the availability of sanitary napkins has been inconsistent across different prisons in the country. The quality of sanitary napkins has also been unsatisfactory. Despite recommendations outlined in the 2016 Model Prison Manual, many States have not implemented provisions like supplying adequate water and washroom facilities for female prisoners. Overcrowding and poor socio-economic conditions further exacerbate the struggle of incarcerated women to secure basic necessities such as water, sanitary napkins, detergent, and



ISTOCKPHOTO

soap during menstruation.

A study conducted by one of the authors in a prison in Maharashtra in June 2023 revealed that water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities failed to meet the demands of women imprisoned there. This presents significant challenges for women, who need more water to maintain personal hygiene during menstruation. The lack of continuous water supply also forced women to store water, taking up valuable space in the limited number of toilets available. About 50 women were forced to share just two toilets for all their daily activities, including excreting, changing napkins, and washing clothes and utensils. Women also reported feeling discouraged from using the filthy washrooms for frequent urination, which led to a greater incidence of urinary infections.

The study also found that prison

authorities depended on sanitary napkins donated by non-governmental organisations. Decisions about the type, quality, and quantity of menstrual absorbents were left to these organisations, often resulting in the supply of substandard products.

What have been policy interventions?

India has been making consistent efforts to improve access to menstrual hygiene products, especially among young women through the Menstrual Hygiene Scheme which includes the distribution of free or subsidised sanitary napkins.

In 2023, India took an important stride forward by formulating the 'National Menstrual Hygiene Policy', to recognise menstruation as a natural process that demands more meaningful attention. At its heart lies a crucial principle: ensuring equity in the safe and dignified

management of menstrual hygiene. The draft policy states: "Prioritise equity to enable all menstruating individuals, regardless of their socioeconomic status and geographical location, to have equal opportunities to access and manage their menstruation in a safe and hygienic way. Address disparities and barriers that prevent certain groups from accessing required menstrual hygiene products, resources and information."

Remarkably, the policy identifies prisoners as a target population with a compromised access to menstrual hygiene facilities. This inclusion reflects a positive step forward. However, the policy falls short of providing a concrete action plan to enhance menstrual hygiene management in prisons. It also overlooks the Ministry of Home Affairs as a critical stakeholder that influences menstrual hygiene management in prisons.

What needs to be done?

The Indian government must ensure that basic standards of menstrual hygiene for women in captivity are met. The uneven implementation of the Model Prison Manual 2016 across States demands urgent attention as well. As a first step, the government must ensure every State adheres to the recommendations outlined in the manual. The experience of menstruation within prisons presents unique challenges that demand attention through a public health lens, particularly as part of the fight against 'period poverty'. The next step is to encourage collaboration between public health authorities and prison administrators to develop a comprehensive strategy to ensure access to adequate menstrual hygiene products and facilities while prioritising the health and dignity of women behind bars. Third, there is a dearth of empirical evidence. Therefore, there is an urgent need to conduct research to understand the current state of menstrual hygiene within prison walls.

Himani Gupta is pursuing her masters at Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai. M. Sivakami is professor at TISS.

THE GIST

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The controversy over eucalyptus planting in Kerala

Why did the Kerala government allow the Kerala Forest Development Corporation to plant eucalyptus trees? Why were environmentalists and social activists against the order?

The Hindu Bureau

The story so far:

The Kerala government issued an order allowing the Kerala Forest Development Corporation (KFDC) to plant eucalyptus trees for its financial sustenance in 2024-2025.

Environmentalists soon protested the decision saying the move would adversely affect forests and heighten human-animal conflicts in future. Subsequently, the head of the Forest Force submitted a report to the State Forest Minister saying it hadn't permitted the planting of eucalyptus trees inside forests. On May 20, the government amended its order to limit permission to only cut exotic tree species from lands in the KFDC's control.

What are KFDC and its plantations?

The KFDC was established on January 24, 1975, as part of a dynamic production forestry enterprise. According to the

KFDC website, the corporation has around 7,000 hectares (ha) of plantations. The plantation working circle includes the following species: Eucalyptus grandis, Acacia auriculiformis, Acacia mangium, Acacia crassiparpa, Acacia pycnantha (also known as wattle), Alnus nepalensis, Casuarina equisetifolia, and Pinus patula.

Eucalyptus plantations have a rotation age of nine years; Acacia auriculiformis trees, 18 years; and Acacia mangium, seven years. At the end of each cycle, plantations approved by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate change are felled.

Clear-felled plantations are planted with species listed in a management plan. Before planting, experts check for soil quality and consult with the Kerala Forest Research Institute. As of this month, the KFDC website also said plantations of exotic species, including eucalyptus, would be converted to those of indigenous species once exotic flora has been felled "so as to be more ecologically

and environmentally friendly".

What was the issue with the order?

In 2021, the State government had published an eco-restoration policy. Among other things, it sought to address what it called the "proliferation of invasive species that are not suitable for our environment" and the resulting "depletion of natural forests". Such depletion, according to the policy, was in turn forcing wild animals to move to human-occupied land in search of food and thus increasing the prevalence of human-wildlife conflict.

For example, a recent study by the Kerala State Forest Protective Staff Organisation – an association of frontline forest officers – found replacing exotic plants in forested areas with the corresponding natural species could help ensure food for wild elephants at Chinnakkal in Munnar. The Chinnakkal landscape is prime elephant habitat in the Munnar forest

division, and is filled with eucalyptus trees. The policy also acknowledged that invasive species of plants as well as animals had rendered "serious damage to natural habitats and ecosystems" and that "eradicating such invasive species ... is of high priority." Environmental activists alleged following the State's order – permitting the KFDC to plant eucalyptus trees – contravened the policy's aspirations and undermined efforts to beat back invasive species and mitigate human-animal conflicts.

What is eco-restoration?

Kerala has around 27,000 ha under industrial plantations. Against the backdrop of climate change and the promise researchers have said trees offer to mitigate against its worsening, the Kerala government had decided to phase out plantations of eucalyptus, acacia, wattle, and pine by 2024 and replace them with natural forests. This process is called eco-restoration. Many of these areas are currently overwhelmed with invasive species.

For example, in 2019, in the Marayoor Sandal Division in Idukki, the forest department initiated a project supported by the UNDP, the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development, and the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority. Some 108 hectares of exotic species were removed to allow natural grasses to flourish. The result: water streams in the area were restored after a 30-year gap.

THE GIST

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BUILDING BLOCKS

What are colours and how do people understand them?

Colours, and the degrees of freedom associated with them, have made their presence felt in art, the organisation of social classes, natural philosophy, trade, innovation, climate change, politics, and religion

Vasudevan Mukunth

Colour plays an outsized role in the human experience of modern life. It invests both natural and synthetic worlds with beauty and meaning. Colours don't deny universalism – a red sign will make you stop anywhere on the planet – yet they also make room for human cultures to appropriate them in unique, even discordant, ways. As the human understanding of colour has improved, and continues to do so, this knowledge has also broadened our sense of our place in this world, and the other life-forms with which we share it.

What is colour?

Colour is a type of information our eyes receive and process based on electromagnetic radiation. An object by itself can't be said to have a colour – but based on which frequencies of visible-light radiation it absorbs, reflects, and/or scatters, we can perceive the object to have a particular colour.

In the human eye, the rod and the cone cells receive information in the light that strikes the eye: the rod cells record brightness while the cone cells record the wavelengths, which the human brain interprets as colour. Human beings have three types of cone cells. Each type is sensitive to light of a different wavelength, and they work together to input colour information to the brain.

The possession of three types of cone cells is why humans are called trichromats. Many birds and reptiles, on the other hand, are tetrachromats (four types of cone cells). Similarly, while human vision is restricted to wavelengths from 400 nm to 700 nm (also known as visible light), honeybees can also 'see' ultraviolet light and mosquitoes and some beetles can access information in some wavelengths of infrared radiation. (Humans sense the latter has heat.)

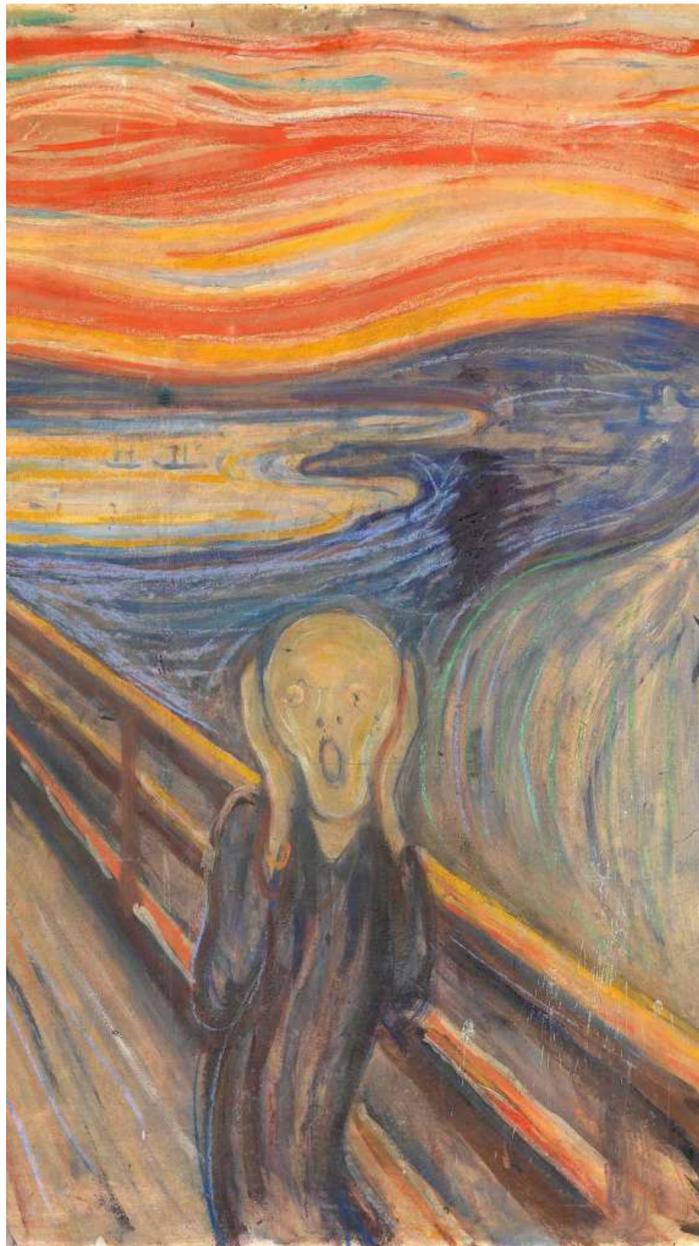
This limitation, such as it is, is why those spectacular images captured by space telescopes of celestial wonders like nebulae need to be false-coloured: to highlight the information secreted in radio waves, X-rays, gamma rays, ultraviolet light, etc. Seen in visible light alone, many of these images will have much less visual detail.

Is there a science of colours?

There are many ways to produce specific colours. The art of mixing colours to produce others is rooted in colour theory.

Until the late 19th century, traditional colour theory specified the different ways in which dyes, pigments, and inks could be mixed to make other colours. In this paradigm, there were three primary colours – red, yellow, and blue – that when combined in different ways could produce all the colours the human eye is capable of seeing.

But modern colour theory, more accurately colour science, rejected the idea of there being three fixed colours. Instead, according to colour science, all the colours that could be produced by combining any three colours in different ways is called the gamut of those three colours. Each colour in a gamut populates a given colour space, and all colour spaces are smaller than the full range of



'The Scream of Nature' by Edvard Munch, 1893. PUBLIC DOMAIN

colours the eye can see.

How are colours rendered?

There are two broad ways to render colours: additive and subtractive colouring. In additive colouring, light of different wavelengths is 'mixed' to yield light of one combined colour. The colours on your smartphone screens and television sets are produced in this way.

A common colour space associated with additive colouring is the RGB space: where red, green, and blue when added to each other in varying measures produces other colours.

In subtractive colouring, a colour is rendered by passing white light through a medium that absorbs, or takes away, specific wavelengths of light, leaving the rest to render a particular colour.

The typical examples include dyes,

pigments, and inks. A dye is a chemical compound that can absorb certain wavelengths of light. When, say, a cloth is dyed, the dyeing compound forms chemical bonds with compounds in the cloth and imbues the cloth with the corresponding (subtractive) colour. A pigment does the same thing without forming chemical bonds. An ink is a solution that contains a dye, a pigment or some other colouring substance.

What are the properties of colour?

In colour science, all colours however rendered are said to have a few appearance parameters: hue, brightness, lightness, and chromaticity.

In 2002, a technical committee of the International Commission on Illumination specified the definition of hue to be the degree to which a given (perceived)

colour can be said to be "similar to or different from" perceived "red, orange, yellow, green, blue, violet". Isaac Newton defined complementary colours on the basis of hue: if two colours combine to produce a greyscale colour – that is, lacking in hue – they are complementary.

Brightness is related to an object's luminance. The luminance is the power emitted by a source of light per unit area, weighted by wavelength; the eye's subjective perception of this power in some direction is inferred as the source's brightness.

Lightness refers to the extent to which a coloured object appears light compared to a white-coloured object that is well lit. The chromaticity, or chromatic intensity, has to do with the human perception of colour and depends on the colour's quality irrespective how well it is lit.

How have people related to colour?

The place and roles of colour in human cultures are too wide-ranging and multifaceted to capture in one short article. Colours, and the degrees of freedom associated with them, have made their presence felt in art, the organisation of social classes, natural philosophy, trade, innovation, cultural symbols, climate change ('green' and 'greenwashing'), politics, and religion, to name a few human endeavours.

Here are just three examples:

(i) In the famous painting "The Scream of Nature" by the Norwegian painter Edvard Munch, the sky is rendered in shades of red and orange – a combination Munch himself famously described as "blood red", to represent an "infinite scream passing through nature".

Why did the sky have such a terrible colour? Some experts have said this could have been the result of the eruption of Krakatoa in Indonesia in 1883. One effect of this devastating event was a tremendous amount of dust in the air for years to come, and dust scatters redder light more, giving the sky the same hues.

(ii) Scientists have dated the use of a pigment called ochre by prehistoric humans to more than 2,00,000 years ago. This is illuminating because we learn something about how much intelligence these humans had. The use of ochre suggests the ability to make it, and to make ochre, you need to mix ferric oxide, clay, and sand together in the right proportions. Archaeological records of pigment use, among others, in Africa have been used to argue against Eurocentrism in the field: manifesting as the belief that, for example, behaviours typical of the 'modern human' first turned up around 40,000-50,000 years ago based on excavations in Europe – whereas the African record would suggest these behaviours arose multiple millennia earlier.

(iii) Light-emitting diodes (LEDs) transformed consumer technologies and industrial and household energy consumption in the 21st century – yet the transformation had to wait for the invention of blue LEDs.

LEDs use additive colouring to produce colours. In the 1970s, scientists had found a way to make LEDs that emitted red light and green light – two of the three primary colours in the RGB colour space – but they didn't have a way to make them emit blue light.

Yet they desperately needed a blue LED because combining the three colours would produce white light, which is the most common lighting colour in household and industrial settings, and therefore had tremendous commercial value. Scientists in Japan finally found a way to make blue LEDs by the late 1980s, for which they and others had to develop sophisticated techniques to make crystals that went on to transform other industries as well.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

K. Subrahmanian

"Deface, efface (A. N. Ragbavan, Madras.)"
" 'Deface' means 'to spoil the appearance of, to disfigure.' When you deface something, you spoil its external appearance."

The wall was defaced by several slogans.
" 'Efface' means 'to rub or wipe out.' It means the complete removal of something."

The letters on the coin have been effaced through constant use.
I cannot efface that unpleasant incident from my memory.

" 'Efface oneself' means 'to make oneself inconspicuous or regard oneself as unimportant.'"
You won't notice him in any company. He is so self-effacing.

The noun form of 'efface' is 'effacement.' The noun form of 'deface' is 'defacement.' The stress is on the second syllable in 'deface' and 'efface.' The 'e' is 'de' and the first 'e' in 'efface' are pronounced like the 'i' in 'ink.'"
" 'Make chalk of one and cheese of another (R. Kulkarni, Bombay)'"

" 'Chalk' stands for something useless and 'cheese' for something of value. When you make chalk of one and cheese of another, you treat two things or persons unequally. You favour one person over the other."
She makes chalk of Krishna and cheese of Raju.

"Rest assured or be rest assured (A. S. N. Murthy, Mysore)"
It is 'rest assured.' 'Rest assured' means 'be certain that..., feel certain.'"
You may rest assured that your mother is fine here.

"Rest assured" is a formal expression. It is followed by 'that.'"
"The Present Continuous or Progressive Tense"

"It was mentioned earlier that verbs like smell, taste, understand, doubt, dislike, know, love are not used in the progressive. These are verbs which refer to a state of mind or feeling. There are some contexts in which these are used in the progressive tense. 'Have' is not used in the progressive tense when it is a 'state' verb. I have a job, not I am having a job. However it is used in the progressive tense when it denotes an activity."

He was having his dinner when I went to see him. It means that dinner had started and was continuing and had not ended. When 'think' is used in the sense of option, it does not take the progressive. I think he is a fool, not I am thinking he is a fool. When it is used in the sense of 'plan, consider,' it is used in the progressive. I am thinking of attending his wedding. When we go into a garden, we smell flowers. The sensation of smelling happens to us. When you take a flower and start smelling it deliberately, you can say 'I am smelling this flower.' You use 'seeing' in certain contexts.

"Can you see this?"
"No."
"I will bring it closer. Can you see it?"
"Yes. Now I am seeing it."
Some more examples:

I can't hear you. I am hearing you now. I could not hear you earlier. There is something wrong with the phone.
You are imagining things."

Published in The Hindu on February 25, 1992.

THE DAILY QUIZ

The ninth edition of the T20 World Cup commences on June 1 co-hosted by the U.S. and West Indies. A quiz to test your knowledge on the World Cups held so far

Please send in your answers to dailyquiz@thehindu.co.in

Soorya Prakash. N

QUESTION 1
Who is the only player to have won two editions as captain?

QUESTION 2
Who are the players to have won the cup as wicket-keeper captains?

QUESTION 3
Which country was involved in two tied matches in the 2012 edition and lost both after a one-over eliminator?

QUESTION 4
Which country has

reached the semi-finals six times – most for any country in T20 World Cup history?

QUESTION 5
Dirk Nannes, Roelof van der Merwe, David Wiese and Mark Chapman share a similarity with respect to the T20 World Cup history. What is it?

QUESTION 6
Who is the only bowler from a non-test playing nation to pick up five wickets in an inning?

QUESTION 7
Who has stood as an on-field umpire in most matches?



Visual question:
Identify the players and the feat that connects them? AFP

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz: 1. The city where Nehru was born. **Ans: In Allahabad (now Prayagraj) on November 14**

2. The parents of Jawaharlal Nehru. **Ans: Swarup Rani Nehru and Motilal Nehru. He had two sisters Vijayalakshmi Pandit and Krishna Hutheesing**

3. The country with which the 'Panchsheel' was formally enunciated under Nehru's leadership. **Ans: China (under Premier Zhou Enlai)**

4. The interim Prime Minister for a 13-day tenure following Jawaharlal Nehru's demise. **Ans: Gulzarilal Nanda**

5. The prison in which Nehru began to write his autobiography. **Ans: Almora prison**

6. This son of a President wrote *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography*. **Ans: Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan's son Sarvepalli Gopal**

Visual: Name the 'samadhi' of Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru. **Ans: Shanti Van**
Early Birds: C. Saravanan| KN Viswanathan| Meena Khanna| Atul Gaur| Saheni George

Word of the day

Ebullient:

joyously unrestrained

Synonyms: high-spirited, exuberant

Usage: *The boss was in an ebullient mood.*

Pronunciation: bit.ly/ebullientpro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /ɪbʊljənt/

For feedback and suggestions for Text & Context, please write to letters@thehindu.co.in with the subject 'Text & Context'

the hindu **businessline.**

TUESDAY - MAY 28, 2024

Bright spot

India's solar installations have gathered pace

The fact that India installed upwards of 10 GW of solar power capacity in the first quarter of the calendar year 2024 is truly remarkable. Admittedly, the record-breaking achievement is partly due to delayed projects attaining fruition during the quarter; nevertheless, it is an accomplishment of note. About 96 per cent of the installations were large, ground-mounted projects, which clearly shows where the action and economics lie. Considering that India's solar journey began only in 2011, this is a noteworthy achievement.



With the addition of 10 GW, total solar power installations in India stand at a little over 82 GW. Add to this the fact that 143 GW are in the pipeline and another 93 GW tendered out, it would seem that solar installations have acquired a new momentum. Not too long ago, 10 GW of installation in one full year was great news. It is, however, possible to argue that there is a less flattering story behind these numbers. The achievement of 82 GW and the better run-rate of installations in recent years is truly a function of falling module prices in the global market. Global module prices have fallen from about a dollar a watt-peak around 2010 to about 14 cents now due to the massive expansion in China, leading to a glut and plummeting prices. When the solar movement started in India nearly a decade and a half ago, with the launch of the National Solar Mission, no one would have believed that module prices would fall so steeply. That said, credit is also due to the government for harnessing the situation, with policy measures such as renewable purchase obligations (RPO) and aggregating demand by having government-owned entities to tender out bulk capacities.

It is also rightly pointed out that India missed the 2022 target of 100 GW mainly because the rooftop solar segment which was to contribute 40 GW was a laggard. The bottlenecks here may come under control now, particularly with the launch of the rooftop solar mission earlier this calendar year. India is fast cruising towards the 100 GW capacity mark. If solar installation continues at the latest rate of 40-50 GW per year for the next six years, India can meet its international commitment of installing 500 GW of renewable energy capacity, including large hydel projects, by 2030. The total capacity in this respect at present is a little under 200 GW.

Yet there are a few disturbing trends. At a large-scale level, solar installations are concentrated in two States – Rajasthan, Gujarat (and to an extent, Karnataka). This means huge spends on transmission. Availability of land in these States has contributed to this concentration. But the government should ensure that utility solar is better dispersed through well-directed incentives. At a small-scale level, solar access should be decentralised through community solar, microgrids and rooftops so that energy is generated where it is consumed. There are signs that this segment is picking up.

POCKET

RAVIKANTH

VIPIN SONDHI
MEGHA SINGH CHAUHAN

The Finance Minister in her address to Industry leaders recently, spoke about the importance and the growth of Global Capability Centers (GCCs) in India and the potential going forward, as an indicator of the confidence and trust that MNCs placed in India.

GCCs are facilities established by MNCs to provide specialised services to their parent company and their arms worldwide. These services encompass technology, cybersecurity, advanced analytics, R&D, advisory and a range of other business functions within the MNCs global corporate structure.

According to a report by Goldman Sachs, GCC revenues in India have surged nearly four fold at a CAGR of over 11 per cent over the past 13 years, reaching \$46 billion in FY23. Over the same period, the number of GCCs has more than doubled from 700 to 1,580 with an employee base of 1.7 million.

GCCs, which started as just cost-saving measures, are much more than that now. They are hubs for innovation and collaboration between the parent company and its offshore arms; increasingly focusing on high-value activities like IP creation, expertise in emerging technologies, digitization mandates and establishing Centres of Excellence.

The process has only accelerated since the pandemic. India's GCCs, comprising about 45 per cent of GCCs worldwide according to Nasscom, contribute to its reputation as the world's services factory. GCCs benefit from a highly skilled, affordable and young population, thereby offering ample opportunities for sustained growth to the parent company.

TIER-2 EXPANSION

Initially, MNCs focused on establishing GCCs in Bengaluru, Pune and Hyderabad given their infrastructure and talent pool.

With the availability of infrastructure and real estate at lower costs and ready talent, GCCs are now being established in Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Mysuru, Vadodara, Kochi, and Coimbatore.

Indeed, the establishment of GCCs in Tier-2 cities enables youth in and around these areas to avoid migrating to distant metros in search of employment opportunities.

The Tamil Nadu government has introduced payroll subsidies and favourable policies to leverage GCCs for economic growth, regional development and innovation. Karnataka is also drafting a GCC policy, focusing on Tier 2 city development and local job creation. This policy aims to boost the local economy through skill

enhancement, extending benefits beyond infrastructure development. GCCs provide employment opportunities for skilled youth, especially women. They play an important role in enabling youth to get upskilled in emerging technologies.



GETTY IMAGES

GCCs: Unlocking the potential of Tier-2 cities

LOOKING AHEAD. GCCs can spur jobs in Tier-2 cities, especially for women, and position India as a global knowledge centre

enhancement, extending benefits beyond infrastructure development.

GCCs provide employment opportunities for skilled youth, especially women. They play an important role in enabling youth to get upskilled in emerging technologies.

The Global Skill Gap Study by National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) showed a growing demand for Indian talent across diverse sectors worldwide, including opportunities for women. Nearly five lakh women are estimated to work in GCCs, comprising 28 per cent of the total 16 lakh employees across GCCs in India

MULTIPLIER EFFECT

GCCs not only drive direct investment and job creation, but also yield numerous secondary benefits that foster economic expansion.

First, they generate employment directly and indirectly, nurturing skill enhancement and income generation across associated sectors.

Second, MNCs introduce advanced technologies and managerial methodologies.

Third, their extensive supply chains create opportunities for local

enterprises, promoting entrepreneurship and strengthening inter-company connections. These initiatives also spur the enhancement of local infrastructure and real estate development, facilitating the growth of the informal sector.

SERVICES EXPORTS

In FY23, India's services exports saw an impressive 26.6 per cent surge, touching \$322 billion, according to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). The Information Technology and Services (ITS) sector, a leading contributor, particularly in segments like consulting, system integration, and management services, underscores the crucial role of GCCs in facilitating these exports.

India is positioning itself as a vibrant knowledge hub for MNCs. Through investments in education and training, it seeks to meet global market demands and foster transformative change across sectors.

By attracting MNCs, India enhances its economic stature and strengthens diplomatic ties, solidifying its position as a beacon of knowledge and opportunity. The increasing research capabilities, as evidenced by the rising number of patents secured by semiconductor GCCs, further demonstrate India's commitment to quality services and its reputation as a favourable and secure business environment.

To facilitate the establishment of GCCs in India, several policy reforms are imperative. Simplifying the regulatory framework and tax policies is essential. This can be done by introducing single-window approval

cells to fast-track issue resolution.

Improving public infrastructure and addressing local commuting challenges for GCCs and tech clusters in Tier-2 cities will enhance workforce productivity.

Furthermore, initiatives to promote gender diversity, such as supporting upskilling programmes for women and creating conducive work environments, are essential for increasing female representation in GCCs and deep tech organisations. Given their low representation now only 6.7 per cent of women hold executive roles in GCCs, and 5.1 per cent in deep tech organizations.

To conclude, GCCs have caught the attention of the leadership at the highest level in both the Central, many State Governments and MNCs for the enormous transformative impact they can have for businesses, local economies and the society at large, especially for women. Supportive state policies aimed at facilitating ease of doing business for GCCs can accelerate a further scaling of up to 2,400 GCCs by 2030 at a value of \$110 billion as estimated by EY.

Since corporations are increasingly establishing centres across India, it presents Tier-2 cities with significant opportunities and simultaneously aids in distributing growth widely through the States. This will further lead to a domino effect, with the next phase of growth of GCCs moving to Tier-3 towns.

Sondhi is Chairperson National Board for Quality Promotion; Chauhan is Policy Unit, Quality Council of India

Lawyers rightly excluded from Consumer Act

The SC has noted that lawyers provide a 'personal service', operating on instructions of clients

Juvraj Singh Bindra
Esha Goyal

The Supreme Court of India recently ruled in the case of Bar of Indian Lawyers v. D.K. Gandhi PS National Institute of Communicable Diseases that advocates practising in the legal profession cannot be sued under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 ("CPA"). This implies that clients who are dissatisfied with their lawyers, cannot seek the remedy provided for deficiency of services under the CPA. However, lawyers would still be liable under the Advocates Act of 1961, Bar Council rules, and other laws as applicable.

The Court arrived at this conclusion after analysing the statement of objects and reasons of the CPA 1986 as re-enacted in 2019, which aimed to protect the interests of consumers against exploitation by the traders and manufacturers, and did not even contain a whisper about professional services provided by doctors, advocates, etc.

There is a difference between 'business' or 'trade' on the one hand, and

'profession' on the other, inasmuch the former is a purely commercial endeavour while the latter is a result of advanced learning and specialised study.

Even among professions, the Court ruled that the legal profession is sui generis i.e. unique since lawyers have a duty to the court and society in addition to their client, and thus play an integral role in upholding the judicial system.

The CPA provides remedies to the consumer for defective goods and deficient services. However, the definition of 'service' under the CPA specifically excludes a contract of personal service.

SERVICE ANGLE

On the issue of whether lawyers provided a 'service' to clients, the Court noted that advocates are agents of the client and could not go beyond the wishes of the client in their representation before courts or substitute their own judgment in place of the client's instructions. Thus, clients exercise a considerable amount of direct control over the advocate they have engaged for a particular case.

This led the Court to conclude that



CONSUMER FACTOR. Lawyers' services (ISTOCKPHOTO)

though an advocate provided a 'service' to the client, such services were in the nature of a contract 'of personal service' (as opposed to a contract 'for personal service') and would therefore stand excluded from the CPA. Since lawyers do not provide a service, as defined, they could not be held liable for a deficiency in service.

It must be noted here that the amicus curiae appointed to assist the Court had recommended that advocates who provide services outside the litigation

process, such as providing legal opinions or drafting commercial documents could be covered by the CPA. However, the judgement pronounced by the Court did not enforce this distinction.

Though the Court distinguished between the legal and medical professions, it also observed that professions in general should not be covered by the CPA and recommended that the earlier decision of the Supreme Court in Indian Medical Association v. V.P. Shantha ought to be revisited, to exclude claims of deficiency in service against doctors as well. A decision regarding doctors may be delivered soon, though it is unclear what the holding would be. As of now, it is only legal services which have been excluded.

The present decision in Bar of Indian Lawyers was necessary to settle the issue of lawyers' liability for unexpected outcomes. The Court was thus justified in protecting lawyers from deficiency in service claims under the CPA, while also leaving the door open to proceedings under other laws in genuine cases of wrongdoing.

The writers are with Cyril Amarchand Mangaldas

✉ **LETTERS TO EDITOR** Send your letters by email to bleditor@thehindu.co.in or by post to 'Letters to the Editor', The Hindu Business Line, Kasturi Buildings, 859-860, Anna Salai, Chennai 600002.

Bioplastic dangers

This refers to 'Saying no to plastic with bioplastic' (May 27). Restrictions on the usage of Single Use Plastic (SUP) are all in papers. Few seizures of bulk quantities of raw materials for manufacturing SUP are made here and there, fines imposed but there is no active follow-up. The quantity of 17.5 lakh tonnes of SUP forming part of 50 per cent of total plastic waste is alarming. Compared to NIOT Chennai's attempt of using prawn waste and the seaweed based bioplastic as a substitute for the plastic, the experiments of the start up unit of Ukhi India in producing biodegradable and compostable

polymer granules with agricultural waste including rice husk, pine needles, nettle and hemp is amazing.
RV Baskaran
Chennai

Investor protection

With reference to the Editorial 'Knotty rules' (May 27), SEBI's investor protection initiative to monitor the exorbitant stock volatility in top 100 listed companies is a good move to shield the investors from market rumours. Though the scheme in fairness largely protects the investment ecosystem, it is also fraught with many challenges, since the ambiguous rules framed, omits to

include the unregulated social media influencers, related parties of the companies etc. in the rumour monger list. The new price determination framework would be much more effective with extended scope and simplified rules, to instill high investor confidence.
Sitaram Popuri
Bengaluru

Liquidity matters

This refers to the 'Liquidity tight as Centre's cash balances pile up' (May 27). The reverse flow of cash into the economy is crucial to easing liquidity in the banking space to help banks cope with the growing demand for credit. Mobilising low-cost deposits

is not easy with savers opting for financial assets with attractive returns. Though banks gain from growing credit demand, using certificate of deposits to mop up funds is uneconomical. The RBI must look to conduct more variable reverse repo operations to enable lenders to have funds at competitive rates to meet the rising demand for credit.
VSK Pillai
Changanacherry

Voting worries

The lead news item reporting lesser voter turnout is really worrisome. That Kerala also figures in low turnout list is cause for concern. Of

all the likely causes narrated, "a general sense of electoral apathy" is a pointer to the abysmal standards our politics has fallen to. The absence of merit in candidate choice, the repeat candidature of incumbents, lack of issue-based campaigning lead to voter fatigue. The lack of propriety and decorum from leaders while campaigning is also a worrying factor. A true democracy needs sensible, issue based campaigning, accountability from the elected representatives, strict adherence to code of conduct and a vigilant, non-partisan oversight of the election system.
Jose Abraham
Vaikom (Kerala)

Is 'security' work secure?

Security services industry needs support

Rajalaxmi Kamath
Lakshmi Parvathy

India's Smart Cities Mission is aimed at improving the quality of urban life. While there have been considerable investments in hard infrastructure, soft infrastructure, like the provisioning of safe and secure spaces, has not been targeted well enough.

Today, the urban population increasingly relies on private security solutions providers. In a study conducted by the authors, using monthly data released by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA), for the years 2016-2022, shows that more than 50 per cent of the around 8,000 companies established to provide HR solutions were providing "security services".

Various reports estimate that the private security service industry in India employed 7-9 million as of 2016 and can employ 11-12 million individuals as of 2023 through more than 22,000 private security agencies. It is slated to be one of India's largest and fastest employment generators, with an estimated CAGR of 20-25 per cent by 2023.

Seventy-five per cent of this security service industry constitutes manned guarding. They cater to the demands of IT/ITeS, retail, commercial and manufacturing sectors, wherein 41 and 39 per cent of guards are deployed in the commercial and residential sectors, respectively.

The rest of the industry constitutes highly organised cash management services with 7-8 major agencies. With the establishment of these agencies, it is argued that this industry has become more organised.

PREFERRED CITIES

Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Kanpur and Gwalior are the preferred cities for registration for security services firms. The workforce is primarily sourced from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Assam.

Specific regions with ex-army populations, paramilitary personnel and unemployed youth are the most significant contributors to this, according to a FICCI report. Thus, Tier II cities such as Kanpur and Gwalior are registering more HRCs than Tier I cities such as Chennai and Hyderabad, which points to the fact that they could be acting as hubs attracting labour from hinterlands to be deployed



RAPID GROWTH. Security sector

elsewhere in the country.

The proliferation of security service companies could be a combination of proximal and distal factors. The proximal factors include increasing concern for personal security, inadequacy of the public safety infrastructure — a low police-population ratio, a rise and spread of the number of banks and ATMs, declaration of private security services as essential services during the Covid-19 pandemic, and so on.

The distal factors include a rise in urbanisation, changing ideas of risks in an increasingly globalised context. From a regulatory point of view, security service companies must also register under the Private Security Agencies Regulation Act (2005). The Act aims to regulate security agencies operating in the country while ensuring that they do not intrude upon the duties of law-and-order enforcement mechanisms. However, the job involves much more risk than jobs, in general, owing to sudden exposure to unfavourable circumstances.

Thus, while emphasis has been given to training the security workforce to do biometrics and zero-touch approaches to enhance the standardisation of processes, equal or more emphasis should be placed on strengthening this first line of defence and protecting themselves during crises. This includes site-specific trainings, even if the workers are deployed on shifts to various sites.

There is also the need to support the participation of women in the workforce. It is thus imperative that the capabilities of this large army of security workforce is enhanced, ensuring that the quality of working conditions is improved with adequate breaks, pay and social security support and opportunities for skilling.

The writers are faculty and doctoral student, respectively, at IIMB's Centre for Public Policy

Trends in consumption spending

Consumption expenditure patterns point to increased inequality and constraints for future growth

MACROSCAN.



CP CHANDRASHEKHAR, JAYATI GHOSH

It is generally perceived that India's growth trajectory has been consumption-led. Many of the enthusiastic international assessments of future economic growth prospects in India are based on the anticipation of the massive domestic market likely to be created by India's large and dominantly young population.

This perception has been enhanced by the fact that consumption has been a significantly high share of GDP (at 55-58 per cent for several decades), while net exports have not really emerged as a major growth impetus other than for some services.

Meanwhile, investment rates, which increased in the decade of the 2000s, have declined and stagnated thereafter.

Such a reliance on domestic consumption naturally requires attention to the size and growth of the domestic market.

Clearly, in order to take advantage of the economies of scale that should result from such a large population of potential consumers, it is necessary for income gains to be reasonably widely distributed. (This was, indeed, a major reason for China's remarkable industrialization success — the ability to take advantage of a huge base of mass consumer demand that immediately generated large scale economies in production.)

This is where concerns about inequality and the distribution of growth become important, because one major failure of the Indian growth trajectory, especially over the past decade, has been the sharp increase in inequality that has meant that the benefits of increased aggregate income accrue to a very small section of the population, say around 10-20 per cent at most.

WAGE STAGNATION

The stagnation of real wages (and even declining real wages for some workers) in an economy growing at 5-7 per cent per year, even as assets and income of the top decile of the population have skyrocketed, is one potent indicator of this disparity.

A necessary corollary of this is that consumption expenditure is not growing as rapidly as it would have if the incomes had been more equally distributed, and the demand for mass consumption items remains limited despite the apparent expansion of the economy as a whole. This in turn has implications for economies of scale (which are thereby less evident) as well as for investment, as will be clear below.

Unfortunately, we do not have recent evidence on household consumption because the NSSO consumer expenditure survey of 2017-18 was not published by the Modi government, and the recent "Factsheet" purporting to provide results of the NSSO survey conducted in 2022-23 is both non-comparable with earlier surveys and inadequate to draw any meaningful conclusions. In its absence, we are forced to rely only on the consumption data as revealed in the national accounts.

Figure 1 shows the trends in real GDP, household disposable income and private final consumption expenditure from 2011-12, according to the just released national accounts data. The trends are broadly similar, but the absolute gap has grown over time.

There has been an argument that recent growth has been more determined by public spending, in terms of both consumption and investment, but this does not appear to be supported by the data provided in Figures 2 and 3.

Government consumption did indeed rise faster than private consumption between 2015-16 and

2020-21, but only slightly more. And in the most recent two-year period, private consumption has outpaced government consumption.

This is actually quite striking — that government consumption remained stagnant in the period of the Covid-19 pandemic.

It reinforces the point that is not made strongly enough, that the government did very little to counter the adverse effects of the disease and the lockdowns, in terms of countercyclical measures or social protection.

SLUGGISH MASS DEMAND

The associated stagnation in mass demand is probably one reason why private investment has remained so muted, despite the massive fiscal sops and other incentives thrown to big business.

Figure 3 shows that both private corporate investment and household investment (which is often an indication of investment by micro-enterprises) have remained mostly flat as shares of GDP, and still not returned to levels achieved in 2015-16. The rise in public investment is the only thing that has kept aggregate investment rates broadly stable, but even so, the aggregate investment rate of 33.4 per cent in 2022-23 was still below the rate of 34.3 per cent achieved in 2011-12.

Disaggregating household consumption is one way of tracking the changes in the domestic market, and assessing how much of it is oriented to the provision of mass consumption goods. Figure 4 provides estimates of the compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of consumption expenditure by category in the nine years between 2014-15 and 2022-23 (the period of the Modi government). Aggregate consumption spending increased by 5.13 per cent per annum over the period, but consumption on food and beverages increased more slowly, by only 4.8 per cent per year, while that on clothing and footwear went up by only 1.75 per cent per year. Spending on housing, water, fuel, etc. also increased by only 2.69 per cent per year. (In other words, the basic items that are more likely to be consumed by the poor increased more slowly than aggregate consumption.)

By contrast, expenditure on transport — and particularly on transport vehicles including luxury cars — went up sharply, especially in the last two years.

This is confirmed by the disaggregation according to type of consumption goods: the increase over this period was most rapid for durable consumer goods more likely to be purchased by the rich and upper middle classes (at a CAGR of 8.2 per cent per year) and much slower for non-durable goods (4.9 per cent) and semi-durable goods (2.7 per cent).

This confirms other evidence in terms of the stagnation of demand for Fast Moving Consumer Goods, especially in rural India, and for items like two-wheelers, even as demand for luxury consumption goods with high import content has increased dramatically.

There has been some excitement among those desperately searching for green shoots, about demand revival for two-wheeler vehicles in recent months. But such excitement needs to be tempered with the knowledge that such vehicles, along with a range of other spending, have always been associated with campaign spending before major elections.

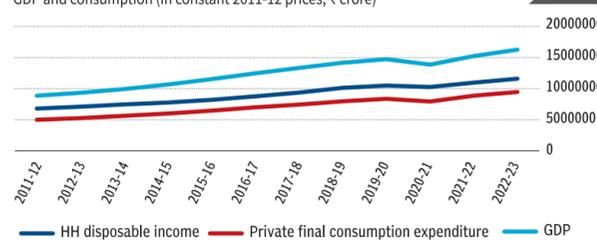
A genuine revival in mass consumer demand will require a very different economic strategy.

The sluggish growth in demand for mass goods is perhaps the reason for the slack in private and household investment over the last few years.



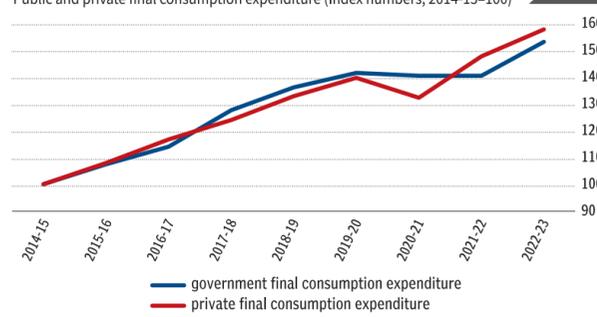
Growing gap

GDP and consumption (in constant 2011-12 prices, ₹ crore)



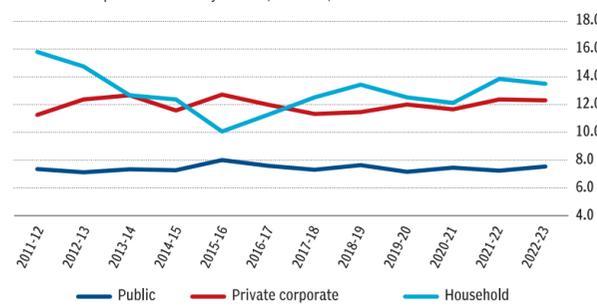
Public vs Private

Public and private final consumption expenditure (Index numbers, 2014-15=100)



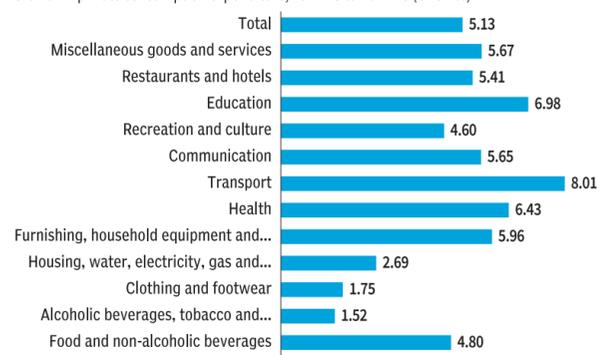
Tepid investments

Gross Fixed Capital Formation by source (% of GDP)



Category break-up

Growth in private consumption expenditure, 2014-15 to 2022-23 (CAGR %)



Source: National Accounts Statistics, CSO

thehindubusinessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

May 28, 2004

CMP balances reforms with other economic concerns

The ruling United Progressive Alliance (UPA) released its Common Minimum Programme (CMP), which stated that profit-making public sector undertakings (PSUs) will "generally" not be privatised and all privatisations "will be considered on a transparent and consultative case-by-case basis."

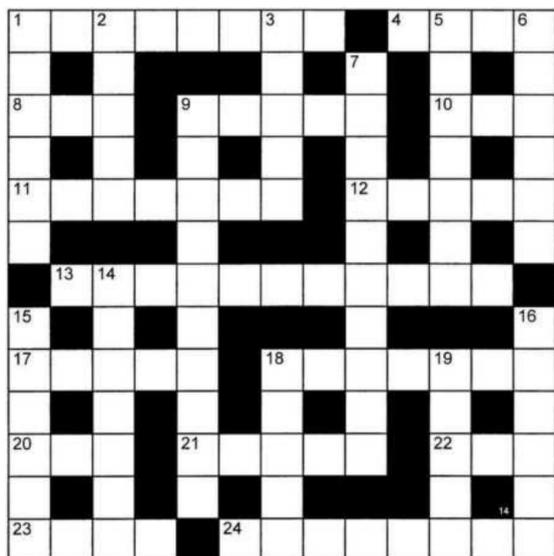
Cess on all Central taxes proposed

A cess on all Central taxes, including personal income tax, corporation, excise and customs duties to finance universal access to primary education seems a certainty in the coming Union Budget. The final Common Minimum Programme document of the UPA made a mention of this, even though it has not specified the level of the proposed cess.

Concern over cess move

The Common Minimum Programme of the Congress-led UPA has left many people rather confused and upset than clear about the policy direction the new Government would take. Two major points that have raised concern in industry circles are "checking misuse of double taxation treaties" and cess on all "federal taxes" to finance the commitment to universalise access to quality basic education.

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2448



EASY

ACROSS

- Long, impassioned harangue (8)
- Drive, as clouds, before wind (4)
- Pair (3)
- Large stringed instrument (abbr) (5)
- Put out on lease (3)
- Make revived (7)
- Yields to low spirits (5)
- Feeling of disaster to come (11)
- Punctuation mark (5)
- Advance showing (7)
- Night-bird (3)
- Law-giver's order (5)
- Miss the mark (3)
- Neat (4)
- Disparage (8)

DOWN

- Foolishly fond old man (6)
- Distant, withdrawn (5)
- Burp (5)
- W Indian folk-song (7)
- Hate (6)
- Something one has bound oneself to do (10)
- Products of patissier (5,5)
- Cottoned on to (7)
- Approach and address (6)
- Deflect, turn aside (6)
- Cost (5)
- Futile, irrelevant (5)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

- Aid wrongly given to body of natives with lengthy harangue (8)
- Wind-driven cloud delivers vigorous cudgelling inside (4)
- One doubled up, having backed out of row tactfully (3)
- Viol, on getting this instrument, completes it (5)
- What landlord will do for net obstruction (3)
- Are topless, impertinent, but will make one feel better (7)
- Is gloomily disposed to some change but quietly enheartened (5)
- Idea there's something bad on the way turning into prim one (11)
- Small division in sentence has large number in deep sleep (5)
- Pure, if non-u, opinion of what the critic sees (7)
- Barnyard bird headed off barn bird (3)
- Order detective branch to back, and in French get round it (5)
- To be inaccurate is to sound hesitant and double the ending (3)
- Fairly good, large and orderly (4)
- Disparage one abstainer embraced by handsome woman (8)

DOWN

- He's old and foolish, showing point a doctor comes up to (6)
- Being stand-offish, trifle with a come-uppance (5)
- Some of the rebel churchmen who pour forth (5)
- Plays around in company going for a song in W Indies (7)
- Greatly dislike to be done on quitting the trial (6)
- People first 'do' crime: time? One is bound to it (10)
- How might a crack seem to come from the pastry cook's? (5,5)
- Caught on to the secret of how empty tummy sounded (7)
- Stop and speak to the company in changing the cast (6)
- Do one's time in forces around the West, but deviate (6)
- What one must pay to see a short pair on the rink (5)
- To write up within it is vain (5)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2447

ACROSS 1. Medallion 5. Sad 7. Safe 8. Overtake 10. Override 11. Ants 13. Kitten 15. Graded 18. Deed 19. Bookshop 22. Cocktail 23. Silo 24. See 25. Digresses
DOWN 1. Mistook 2. Defoe 3. Invade 4. Norm 5. Stained 6. Dress 9. Green 12. Drake 14. Treacle 16. Deploys 17. Hoping 18. Docks 20. Hails 21. Stud

A decade after States need engines of growth

It has been 10 years since the bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh — into Telangana, around the city of Hyderabad, and the new Andhra Pradesh, which retains the area of Rayalaseema and the districts of coastal and upper Andhra. The division of the state was not amicable. Disputes continue about the splitting of shared assets, including public-sector companies of the undivided state, and properties in Hyderabad. The acrimony between the two states is not entirely surprising. The bifurcation, after all, followed a long period of agitation by pro-Telangana activists, who believed that their part of the undivided state was being exploited by “Seemandhra”. Many data points in the decade since the bifurcation could be marshalled in support of their cause.

The two states have demonstrated similar growth rates in the period: 7.1 per cent and 7.2 per cent, both higher than the national average. But at the time of bifurcation, poverty was concentrated in rural Telangana. Most of its rural districts were classified as being among the most deprived in the country. That has been effectively turned around by the welfare-oriented regional party that ruled in the state before being ousted by the Congress in the last Assembly election. While welfare spending in Telangana increased and new government schemes were piloted, the state also managed to run a revenue surplus in seven of the nine years prior to the Assembly elections.

Andhra Pradesh, meanwhile, opened the fiscal tap without corresponding revenue. Its fiscal deficit went up to more than a percentage point of state gross domestic product, higher than the mandated level of 3 per cent. Unlike Telangana, it had a change in government, which led to severe policy uncertainty. Projects from the massive plans for a new capital to contracts signed with renewable power suppliers were all discarded. Revenue was not raised, off-Budget liabilities built up, capital assets were not created, and investors were turned off by the policy shifts. The state no longer has the sort of political capital in New Delhi that would cause it to receive a special financing package from the Union government. It thus faces a difficult reckoning — which is not helped by the competitive welfarism of the major contenders for power in the ongoing Assembly elections in the state.

There is no clear lesson to be drawn from recent Indian political history about whether bifurcation leads to better outcomes. Jharkhand and Uttarakhand, which were separated from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, respectively, a quarter century ago, may have done better than their parent states but it is also clear that they have not lived up to their potential. The Telangana story reveals, if anything, that the Indian political economy is far too dependent upon extractive politics structured around revenue-generating cities. When Seemandhra dominated the politics of undivided Andhra Pradesh and had access to Hyderabad’s surpluses, it did well. When instead that power shifted to the rural districts of Telangana, they did well in turn. Cities are the engines of growth, but Indian state politics continues to compete not around expanding that growth or creating more cities, but instead for the spoils of that growth — to funnel it to the regions and communities that happen to have political power at that point.

Deadly negligence

Hospital fire underlines criminal regulatory failure

A hospital fire in east Delhi, resulting in the death of seven new-born babies, is yet another deeply tragic reminder of the systemic abdication of responsibilities by regulatory authorities. In the aftermath of this heart-breaking catastrophe, caused by exploding oxygen cylinders, it transpires that nothing about this hospital was legal. Investigation has revealed that the hospital’s licence had expired two months ago, it did not have trained medical personnel, a fire-safety certificate, basic fire-safety equipment, or usable fire exits. The survival of five of the 12 infants was due to quick-thinking improvisation by firefighters, who used a ladder from a neighbouring building to climb through a window at the rear of the facility to reach the infants. Subsequent investigation revealed that owners of the hospital had three branches in the National Capital Region. The criminal rule book has been thrown at the owners now, but this does not detract from the fact that the disaster has highlighted the combination of rank corruption and negligence that increasingly characterises public services in India. According to *The Times of India*, Delhi has reported 66 hospital fires over the past two years, suggesting that fire regulations are observed in the breach.

If this is the state of hospitals in Delhi, the situation elsewhere can only be imagined. In 2011, for instance, a fire broke out in an upscale hospital in south Kolkata, resulting in the death of more than 60 people, the bulk of them patients in the intensive care unit. Medical waste and chemicals stored in the basement had caused the fire. Those who died could not be evacuated down stairways, which were too narrow to accommodate stretchers, pointing to obvious shortcomings in the fire-inspection processes. In a country where government investment in health care is wholly inadequate, as the Delta phase of the pandemic revealed just three years ago, the private sector is visibly filling the gap. This forced and growing reliance on private hospitals, clinics, and related facilities, therefore, demands robust, efficient, and trustworthy regulatory systems, ensuring minimum safety standards — from building codes to the quality of Medicare.

The irony is that strict rules and regulations exist in the statute books in almost every state. The fact that they are often bypassed with impunity, as this latest tragedy has demonstrated, is an issue that should command the attention of all administrations. Penalising errant officials after the fact has limited deterrent effect; working at establishing a robust regulatory environment as a standard operating procedure is the hard work that political leaders urgently need to undertake. These basic values play as critical a role in determining a nation’s success as lofty goals such as massive infrastructure spending and ease of doing business metrics. Such reprehensible developments as the deaths of Gambian (in Africa) and Uzbek (in Central Asia) children ingesting contaminated cough syrup made in India or reports of impurities in eye drops causing blindness in the US, or the presence of toxins in spices exported by reputed companies are damaging to the country’s reputation as a reliable place to do business. This message has just been underlined at the cost of human lives.



ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA

Governance by disguised legislation

The tyranny of circulars must end to ensure democratic legitimacy of laws and ease of doing business

A judgment dated April 4 of the Bombay High Court struck down a few clauses of a circular issued by the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) on the grounds that these clauses prescribed legal norms beyond the liquidation process regulations. It, however, observed that it would indeed be feasible for the IBBI, in its legislative wisdom, to propose the contents of those very clauses as an amendment to the regulations, following the due process of making regulations.

An order dated April 10, 2024, of the Karnataka High Court obliterated a circular issued by the Central government that imposed a blanket ban on “ferocious” breeds of dogs, as it travelled beyond the rules. It, however, observed that such obliteration would not come in the way of the Central government introducing an amendment to rules, following the due process of law. These two recent rulings reinforce that a circular cannot exceed the rules/regulations, which are the only instruments through which the executive can prescribe legal norms.

About a year ago, the Securities Appellate Tribunal set aside an order of the Securities and Exchange Board of India, inter alia, on the grounds that the circular relating to the pledge of securities, which was the basis of the order, did not apply to the appellants. It noted that a circular is issued to specific addressees, and therefore, applies only to them. Others have no obligations/compliances under the circular even when they are dealing with the addressees or undertaking transactions covered by the circular. By implication, if the provisions of the circular were specified through regulations, the order could have been upheld.

The Apex Court has been alerting to the inherent limitations of circulars for prescribing legal norms.

It has settled that a circular presents the issuer’s understanding of a legislative provision. It does not have legal standing if such understanding is incorrect/inconsistent with the legislation. However, an inconsistent circular is binding on the issuer if it benefits the stakeholders compared to the legislation. Therefore, most enactments do not envisage the prescription of legal norms through circulars.

There are only two forms of legislation for prescribing legal norms, namely, primary legislation (Acts) and secondary/ subordinate/ delegated legislation (rules and regulations). The former is enacted by the legislature, while the latter, which is subordinate to the former, is made by the executive (rules by government and regulations by regulators), as a delegate of the legislature. However, a plethora of disguised legislation has emerged, nationally and internationally, which are made by the bureaucracy (typically a senior officer), as sub-delegates of the executive, to sneak in legal norms. These take different forms such as determination, direction, instruction, order, arrangement, scheme, strategy, guidelines, guidance notes, practice notes, codes, standards, protocols, notifications, notices, announcements, advanced rulings, clarifications, press releases, FAQs, and the ubiquitous circular.

In the Indian context, subordinate legislation is subject to several procedural and substantive safeguards to ensure democratic legitimacy for laws made by the unelected. Take the example of regulations. Primary legislation: (a) defines the contours of regulations in terms of the matters and purposes, (b) mandates only the governing board of the regulator to make regulations, at times with prior approval of the Central government, (c) requires



M S SAHOO & SUMIT AGRAWAL

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In the Indian context, subordinate legislation is subject to several procedural and substantive safeguards to ensure democratic legitimacy for laws made by the unelected. Take the example of regulations. Primary legislation: (a) defines the contours of regulations in terms of the matters and purposes, (b) mandates only the governing board of the regulator to make regulations, at times with prior approval of the Central government, (c) requires



INDRAJIT GUPTA

As a result, it in-sourced warehousing, invested in a large setup of its own, and asked an integrated logistics partner to run it on its behalf, with half of the capacity earmarked for e-commerce. The result: After a few months, it realised that its e-commerce business had simply failed to take off, customers continued to, through its physical stores, and it paid rent and a substantial fee for the excess warehousing space. Now, with a lock-in in place, exiting such rigid arrangements wasn’t easy. The more sensible approach would have been to rely on third-party warehousing options till such time the volumes built up, and it made economic

Holy grail of blended commerce

Ever since the pandemic ended, shoppers have been thronging physical stores. Step into a mall any weekend and you’ll find it hard to attract the attention of a shopping attendant. Or indeed, find the item that you’re looking for — in the size or colour that you need. You’re possibly wondering whether the trip was worth the hassle — and if you would easily find the item online — plus maybe, a better deal as well. Except that you’d prefer to touch, feel and try the product before you buy.

Here’s the upshot: Smart retailers are seeing this gap as an opportunity to improve the customer experience, efficiency and conversion rates by leveraging the power of blended commerce. That is, get the best of both worlds — physical and online.

It isn’t new *per se*, but retailers are starting to think about blended commerce as the next frontier, and work to offer a seamless and unified shopping experience.

Imagine a customer who walks into a store needing a dress for an important official engagement two days later. In case the item isn’t available, does the store attendant have the wherewithal to check in his system if any of the stores in the city have the item in stock? If it is in stock, would he be able to reserve it and offer the customer the option to either pick it from that store or have it express-delivered home well in time? Plus, in the event there is more choice available beyond the limited range the store stocks, can the attendant offer the shopper the choice to select an item from the “endless aisle” that the online shopping experience offers and have it delivered from the nearest warehouse within a specific time frame? Therefore, the physical store has a new role: Not

just showcase what is available, perhaps help the customer to try it out — but also offer the added benefit of closing the sale, in case the customer is open to having it delivered from their nearest store or warehouse.

It isn’t without reason that blended commerce is emerging as the holy grail of retail. Especially since covering a country as large and diverse as India has its challenges. The opportunity in Tier-II towns and beyond is starting to open up. Major retailers are scrambling to open physical stores, but that invariably takes time. Instead, a thoughtfully crafted combination of e-commerce and physical stores could help bridge the gap.

It is easier said than done, though. A major consumer electronics retailer decided that store expansion was too slow and cumbersome, and that expanding e-commerce in a big way by taking control of its logistics, warehousing and supply chain operations was the solution. It assumed that having control over its supply chain was a prerequisite for improving service levels, ensuring quicker delivery, and thereby, scaling up e-commerce.

As a result, it in-sourced warehousing, invested in a large setup of its own, and asked an integrated logistics partner to run it on its behalf, with half of the capacity earmarked for e-commerce. The result: After a few months, it realised that its e-commerce business had simply failed to take off, customers continued to, through its physical stores, and it paid rent and a substantial fee for the excess warehousing space. Now, with a lock-in in place, exiting such rigid arrangements wasn’t easy. The more sensible approach would have been to rely on third-party warehousing options till such time the volumes built up, and it made economic

public consultation on the proposed regulations, preferably with the help of *ex-ante* assessment of the proposal, (d) requires a gazette notification of regulations for everyone to take notice of, and (e) provides for parliamentary scrutiny of regulations. None of these apply to disguised legislation. Thus, a circular could be issued to forbid a market participant from wearing a red cap on Tuesdays!

Primary legislation envisages only regulations for making laws. It prohibits the regulator from delegating regulation-making to anyone. However, there is no explicit prohibition on a regulator from using disguised legislation, although the legislation does not envisage it. The rigour of lawmaking (in terms of its authority and process) is directly related to its democratic legitimacy. The legitimacy is highest in the case of primary legislation, which is the most rigorous to make. It is somewhat less for subordinate legislation. It is the least for disguised legislation, which does not go through the sacrosanct process of checks and balances that the subordinate legislation is subject to. This probably explains why authorities prefer disguised legislation to subordinate legislation for prescribing legal norms, despite its doubtful legal sanctity.

In both depth and spread, the volume of subordinate legislation relating to markets far exceeds that of primary legislation. The volume of the disguised legislation dwarfs the aggregate of primary legislation and subordinate legislation. This reflects a shift in the balance of power from the legislature to the executive, and from the executive to the bureaucracy. This has prompted a worldwide call for restoring the balance of power to the legislature, reducing reliance on subordinate legislation, and an absolute ban on disguised legislation, except during emergencies like Covid-19.

In two hard-hitting reports in November 2021, two Select Committees of the House of Lords expressed grave concern about the increasing subordinate and disguised legislation that effectively bypasses the legislature. While calling for the restoration of power to Parliament, they noted that further delegation of legislative power by the delegate-executive is potentially a more egregious erosion of democratic accountability than the delegation to the executive to make subordinate legislation.

The only excuse often advanced in favour of circulars is that the executive may need to intervene urgently to address an imminent emergency. This is addressed by empowering the executive to issue emergency subordinate legislation, which has a limited shelf-life, without following the normal process for making them. This is not to argue that there is no place for circular-like instruments. Instead of prescribing legal norms, they could be used to guide the implementation of regulations and facilitate compliance.

It is high time that Parliament put a complete ban on disguised legislation of any form, and required the executive, including regulators, to use only subordinate legislation to prescribe legal norms henceforth. They must be obliged to either move the existing disguised legislation to rules/regulations, if they are relevant, following due process, or withdraw them within a definite time frame. Circular Raj must end in the interest of democratic legitimacy of laws and ease of doing business.

The writers are legal practitioners

The debt trap saga



BOOK REVIEW

SAMIE MODAK

Over the past decade, the Indian financial markets have been the toast of investors. The domestic stock markets have outperformed most global peers. India’s market value — which first hit \$1 trillion only in 2007 — hit \$5 trillion this month. The country is the world’s fourth-largest market now, after the US, China and Japan. A booming stock market reflects the fact that the country’s corporate sector has performed well. The equity side of the market is often discussed but the debt side of the business doesn’t get equal attention. Yet few companies, particularly those in capital-intensive

sectors such as steel, power and textiles, can do without raising debt, and bank loans are considered the lubrication for a country’s economic engine.

The dark side of this cycle is that large borrowers can fail to honour repayment obligations and banks have to contend with the consequences. In the normal course, any business can fail. Mega-plans can also run aground as a result of large-scale changes or an economic downturn. But large defaulters are often those who try to game the system by duping banks and scooting with hard-earned depositor or taxpayer money.

N Sundaresha Subramanian, who specialises in reporting on the regulatory landscape and corporate wrongdoings, has done an impressive job in recounting the story of India’s most indebted firms in *The Dirty Dozen*. In most cases, he finds a nexus between corporations, politicians and corrupt bank officials.

The Dirty Dozen is not just an attempt at describing the journey of the 12 large defaulters but also an effort at

capturing the changing landscape around the evolution of the bankruptcy system in India. The book leaves you with plenty of food for thought: How we got to the often-quoted ₹10 trillion bad loan figure, the painful process of under-recovery and the evolution of the framework leading up to the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI).

The book — premised on the country’s 12 biggest defaulters declared by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in June 2017 — has three chapters. The first one delves into how regulations governing defaults and bad loans changed under various governments. It also simplifies all the jargon around bad loans for the uninitiated. This makes it an interesting read for those who are unfamiliar with the Indian banking system.

The chapters are sprinkled with interesting anecdotes, studies and speeches of governors and deputy governors. It dives deep into the power equation between a borrower and a banker. It looks at, for instance, how state-owned banks account for the bulk of the bad loans and how public sector bankers are often from humble backgrounds, which makes the system vulnerable to

exploitation. Worse, corporate borrowers escape largely unscathed but bank officials end up behind bars.

A separate chapter on Vijay Mallya is intriguing. Kingfisher Airlines (KFA) didn’t go through the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) proceedings because Mr Mallya was declared a defaulter before the new regulation was enacted. Though much has been written on Mr Mallya’s doomed entry into aviation, the book offers a lot of new information, including on the liquor baron’s political affiliations and email exchanges between KFA’s top bosses amid mounting debt.

Chapter two, which makes up almost half the book, is dedicated to the “dirty dozen” with one section dedicated to each. Mr Subramanian finds interesting common threads between them — their faulty decision-making and questionable business acumen. Generally speaking, insolvency

proceedings can be extremely technical. The book tries to tell a simple story around the company’s background, its promoters, run-ins with the authorities and the eventual fall into the debt trap. After every chapter, however, you are left wanting to know more.

While one could expect the book to end after summarising the travails of the 12 defaulters, the last chapter covers fugitives Nirav Modi and his uncle Mehul Choksi of Gitanjali Gems and the story of how they took Punjab National Bank for a ride by misusing the letter of undertaking

(LoU) mechanism. It also focuses on a select few groups, such as JSW, Adani and Vedanta, which have managed to thrive despite a pile of debt. The Videocon-Chanda Kochhar controversy and the collapse of the Anil Ambani empire also find a place in this book. A chapter on the RBI’s response — which begins with a reference to the

Asian Currency Crisis — dives into how the regulatory landscape around tackling bad loans has evolved starting with the corporate debt restructuring (CDR) mechanism leading up to the present day IBBI. It explains approaches the RBI uses towards tackling stressed assets.

Despite the regulator’s best efforts at addressing the issue of bad debt, the system is still plagued by complications — whether it is poor adjudication infrastructure or complex judicial proceedings. As MS Sahoo, the first chair of IBBI, sums up in the foreword to this book, “the road to success is always under construction.”

The third chapter is packed with information, but the flow is somewhat inconsistent.

Mr Subramanian developed the idea of the book in 2016; since then, the landscape around bad loans has changed. Add to that the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, which brought many insolvency proceedings to standstill. This makes writing on the topic extremely complex, so his effort at demystifying it is a laudable achievement.

The writer is co-founder at FoundingFuel





OPINION

The
Hindustan Times
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{ OUR TAKE }

Market rally and poll expectations

Bull run reinforces the fact that the growth story of Indian economy is because of the bipartisan consensus on reforms, policy prudence

The BSE Sensex, India's benchmark equity market index, crossed yet another new benchmark of 76,000 during intra-day trades on May 27. With election results just about a week away, is there a relation between the ongoing stock market bull run and some sort of perception about which way the results might go? Three points can be made vis-à-vis this question.

It is a given that equity markets will react positively to Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) victory in the elections. Policy certainty, fiscal conservatism and the business-friendly credentials of the Narendra Modi regime are some of the factors behind this affinity between the markets and government. This means that there is at least a cohort of investors who see the BJP doing well in the elections. However, most experts also believe that markets have already factored in most of the premium which would accrue on account of a BJP victory. In that case, the recent rally in the markets could just be bulls exploiting the moment to drive up markets even more. The fact that the Prime Minister and other senior BJP leaders have been talking about a big rally in the markets after the results may have generated tailwinds for such an endeavour. To be sure, equity markets are always driven by some amount of speculation and short-term movements around elections are not uncommon. So, there is nothing untoward about such a rally.

The more important question, however, is to ask whether such movements in equity markets are of long-term significance. An HT analysis of stock market movements during every election cycle — date of announcement of polls to election results — shows that markets have not seen abnormal movements during most elections and even when they have, they have reverted to the normal trend within a short span of time. This, once again, should not be a surprise.

Long-term movements in markets, unlike short-term volatilities, are driven more by economic fundamentals and tangible growth in incomes of companies listed on the bourses. On this front, the India story has only been of long-term growth. The overwhelming opinion is that it will continue to be like this going forward as well. It is important to acknowledge that the long-term growth story of the Indian economy is the result of a bipartisan consensus on reforms and policy prudence. Unless these two factors change (for the worse) after the results, the story will remain intact.

IPL 2024 has skewed game towards batters

The Kolkata Knight Riders won their third Indian Premier League title in some style on Sunday night. Their bowlers ripped through the Sunrisers Hyderabad batting line-up and then their batters finished off the chase in quick time to seize a well-deserved trophy.

When the dust settles, most will remember the 2024 season for how it redefined batting in the shortest format. A casual look at the records broken this season — highest aggregate innings in T20 cricket, most runs scored in a chase, the highest ever team total, most sixes (1,260) in a season, most centuries scored in an IPL season — suggests that the league will never be the same again.

Players and teams have now seen that the game can be played differently and there might be no reason to go back. For instance, Sunrisers Hyderabad's Abhishek Sharma hit 42 sixes, the most by a batter this season, and this meant that more than half of his 484 runs came through sixes (252). A new mindset was driving this change as was the "Impact Player" rule, which allowed teams to replace a batter or bowler in the line-up. The cushion it provided teams played a huge role in the madness that played out.

It was fun for the fans but a question many, including players, seemed to be asking was whether this is good for the game. A balance between bat and ball is crucial because it keeps both the batters and bowlers interested. It also means there is more than one way to win a match. In IPL 2024, the scales became more uneven than ever before. Maybe the BCCI will give this rule a rethink in the coming season, or perhaps, given enough time, the bowlers, as they showed in the final, will find a way to fight back and restore the balance.

Political promises in an aspirational ethos

The polarised campaign in this election season suggests the immunity to issues of inequality that political debates gained in recent years has worn off

The current election cycle has seen inequality regaining a prominent place in political discourse. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has been talking about the overwhelming influence of a few business houses in a style reminiscent of his grandmother. After ignoring his arguments for a while, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has responded by presenting the Congress as a party of the extreme Left. The immunity to issues of inequality that political debates had gained since liberalisation appears to have worn off.

The return of inequality to the political stage is not entirely surprising, once we distinguish between the perception of differences in the mathematical and social domains. In a mathematical sense, any difference is an inequality. In the social domain, there are differences that are celebrated and those that are treated as inequalities. While we celebrate those who distinguish themselves from others academically, we tend to be morally less comfortable with extreme social inequalities.

Liberalisation shifted the focus

from the disapproval of inequality in the *garibi hatao* years to celebrating individual economic successes as examples of what can be achieved. Manmohan Singh, as finance minister, ended his epoch-making 1991 budget speech with the statement that India as a major economic power was an idea whose time had come. Later governments may have made this claim more muscular than Singh's style, but the goal had already shifted from leading the developing world in its fight against global inequalities to becoming one of the beneficiaries of that inequality.

The shift from inequality to aspirations had a greater effect on domestic politics. Political rhetoric was transformed from helping the vulnerable to asserting the dominance of specific identity groups. Even as Hindutva asserted the dominance of the national majority, regional groups asserted their dominance through disdain for local minorities. The political terrain was redefined in terms of a battle between Hindutva and regional identities.

The celebration of dominance in the economic domain led to the view that poverty could only be removed through unequal economic growth. A part of the higher revenue generated through this growth was to be used for politically rewarding welfare schemes. This worldview meant not just ignoring income differences but using inequality as a tool to step up savings and hence growth. The goal of

raising the rate of savings could have been realised either by increasing the savings of all sections of the population or simply by transferring income to those who save more. Since the rich are able to save more, increasing inequality would generate a higher overall rate of savings. Studies have shown that India used increased inequality to generate savings for its growth.

There are, of course, limits to increasing inequality, especially in a democracy. Growing inequality reduces the share of large sections of the population in income and hence consumption. This steps up the demand for welfare that the State and/or the political class is expected to provide. It does not help that the celebration of the rich raises these expectations even further. Thus, even as economists use a minimalist poverty line to point to a reduction in poverty, politicians don't have that luxury.

At a time when the government has been claiming a massive reduction in poverty, it has been careful enough to ensure it provides free food to 800 million Indians, which is around 60% of the population.

Having created an aspirational ethos, merely providing free foodgrain is not enough. Politicians have been forced to change their attitudes to the generation of jobs. Nowhere is this clearer than in Bihar. At a time when inequality was ignored, Bihar's workers coped with regional inequality by seeking short-term assignments in distant metropolitan centres. Its



Growing inequality reduces the share of large sections of the population in income and hence, consumption

politicians encouraged this process. Ram Vilas Paswan, Nitish Kumar, and Lalu Prasad used their stints as railway ministers to extend the railway network to more remote parts of the state, thus enabling workers to travel relatively quickly to distant worksites. This paid political dividends when caste-based worker networks used the wages and skills generated in the metropolitan centres to alter dominance patterns in their villages. But exposure to urban centres also raised aspirations that low-wage assignments in urban centres could not meet. The political value of encouraging short-term migration has begun to taper off. Tejashwi Yadav is leading the next political generation's move away from short-term migration by promising better-paying jobs in Bihar. Rahul Gandhi may be leading the campaign on inequality and jobs on the national stage, but Yadav is arguably doing the most intense groundwork for the cause.

The BJP's response to inequality getting a prominent place on the national stage after more than three decades has been to double down on what it does best. It has put all its resources behind the politics of majoritarian dominance. The Prime

Minister (PM) himself is leading the targeting of Muslims. And, the PM's economic advisory council has used old population data, including some convenient calculation errors, to raise fears of a Muslim population explosion. It states the share of the Sikh population has grown by 6.58% though the figures in the same sentence point to a growth of 49.19%, well above the growth rate of the share of the Muslim population.

Beyond the personalities, the political choice of 2024 has emerged as one between the politics of asserting dominance and that of easing the effects of inequality. In a political milieu where it is generally believed that direct ideological confrontations are a thing of the past, this is the sharpest difference that has been presented to the Indian electorate in a while. Whoever is first past the post on June 4 will take the result as an endorsement of their politics, thereby determining whether the next five years will see more of the politics of dominance or an effort to ease the extremes of inequality.

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Narendar Pani

Trump trial will change US politics, presidency

The first-ever trial of an American president in a civil or criminal court might conclude this week, following Memorial Day, a national holiday observed on the last Monday in May to honour fallen American military personnel. The prosecution is set to make its closing argument in "People v. Trump" on Tuesday, May 28, with jury deliberations likely to begin on Thursday.

Whether Donald J Trump, the 45th president, will be convicted for falsifying business records related to hush money payments made to a porn star is a subject of considerable discussion around the country, which is in the middle of another close presidential race between former president Donald Trump as the Republican candidate and current president Joe Biden as the Democratic candidate.

During the six-week trial in New York, the prosecution presented several key witnesses. They included Michael Cohen, Trump's former lawyer and "fixer" as the star witness; Stormy Daniels, who allegedly had a sexual encounter with Trump in 2006; and David Pecker, a former tabloid publisher who paid to "catch and kill" negative stories about Trump to prevent them from damaging his electoral prospects during the 2016 election.

Trump did not testify at his trial, despite his earlier statements that he would. This was not surprising, as many knowledgeable individuals believed the former president's penchant for talking too much and too long would have aided the prosecution more than advancing his own defence.

After the prosecution and defence have made their final arguments in the trial, it will be up to the 12 New Yorkers serving as jurors to either convict or acquit Trump. A third possibility of a hung jury is also very much on the table. Some legal analysts believe that a hung jury seems more likely, at this point, than a conviction or an acquittal.

For a guilty verdict on the felony charges, all the jurors must be convinced "beyond a reasonable doubt" that Trump falsified records with the intent to conceal another crime. In this case, that crime is violating election laws. If even one juror concludes that the charges against the former president have not been proven beyond a reasonable doubt, the

result will be a hung jury. Although this does not equate to an acquittal, Trump and the legion of his supporters would undoubtedly consider it a victory. And, it is unlikely that the prosecution would attempt to retry the case.

If Trump is convicted, it will be up to the presiding judge, Judge Juan Merchan, to determine his sentence. Sentencing is likely to occur one to two months after the verdict. That means, the timing of the sentence could coincide with the Republican National Convention scheduled for July 15 to 18 in Milwaukee/Wisconsin, where Trump is expected to be nominated as the party's candidate.

If convicted, Trump could be sentenced to jail. Some experts believe that even if Trump is convicted, he might not serve any jail time since he would be a first-time offender. Regardless of whether he is sentenced to jail or not, Trump can still run for president and serve as president if elected.

The consequences of this trial extend far beyond what happens to Donald J Trump. Its more consequential and enduring aspect will be its impact on American politics and the presidency. In fact, the trial may have already changed America, especially in terms of how prosecutors at the federal and state levels view future presidents.

With the Trump trial, the Rubicon of trying a president has been crossed. Now that the precedent of a president in a courtroom has been established, future prosecutors will probably be more willing to bring charges against a former president.

The Trump trial signals a new era where the legal accountability of presidents becomes an ongoing reality. This could reshape the expectations and behaviours of future presidents, knowing that their actions could lead to legal scrutiny and potential trials long after their term in office has ended.

Even if Trump avoids conviction in New York, his legal troubles will not be over. He currently faces charges in three other criminal cases with potential trials in each. That's the bad news for the former president.

At this time, however, it does not appear likely that any of these trials can be convened and concluded before the presidential election date of November 5. That is the good news for Trump.

If he is re-elected President on November 5, there is substantial conjecture among legal experts as to whether Trump could legally use the Office of President and the federal department of justice to evade the criminal charges against him. Trump has already claimed that there should be presidential immunity and the United States (US) Supreme Court held a hearing on that claim on April 25 and will hand down its decision on this before it adjourns in late June or early July.

In conclusion, according to the most recent political polls, Trump is running ahead of Biden and has a good chance of being re-elected president. Polls do not vote but people do. If the people decide that Trump should be the next president, it will not only be Trump who has been put on trial, it will be the country's political system and the US democracy.

Frank F Islam is an entrepreneur, civic leader, and thought leader based in Washington DC. The views expressed here are personal



Frank F Islam



The Trump trial signals a new era where the legal accountability of presidents becomes an ongoing reality

REUTERS

{ DROUPADI MURMU } PRESIDENT OF INDIA

When the followers of any religion deviate from spirituality, they become victims of fanaticism... World history is witness to the fact that adopting only the path of material progress has proved disastrous



Blinken in Beijing and the mirage of US-China detente

When the United States (US) secretary of state, Antony Blinken, travelled to China last month, his purpose was threefold: First, to assess the concrete steps taken in the bilateral relationship since Presidents Joe Biden and Xi Jinping met in San Francisco in November 2023; second, to reposition the focal point of US-China relations within a rapidly shifting international landscape; and finally, to "de-risk" the bilateral relationship by ensuring that China maintains a favourable disposition towards Washington. To achieve that, Washington's approach has been a combination of incentives and deterrents.

During the visit, lines were once again drawn between the two sides, highlighting simmering disputes on issues such as trade, technology, and security. There is a keenness in Washington to prevent these cracks from widening further, particularly in light of the repercussions of ongoing conflicts in Europe and West Asia. Of particular concern is the burgeoning China-Russia relationship, with the US expressing worry that China may be providing vital technologies to the Russian defence industry, thereby bolstering the latter's capability to maintain battlefield advantages and undoing western support.

The Biden administration has consistently signalled a stance of cooperation alongside measures that have fuelled competition. On May 14, the US increased tariffs across strategic sectors such as steel and aluminium, semiconductors, electric vehicles, batteries, critical minerals, solar cells, ship-to-shore cranes, and medical products to curb China's unfair trade practices in key sectors like tech transfer, innovation and intellectual property. Since the Anchorage summit in March 2021, when the bilateral relationship seemed to veer off course, the focus has been on "responsibly managing competition" from the US. Incidents such as former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan in August 2022 and the spy balloon incident in January 2023 have redrawn the boundaries of the US's competitive approach towards China. Meanwhile, the Biden administration has initiated a tech competition with China since the passage of the 2022 CHIPS and Sciences Act, prompting retaliatory measures from China.

The impact of these disruptions has been further compounded by instability in the world order. The past couple of years have been immensely destabilising for the international

system, marked by the wars in Europe and West Asia and the systemic shocks arising from them. The US-China relationship has not been immune to these impacts.

Blame it on the age of globalisation and interconnectedness, but the US-China relationship is, in many ways, a uniquely significant great power dynamic. It stands out, particularly in how it has evolved distinctively from the competitive relationship between the US and the Soviet Union during the last century. Today, between its relations with China and Russia, it is primarily with China that the US can attempt moderation. Simultaneously, China remains deeply integrated with western economies.

These mutual dependencies have prevented a complete rupture in bilateral relations. Two successive high-profile visits within a month — Janet Yellen and Antony Blinken — suggest that Washington is intent on maintaining engagement with Beijing amidst the shifting sands in Ukraine and the blitz in Gaza.

Several cooperative steps between the two countries, such as joint efforts to combat synthetic drugs like fentanyl through the establishment of a joint Counternarcotics Working Group, collaboration on policymaking and law enforcement in this regard, and the resumption of military-to-military talks at various levels, along with the agreement to hold US-PRC talks on Artificial Intelligence in the coming weeks, underscore the shared concerns to avert any regional or global crisis that might escalate into military conflict between the two powers. However, China perceives an opportune moment to assert itself distinctly against the US as the sole alternative power centre with comparable capacities, global heft, and influence to engage wayward countries beyond Washington's control, such as Russia, Iran, North Korea, and Syria. Recent US intelligence suggesting potential collusion between Russia and China on the issue of Taiwan has prompted preparations for a new form of joint military readiness from the US and its regional allies.

Blinken's visit may be another way of signalling to China that it shouldn't exploit any crisis to escalate new ones, at least until the US elections are over in November of this year.



Harsh V Pant



Vivek Mishra

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OUR VIEW



Israel is losing badly in the perceptions battle

Tel Aviv risks global isolation if it persists with its Gaza offensive. A ceasefire and captive exchange could end this war and prepare the ground for peace based on a durable solution

More than seven months after Israel began its counter-offensive against Hamas, the war in Gaza seems no closer to an end. On Sunday, Israel launched a fresh strike based on "precise intelligence" against what it called "legitimate targets" after Hamas fired a barrage of missiles at Tel Aviv. Two senior Hamas officials are said to have been killed in the Israeli strike, which Hamas claims hit a refugee facility near Rafah in south Gaza and killed at least 35 people. The painful loss of civilian lives will only weaken Israel's stature. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, however, seems bent on prolonging this war, as favoured by his far-right allies and perhaps calculations to keep himself in power. For the region, however, such an endless cycle of violence is catastrophic. Nearly 36,000 Palestinians are reported to have been killed in Israel's war since the 7 October attacks by Hamas in which about 1,200 Israelis lost their lives and 250 others were taken hostage. Various peace proposals have gone abegging even as discontent grows in Israel. Netanyahu's government has been unable to secure the release of hostages; about half of them are still in Hamas captivity. It is also clear that victory would be an endless wait if wiping out this anti-Israel militia is the war's principal aim. Meanwhile, the clock has run down on the leeway Tel Aviv got from world opinion for its response after last October's horrors. Israel's attack on Gaza has also been brutal; Gazans have suffered grievously and the still-rising death toll of women and children with no place to flee has marked Israel's record with allegations of 'genocide' in a tragic irony for this Jewish state. As the weight of international views and jurispru-

dence has moved against Tel Aviv, it is lucky to have US backing. If Israel could openly ignore the International Court of Justice's order to stop its Rafah offensive, it's because of US support. Yet, this backing could run thin if America re-invests in the wisdom of a "decent respect for the opinions of mankind" in the context of how its overseas image is shaped by its Israel policy. It makes sense for all sides to grab an olive branch that puts an end to hostilities. If local Israeli politics is an obstacle, then it is even more important for America to push for a truce and play peacemaker. Netanyahu's newly restive cabinet colleagues are right that Tel Aviv must declare a clear post-war plan for Gaza. Full re-occupation would mean a return to a scenario given up in 2005 and will be taken as a move backwards in the peace process, while allowing a Palestinian administration to work under Israel's military oversight might prove a non-starter, especially if other countries are asked to help rebuild a Gaza that lacks sovereign control over itself. The options may be few, but any real settlement of the dispute will have to respect the right of Palestinians to self-determination. As Israel would be reluctant to give up its Jewish identity to fully embrace religious diversity, a two-state solution suggests itself, with the sovereign states of Israel and Palestine sharing Jerusalem. This has long been considered the most feasible lasting solution, with Palestinian refugees allowed to return to their state—in Gaza and the West Bank—but not Israel. Down the years, sadly, Israeli hardliners have rejected through actions what was agreed upon in principle as a peace formula. What we need right now is an urgent prisoner-exchange pact, one that lays the ground for fire-arms to fall silent and final-status talks to re-begin.

GUEST VIEW

Climate imperative: G7 leaders can unlock financing for Africa

Africa is keen to help make the world more habitable but requires funding for its green transition



WILLIAM RUTO
is President of Kenya.

Climate change continues to ravage Africa, which is enduring extreme weather and natural disasters on an unprecedented scale. My own country, Kenya, has just emerged from its longest drought on record, only to suffer devastating floods, which have killed 289 people and affected more than 800,000. Meanwhile, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe recently experienced a severe drought that exposed millions of people to hunger, and the Sahel region was hit by a debilitating heatwave, resulting in more than 100 deaths in Mali.

Climate change increasingly drives droughts in Africa, jeopardizing water supplies. It ruins lives and livelihoods, cripples food production and destroys homes and infrastructure. It affects migration patterns and exacerbates conflicts, forcing entire populations to flee in search of alternative livelihoods for survival.

Making matters worse, African countries pay interest rates up to eight times higher than those attached to the typical World Bank loan, leaving them even less equipped to deal with climate-related challenges. This disparity reflects an international financial system that was established in 1945, when most African countries did not yet exist, and which remains tilted in favour of wealthy countries. Many African nations are trapped in a perpetual cycle

of debt, with little or no fiscal space for development and investments in climate-change mitigation or adaptation.

In fact, developing countries are now net contributors of financial flows to the global economy. Net financial transfers to developing countries plummeted from a peak of \$225 billion in 2014 to \$51 billion in 2022; and in 2023, \$74 billion in interest payments left International Development Association (IDA) countries (comprising low-income and some lower-middle-income economies) for wealthier donor countries.

These financial strains are hampering African countries' efforts not only to adapt to the impact of climate change but also to make the transition to a low-carbon economy, not to mention allocating adequate resources for education, health care and social protections. That is why Africa—and the rest of the developing world—has been calling for urgent reforms to the global financial architecture.

But it falls to the G7 and G20 to take the necessary steps in this direction. As a major shareholder in the multilateral development banks, the United States can help lead the way.

When the G7 meets in Apulia, Italy, for its 50th summit next month, the leaders of major donor countries can demonstrate solidarity with Africa by committing to support debt restructuring and cancellation, as well as make provisions for greater concessional and longer-term development financing.

At the Italy-Africa Summit in January, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni pledged to be Africa's friend and envoy at the G7, and we remain confident that she and other well-meaning G7 leaders will deliver the keys to unlock the financing that Africa needs.

A fair financial system would grant all countries equal access to equity. One readily available way to do this would be to reallocate Special Drawing Rights—SDRs, the International Monetary Fund's international reserve asset—to the African Development Bank.

While the G20 launched the Common Framework for Debt Treatments four years ago, the pace of restructuring remains woefully misaligned with countries' needs. Wealthy countries must show leadership and release the financing that African countries need to unlock their growth potential. Continuing merely to talk about it will achieve nothing.

I recently hosted the IDA's replenishment summit in Nairobi, where 19 heads of state or government from across the continent discussed Africa's debt crisis, and how it has been compounded by climate-driven costs and the economic scars of the covid pandemic. All agreed that we need wealthy countries to rise to the occasion and scale up financing to bridge Africa's climate and development needs. We are calling on our friends—the US, the EU, the UK and Japan—to provide a steady stream of long-term concessional financing, including at least \$120 billion for the IDA21 replenishment, on the way toward tripling the fund by 2030.

Rather than playing victims, we are keen to do our part to make the world more habitable. We are taking the lead and showing that it is possible to achieve prosperity without destroying the planet—through green industrialization. As I conduct my state visit to the US, I will make clear that Kenya—and Africa more broadly—is open for business.

We invite investments that will tap our immense renewable energy resources, our young and skilled workforce, and our conducive business environment. We offer major opportunities in apparel manufacturing, agriculture, information-communication technology, and much else. The US is already Kenya's largest export market, and as we mark the 60th anniversary of US-Kenyan diplomatic relations, we will look to build on this relationship, and to enhance trade and sustainable development gains for both countries.

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MY VIEW | TRUTH, LIES AND STATISTICS

Economists should reskill themselves for the age of AI

PRAMIT BHATTACHARYA



is a Chennai-based journalist.

The poor placement record of India's top engineering schools this year has received much attention. What went unnoticed are dismal placements at top economics schools. One reason is the growing caution among employers that face multiple global uncertainties. The other is a reassessment of the need for economic analysts in the age of artificial intelligence (AI). While there is a cyclical element to this downturn, it is worth asking if the training that economists receive needs an upgrade. Over the past four decades, they have gained more from computerization and digitization than other social scientists. Rising computing power made it increasingly easy to run econometric models on large data-sets. It helped academic researchers produce more research, and enabled graduate students to master sophisticated modelling techniques. Over time, economists began taking the data-generating process for granted. What ever appeared on their computer screens was viewed as an accurate description of

reality. In search of quick results, data scrutiny and primary research took a backseat. Now, a faster breed of analysts has appeared. AI models today can produce as good or as bad a forecast as an average graduate, and in a much shorter span of time. To be sure, AI models suffer from the garbage-in-garbage-out syndrome. But economists who aren't trained well in scrutinizing data-sets also suffer from the same syndrome. Unless they re-examine their relationship with economic statistics, economists are likely to lose jobs to AI-driven bots. Writing more than half a century ago, Nobel-winning economist Oskar Morgenstern pointed out that most economic statistics are built on a number of simplifying assumptions and judgement calls. But economists often use these statistics as if they were error-free measures of socioeconomic realities. In *The Accuracy of Economic Observations*, Morgenstern criticized economic statisticians for failing to alert data users about the error margins in economic estimates. But he was equally critical of his own tribe of economic researchers for failing to "distinguish between what we think we know and what we really can and do know". To improve the accuracy of economic observations, Morgenstern advocated

deeper engagement between data producers and users, openness in acknowledging errors of economic measurement, and careful reviews to bring down errors over time. Most importantly, he wanted economics students to be trained to question the 'facts' put up before them, so that they learn "how terribly hard it is... to find out what truly is a 'fact'." Morgenstern's observations hold true for all geographies, but more so for data-deficient poor countries such as India. In post-independent India, the first generation of economic statisticians (such as K.N. Raj, Jagdish Bhagwati and Uma Dutta Roy Choudhury) and economic practitioners (such as K.N. Raj, Jagdish Bhagwati and T.N. Srinivasan) were deeply conscious of this problem. In most of their writings, you will find careful descriptions of the data-sets they used and their limitations. In his foreword to Mukherjee's 1969 book on national accounting in India, Nobel laureate Simon Kuznets noted that the problems in adapting international standards to

a poor and diverse economy ran like a "red thread through the volume" and reflected "a proper concern with this problem." Faced with incomplete data-sets, leading economists of the day learned to complement quantitative techniques with other methods, including case studies and historical analysis. The limited access to high-speed computers meant that they couldn't run endless regression models even if they wanted to. Some of the most prominent economic studies of that era, including Bhagwati's 1971 critique of India's 'licence raj' regime and Raj's 1975 report of Kerala's human development model were essentially case studies. They relied on both quantitative and qualitative evidence to build their arguments. Sensing the inadequacy of the state-level National Sample Survey consumption data, Raj had to collect primary data on food consumption patterns to construct alternate estimates of household consumption expenditure in Kerala. Bhagwati and his

co-author, the late Padma Desai, had to reconstruct industry-wise input-output ratios to make them comparable over time. If they had just run regression models on official data-sets, they wouldn't have unearthed the insights that they did. Today's generation of young economists need to relearn the skills that the old masters possessed. They need to acquire the lost art of scrutinizing economic statistics while avoiding the temptation of high-speed and low-insight econometrics. This will secure a better future for them and the country. One complaint of official statisticians is the limited understanding of economic statistics among economic practitioners. This leads them to make uninformed comments and create statistical controversies, statisticians say. This is of course self-serving, since it absolves statisticians of any role in such controversies. Nonetheless, it isn't bereft of truth. Economic practitioners today have a poor understanding of economic statistics compared to the economic pioneers of the post-independence era. If tomorrow's practitioners understand economic statistics better, it will enable us to have saner debates on the economy. It will also lead to more nuanced debates on statistical issues.



JUST A THOUGHT

Climate change isn't something people get to choose to believe or not: it's happening.

MATT GAETZ



THEIR VIEW

MINT CURATOR

Savings flowing into equity: Not a pandemic blip but a basic shift

More and more people will invest in stock markets as India's middle class expands, incomes rise and youth bulge adopts MFs



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Over the past four years, we have been amazed by the notable increase in the number of demat accounts, SIP investment flows, mutual fund (MF) investor count and similar data. The number of unique investors in Indian equity markets has nearly tripled since 2020 to 90 million. Equally impressive, the number of investors in mutual funds (unique PAN holders) has more than doubled from 21 million as of December 2020 to 45 million as of April 2024.

We are witnessing an extension of the financialization of savings—what I call as the 'equitization of investments.' This trend, which refers to the increasing preference for equity investments over traditional savings, is poised to reshape the financial landscape of the country.

This shift is being fuelled by three interconnected mega trends: An expansion of the middle class, rising incomes within this demographic and the youthful profile of India's population. Trust and financial literacy are reinforcing this trend, although the inherent volatility of equity markets will lead to fluctuations in this equitization trend.

Growth of the middle class: As per a report by People's Research on India's Consumer Economy (PRICE), India's middle class is set to nearly double its share of total population by 2047 from an estimated 31% of our headcount in 2020-21 to a projected 61%. In absolute terms, the class is expected to grow from 432 million individuals in 2020-21 to about 715 million by 2031 and over a billion by 2047. Our fast-rising middle class is a critical driver of equitization, given its high capacity for investing assured by relative financial stability.

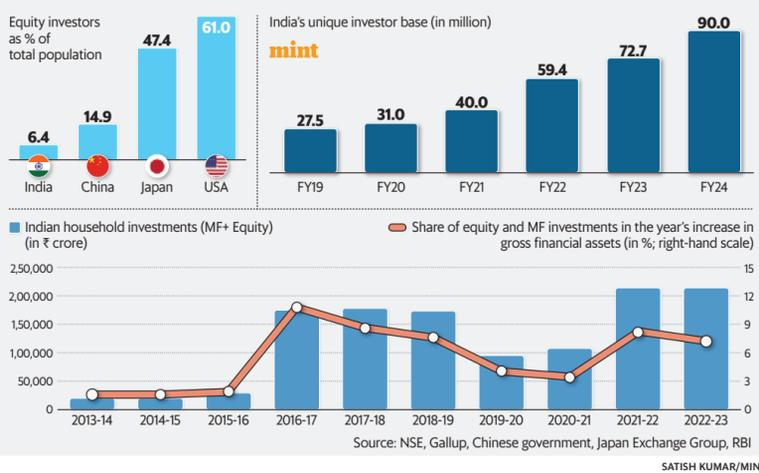
Rising income levels: As per a report by HR consulting firm AON, annual salary increases in India have ranged between 9.3% and 10.5% during 2013-2023, except in covid-impacted 2021. It is fair to assume that we would see robust wage increases over the next decade lifting the disposable incomes of the middle class. This money is often channelled into investments. Given the relatively low returns on traditional savings avenues like fixed deposits, equities present an attractive alternative with the promise of higher returns, albeit at higher risks.

Young demographics: As per a CAMS report in 2023, India added 15.7 million new mutual fund investors between 2019 and 2023. A whopping 54% of these investors were millennials (born between 1981 and 1996). In 2023, almost 90% of their investments were in equity MFs. Almost 66% of these millennials (5.1 million in total) opted for the SIP route to make their first investment, indicating an intent to keep equity as an important asset class in their portfolio. They have a good 20-30 years of earning and saving ahead of them. We expect this group to have only started investing



Equitization of Indian savings

India's equity market can look forward to a fast swelling base of domestic investors as most Indians are still to sign up while incomes rise along with flows into shares either directly or via mutual funds.



Source: NSE, Gallup, Chinese government, Japan Exchange Group, RBI

with small amounts and significantly increase equity allocation as their familiarity with this asset class and confidence in it grows.

Trust and financial literacy are factors that could lend the trend support.

Trust: Trust is fundamental to stock market participation, with several studies highlighting how the confidence of investors in market fairness, regulatory effectiveness and the reliability of financial information influences their risk perceptions and willingness to invest. Trust has been gradually built through improved regulations and better governance, apart from the success of our financial markets. Corporates, regulators and intermediaries such as accountants, brokers, advisors and institutional fund managers play crucial roles in fostering investor trust and ensuring market integrity. As per the CFA Institute's Trust Survey conducted in 2022, India has the highest trust level among 15 markets globally. About 83% of retail participants from India said they trusted financial services, compared to 64% in the US, 45% in Australia and 37% in Germany (the lowest ranked).

Financial literacy: This is a pivotal factor. Brokers, advisors and other professionals need to guide investors, particularly novices, on how to mitigate risks associated with market fluctuations.

They must recommend effective strategies, such as asset diversification, selecting stocks from high-quality companies, entrusting money to professional fund managers and maintaining a long-term perspective to withstand volatility and achieve potential growth. By educating investors on these approaches, intermediaries not only enhance individual investor portfolios but also foster greater confidence and participation in financial markets.

There's a long way to go: Despite the strides made in the past four years, only about 6.5% of Indians invest in equity markets. The corresponding count is significantly higher in other developing and developed economies. Overall investments in MFs and equity still remain low as a proportion of overall financial assets held.

Befriend the trend: I am not suggesting that this mega trend will be smooth. Indeed, it will experience fluctuations influenced by historical and projected returns from various asset classes like equity, real estate and debt. Changes in taxation could also impact it. However, the broader growth in equity participation by Indian investors is likely to sustain over the next decade, if not longer. As India continues to evolve, the move towards equity is not just a pandemic blip but a fundamental shift that is likely to endure.

Musk's use of crowd-sourced fact checking for X is working

The wisdom of crowds is found to fight misinformation quite well



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X's Community Notes feature introduced by Elon Musk has been a success

After Elon Musk bought Twitter (now X) in 2022, the social media company got rid of many of its moderators, slashed the system whereby users could flag tweets for review, and ramped up a different system to fight misinformation—a form of crowdsourcing called Community Notes. A wave of outrage followed these changes. But the Community Notes feature has the benefit of transparency and shows scientific and medical merit. And a new academic review suggests it's working—at least for scientific issues.

Researchers who study social media worry about rampant hate speech and incitements to violence; in 2023 it became prohibitively expensive for researchers to get data to study these problems. But the lead author of this new study, behavioural scientist John Ayers of University of California, San Diego, said Community Notes data was easy to obtain. And for hashing out factual issues in fields like science and health, social scientists recommend a crowdsourcing approach, citing studies that show the power of collective intelligence. Several studies have pitted crowdsourcing against professional fact checkers and found the former work just as well for checking the accuracy of news stories.

Ayers and other researchers looked at the accuracy of X's Community Notes, using the contentious issue of covid vaccines as a test case. The results, published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, showed these X notes were almost always accurate and usually cited high-quality sources. The X feature relies on volunteers to flag misleading posts and add corrective commentary with links to scientific papers or media sources. Other users can vote on the notes' value.

The old system relied on fact-checkers whose identity and scientific credentials were unknown. They could take down posts they deemed to be misinformation, ban users or use 'shadow bans,' by which posts are hidden without user knowledge.

Content moderators employed by social media companies have also been attacked for moving too slowly and failing to take down hateful or violent content. It may be impossible for any social media company to keep up, which is why it's important to explore other approaches.

The new system isn't perfect, but it does appear pretty accurate. In the JAMA study, researchers looked at a sample of 205 Community Notes on covid vaccines. They agreed the user-generated information was accurate 96% of the time, and that the sources cited were of high quality 87% of

the time. While only a small fraction of misleading posts were flagged, those that did get notes attached were among the most viral, said lead author Ayers.

Psychologist Sacha Altay says people tend to underestimate the power of collective intelligence, which has proven surprisingly good for forecasting and assessing information, as long as enough people participate. The public perception of misinformation is often distorted by political biases, outrage and self-delusion. Last year, Oxford researchers prompted some reflection with a study titled 'People Believe Misinformation Is a Threat Because They Assume Others Are Gullible.' In other words, the people most outraged about fake news aren't worried they'll be fooled; they're worried others will be. But we tend to overestimate our own discernment.

During the pandemic, post moderators labelled lots of subjective statements as misinformation, especially those judging various activities to be 'safe.' But there's no scientific definition of safe, which is why people could talk past each other for months about whether it was safe to let kids back into school or gather without masks. Much of all this 'misinformation' was just minority opinion.

Twitter's old post-censorship system assumed that people skip vaccines or otherwise make bad choices because they are exposed to misinformation. But another possibility is that lack of trust is the real problem—people lose trust in health authorities or can't find the information they want, and that causes them to seek out fringe sources. If that's the case, censorship could create more distrust by stifling open discussion about important topics.

Of course, people don't usually portray themselves as pro-censorship, even if that's what's happening. Conservatives are more likely to accept censorship of material they deem indecent, while liberals are more likely to tolerate censorship of information they deem harmful.

But both sides should approve of any system that discourages blind assumptions and snap judgements and encourages open discussion, reflection and the deployment of collective minds. Musk is a divisive figure and there's plenty to dislike about recent changes in X, but Community Notes is an upgrade.

MY VIEW | IT MATTERS

Apple will likely recover from its slump in iPhone sales

SIDDHARTH PAI



is co-founder of Siana Capital, a venture fund manager.

Apple Inc faced a significant challenge recently: declining iPhone sales. This trend, a stark contrast to the company's record of rapid growth and dominance in the global smartphone market, raises critical questions about the future of one of the most iconic products in consumer electronics. A recent *Bloomberg* article highlights Apple's woes, listing 10 reasons why it is in trouble ([bloom.bg/3uKhj1z](https://www.bloom.bg/3uKhj1z)). I will touch on some of these, but also address some critical strengths Apple has that seem apparent but need analysis through an alternate lens.

First, the article. It states that demand for the iPhone has declined globally, primarily due to Chinese competition and a ban by the Chinese government on iPhones being used in any government department. Meanwhile, Xiaomi's IQ handset shipments grew by almost 34% year-on-year. Huawei's re-entry into the market with its own chip and the Harmony operating system has also dented iPhone sales in China, its largest overseas market. *Bloomberg* calculates that iPhone

sales in China fell from 12.6 million units in January and February 2023 to 7.9 million in the same period of 2024. From a global standpoint, in the first calendar-quarter of this year, iPhone sales slumped by 10%. Its first-quarter shipments were a shade over 50 million units, 10 million units behind its chief rival, Samsung, which shipped a little over 60 million units in the same time frame.

However, it is not all gloom and doom for Apple. It still has a large installed base. It had over 1.8 billion active devices in 2022, the last time CEO Tim Cook shared these numbers. Even conservative estimates would put today's figure at well over a billion iPhones. While it has been a financial juggernaut for Apple, the iPhone is also the primary hardware platform through which over a billion people access the internet. To grasp the implications of this, we need to explore the factors behind it and reflect on the broader significance of this device in our digital lives.

I will draw on some insights from technology author Adrian Daub's analysis in his book *What Tech Calls Thinking*. Daub argues that smartphones, particularly the iPhone, have become the primary medium through which we engage with content. He says: "To create content is to be distracted. To create the 'platform' is to focus on the true struc-

ture of reality.... It is the person who makes the 'platform' who becomes a billionaire." The content on Apple's hardware platforms is not limited to entertainment or social media, but encompasses a wide range of digital interactions, from work and education to healthcare and personal communication. In this sense, the iPhone is not just a phone but a gateway to the digital world.

The iPhone's role as a gateway is intricately linked to Apple's broader ecosystem. This ecosystem includes the App Store, iCloud, Apple Music, Apple Pay and many other services in what is sometimes called a 'walled garden.' These services tie users deeper into the Apple experience, making it hard to switch hardware platforms. This ecosystem drives hardware sales and generates substantial revenue from services, which become increasingly crucial as hardware sales slow. Almost 20% of Apple's revenues come from services.

Meanwhile, Apple's seamless hardware and software integration ensures a smooth

and intuitive user experience. This is crucial for content consumption, as users expect quick and reliable access to information and services. Daub highlights how this seamless experience encourages continuous engagement with digital content. The ease of accessing various types of content keeps users glued to their devices.

Its stock was hit and it's seen behind the AI curve, but it retains its sway over a billion plus digital lives

The iPhone's role in this ecosystem is not passive; it actively shapes how we consume and interact with content.

In addition, as concerns about data privacy and security have grown, Apple has positioned itself as a champion of user privacy. Features like App Tracking Transparency and robust encryption appeal to users who are increasingly wary of how their data is used. This emphasis on privacy still differentiates Apple from its competitors and reinforces the iPhone's role as a trusted device for internet access.

While the decline in iPhone sales presents a challenge for Apple, it also opens new opportunities for change. The company will

likely focus on a few strategies, the first of which will be to deliver meaningful artificial intelligence (AI) chatbot assistance, where Apple is badly lagging market leaders Google and OpenAI. According to *Bloomberg*, Apple is in talks with Google to have its Gemini AI. ChatGPT's primary competitor, power iPhone features ([bloom.bg/3yHNijf](https://www.bloom.bg/3yHNijf)). This won't be the first time Apple has worked with Google, though the power dynamics have shifted this time. As I have written in this space before, in the internet's simple 'search' world, Google used to pay Apple billions of dollars to be the default search engine on Apple's Safari browser on the iPhone. Now with AI, Apple will be at the buying end, but this is a symbiotic relationship, as Google's Gemini will immediately get a critical edge over OpenAI's offerings by accessing Apple's billion-plus users.

The iPhone's decline in sales does mark a pivotal moment for Apple Inc. However, the device's role as a primary hardware platform for accessing the internet remains unchallenged. As Adrian Daub elucidates, the iPhone is not just a product, it is a critical conduit for digital content and interaction.

Apple's stock has been hit, with hundreds of billions of dollars of market capitalization gone. My bet is that it will recover.



The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

NOT PLAYING SAFE

India's Cannes success shows filmmakers willing to forge paths — creative, commercial, political — where there seem to be none

WHAT IS IT that makes for good art? The answer to this has been variously interpreted as originality, a grand vision, telling stories that few others would, in ways that not many would consider. Before the announcement of Payal Kapadia's Grand Prix win for her debut feature *All We Imagine As Light* at the Cannes International Film Festival, actor Viola Davis added another element to the debate — precarity: "Art doesn't come from a safe place". India's showing at Cannes this year, of which Kapadia's win is the highlight, validates this. From Anasuya Sengupta's Best Actress award for her performance in Bulgarian director Konstantin Bojanov's *The Shameless* (in the Un Certain Regard section) to director-cinematographer Santosh Sivan's Pierre Angéniéux Excellens in Cinematography honour, making him the first Asian to win it, from Chidananda S Naik winning La Cinef for *Sunflowers Were The First to Know*, to Maisam Ali debuting with *In Retreat* at the ACID Cannes sidebar, the first Indian to do so, it shows a quiet confidence in one's ability to forge a path where there seems to be none.

Kapadia would, of course, know this the best. Her win, 30 years after Shaji N Karun's *Swaham* was selected for the competition section, has been claimed by India as its own. Congratulatory messages are pouring in, including from her alma mater, the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), that had lodged a case against Kapadia and 34 of her batchmates for protesting against the selection of actor-politician Gajendra Chauhan as the institute's chairperson in 2015. Dissent is never an easy path to tread — the cases against the former students are still pending — but in choosing to stand behind stories of all that is broken, Kapadia does art a great service: She offers it hope. In 2021, her *A Night of Knowing Nothing* on student politics and the anxieties of caste in Indian campuses, won the prize for best documentary at Cannes. *All We Imagine As Light* tells the story of female friendships, but it is also about migrants and their unending search for papers to show that they belong.

There is another upside to India's Cannes triumph and it deals with what has traditionally driven a wedge between cinema that is considered "mainstream" and that which is "arthouse": Commerce. Kapadia's film was co-produced by companies from India, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Italy, freeing her up from the pressures of conformity. Ali, another FTII graduate, made *In Retreat* with his batchmates. Their global reception shows there is a market for innovative storytelling, freed from the onus of profit-making, one that India appears to have forfeited in the past few decades. The success at Cannes, therefore, is a good moment to revive an ecosystem that prioritises craft. During the shooting of his first film *Pathar Panchali (Song of the Road)* in the early 1950s, which shows how grand narratives of development elude the poor, Satyajit Ray reportedly ran into a fund crunch. When he approached the West Bengal government, money was allotted from the Public Works Department since the film's title referred to roads. It won 11 international awards, including the inaugural Best Human Document award at the 1956 Cannes. And history was made.

DELHI TO LONDON

Sunak's call for snap polls may be last card for his beleaguered party. India must build on gains with next UK government

BRITISH PRIME MINISTER Rishi Sunak's decision to go to polls on July 4, well before they were due, has been widely viewed as a gamble with little chance of success. After 14 fractious years in power, the Tories have become unpopular and the British mood may be tilting in favour of change. Sunak's efforts to salvage his party's reputation over the last year and a half have not come to much. At least 76 sitting MPs have quit what seems to be a sinking ship. Going for a surprise poll was one last card Sunak had and he has now played it.

If the Tories appear to have squandered the massive mandate they won under the leadership of Boris Johnson in 2019, Labour under Keir Starmer may be making a comeback. The widely under-estimated Starmer has gained control over the party that had drifted too far left under Jeremy Corbyn, who led it to three successive defeats. Starmer has walked away from many of the radical promises he made on the economic front when he took charge; on foreign policy too, he has little time for the anti-American and pacifist posturing on the left of the party. But India has reasons to remember this round of Tory rule as a positive phase in bilateral relations. Over the last decade and a half, the Tories made a systematic effort to transform the relationship with India that had been caught in a box defined by the British establishment's paternalism on South Asian issues and the post-colonial chip on the shoulder of the Indian elite. India's traditional preference has been in favour of Labour, but Delhi was peeved by the latter's growing hostility towards India, especially under Corbyn. A combination of the vacuous claim to pursue "foreign policy values" and a cynical pursuit of minority politics at home saw Labour take anti-India positions on a range of issues, including Kashmir. The Tories, in contrast, have resisted the temptation to meddle in India's internal politics, they set aside the compulsion to mediate on the Kashmir question, and began to dehyphenate relations with India and Pakistan.

These efforts culminated in Boris Johnson's tenure, which saw the unveiling of a roadmap for restructuring the relationship in trade, investment, technology, migration and defence. India, which has shed some traditional inhibitions over the last decade to elevate ties with the UK, will hope that the upward trajectory will continue. The next Indian government must seize the earliest opportunity for a summit-level meeting with the next UK PM.

KKR'S TRUMP CARDS

The way uncapped players came to the fore for the team is a lesson for other franchises that rely too much on big names

IT'S PERILOUS TO look for patterns in a fickle format like T20 cricket, but what Kolkata Knight Riders' Indian Premier League triumph, their first in a decade, proves is the benefit of clarity in the assignment of roles to individual players for the good of the team. The franchise didn't feature any Indian megastars. Their highest scorer, Sunil Narine, sits ninth in the overall chart, but the surprise impact he had at the top of the order was one of the major stories of the tournament. They had only one other player among the top 20, but this was more than compensated by KKR's strike rates throughout the season.

They didn't have the highest wicket-taker in their ranks but they had three of the top five wicket-takers, which went a long way in scripting their success in a tournament where batsmen took big hitting to another level. In the afterglow of KKR's title triumph, whatever they did may be put forth as the right move. But it does shed light on the benefits of continuity and having a settled core. Despite the lack of success over the last several years, they resisted the temptation of a complete overhaul. They broke the bank to get Mitchell Starc, and though the Aussie left-arm pacer was almost a liability in the first half of the tournament, the team management persisted with him and he delivered when it mattered most.

The way uncapped Indian players came to the fore for KKR is a lesson for several other franchises that rely too much on big names. Pacemen Vaibhav Arora and Harshit Rana showed what they are capable of, while Ramandeep Singh was always at hand with some big hits towards the end. Narine, Varun Chakravarthy, Venkatesh Iyer and Andre Russell have been part of the side for a long time and while many other franchises would have considered them past their best, KKR knew that with just a tweak in the game plan, they could turn out to be trump cards.



ANUJ DAGA

WHILE WE AWAIT the investigation into the recent mishaps that different cities across India have experienced in the past two weeks, the innocent lives lost ask for someone to take the blame. The falling of an oversized hoarding over a petrol pump due to a dust storm in Ghatkopar, another collapse of a billboard in Pune just three days after Mumbai, the boiler blast at a chemical factory in Dombivli, and the more recent cases of fire outbreak in Rajkot's Game Zone and the short circuit-induced blast of oxygen cylinders in a paediatric hospital in Vivek Vihar in New Delhi — each of these unfortunate events could directly or indirectly be identified as man-made disasters, for they suggest institutional failure.

Here, the institutions responsible for regulating urban development are brought into question. The municipal corporation, civic development authorities and planning control commissions that make decisions which shape our urban environment are asked for explanations. How can we delineate the complicity of planning in these mishaps and further, how could effective planning have helped in reducing the risk to the lives that have been lost in these incidents?

Urban development is controlled through the instrument of by-laws that are, in turn, framed under the National Building Code. All buildings in the city must abide by these laws that safeguard aspects of livability, safety and sustainability of its users. Further, city planning documents demarcate distinct facilities at considered proximities from or within a given neighbourhood to balance its social and economic requirements.

However, in cities like ours, these spatial relationships are inherently complex since a certain planning order gets imposed on areas that may be already semi-developed, but are growing to accommodate greater densities of life. Thus, in cities like ours, construction leads to negotiating the laws in an inherently strained manner so as to accommodate enterprise and survival. In such parsing of the law, several aspects of its interpretation may become prescrip-

Letting in light & air

Rajkot and Delhi fires underline that safe urban spaces are created through collective responsibility

tions, which are not necessarily spatially meaningful. For example, the codes specify the minimum room-to-window area ratio for sufficient light and air, but if the window is not oriented climatologically, it may fail to serve its purpose. Or, in another case, the recent laws may necessitate a fire escape staircase for older buildings that could be appended on their exterior, but they may be very difficult for residents to access from the inside. In other cases, construction economics may force the elimination of essential spaces of refuge within buildings. Balconies seen in earlier mid-rise apartments that were free of FSI (Floor Space Index) are now being eliminated; their appropriation within internal spaces by residents ultimately meant that there was no economic incentive for the developer to continue to build balconies. Similarly, terraces and open spaces too don't offer any incentive for the builders. While they are counted as part of the built-up areas, and are a common resource, their cost cannot be charged to any resident, thus leaving them out of a building scheme. Residents whose properties are now undergoing redevelopment in cities like Mumbai ask for more carpet area in their new apartments, but often fail to demand better light and fresh air. Thus, construction laws, essentially framed to ensure the well-being of users, turn against them as they become mere prescriptive checklists or numerical indicators for ensuring efficiency.

A range of spaces that once lay in the public realm are fast being privatised. Smaller pockets and parcels of intermediate lands that were available for micro public activities are now amassed into larger lands where tall buildings are constructed with clear boundaries that enclose large, green manicured spaces. On the other hand, leftover spaces around private commercial developments are put under extreme surveillance, which drives out any public activity like lingering and loitering. Such loss of open public space for the average city dweller — from both residential and commercial domains — has ne-

cessitated the invention of new forms of recreation that are often encapsulated within malls or large independent structures. While building environments become hyper interiorised, by way of extremely closed and mechanically controlled spaces insulated from the exterior, their outer skins become flatter and larger in order to bear advertisements. In the early millennium, there was a drive to eliminate large hoardings to preserve the aesthetic face of the city. Today, we demand their removal for our safety. Yet, hoardings continue to dominate several residential or commercial premises, neglecting people's need for access to natural light and ventilation.

The distressing incidents we have been witnessing in our cities indicate India's rapid and reckless foray into urbanisation through building edifices of consumption. At the same time, they ask us to turn our attention to improving our urban environments. The envisioning of a safe and sustainable urban environment requires all its stakeholders to demand a healthy environment over and above the prescriptive following of laws and codes. Here, urban residents must become aware of the pitfalls of the short-term benefits of quantitative advances, such as extra floor space, and invest in long-term qualitative gains, such as houses that breathe fresh air and receive natural light or environments that foster social and ecological sustainability. Institutions of planning must then be asked to periodically assess the quality of built spaces to check for accumulated vulnerabilities within urban infrastructure, maintaining the dignity of lived space, avoiding foreclosure of access to public space and upholding the overall quality of urban space. All in all, a safe urban space is a collective responsibility. While the law makers must ensure that spatial codes are meaningfully and correctly implemented, the city users must ensure that their participation in urban processes set the priorities right for achieving a sound urban environment.

The writer is Assistant Professor at the School of Environment and Architecture, Mumbai



SHUBHRA GUPTA

AFTER THE GRAND PRIX

Payal Kapadia's Cannes success is magical. But what happens now?

SOME EVENINGS ARE magical. It will take a while to recover from the euphoric sight of Payal Kapadia and her wonderful cast — Kani Kusruti, Divya Prabha and Chhaya Kadam — receiving the Grand Prix award for *All We Imagine As Light* at this edition of the Cannes Film Festival.

It may not have been the coveted Palme d'Or, but making the second spot in one of the toughest competition line-ups is not too shabby. Unless you have been living under a rock, or are oblivious to the happenings in the cinematic sector, you would have heard enough about Kapadia's debut feature ending a 30-year dry spell (Shaji N Karun's *Swaham* was part of the Cannes competition in 1994). And the win makes it a historic first for an Indian filmmaker who just happens to be a woman: It doesn't get bigger than Cannes.

But after the dust settles down, as it inevitably will, the most obvious question will begin raising its pesky head: So what happens now? How will it change things for Indian cinema? Or, for Kapadia? Or will everything default right back to the status quo, in which the win will be seen as a flash-in-the-pan, once-in-a-lifetime achievement? A can-can at Cannes, and nothing more?

I'm going to stick my neck out and say that this win is truly a game-changer. To raise a victorious flag for an Indian film at Cannes, under the glare of global media, brings with it a huge spike in awareness of India's "other" kind of cinema, which is

aligned with global art-house practices. After the press screening of Kapadia's film, so many fellow critics told me, with an air of real surprise, "Oh we didn't know that this kind of film can also be made in India."

One film cannot, and should not be expected to, shoulder the responsibility of changing the perception that all Indian films are song-and-dance stompers. But there's no doubt that the ecstatic Cannes reception of *All We Imagine As Light* will help shift that needle, and even more importantly, hold out hope for other Indian filmmakers who want to tread the tough path of independence.

Again, it is nobody's case that a Cannes win will automatically open doors to a theatrical release back home for Kapadia's film. Or, for that matter, any other film that chooses to privilege substance over stars. A famous director once told me that any film that comes with "those leaves" (the pretty quote marks that accompany the details of the number of prestigious film festivals it has been screened at) spells automatic box-office disaster.

The fact that Kapadia did not have to depend upon the Mumbai mainstream industry's rigid financing rules — gotta have stars, everything else be damned — has helped her make the film without any external interference. But how many of the same people who are lauding her win, helped no doubt by red carpet visuals, will show up and fork out for a multiplex ticket, if it does get a release?

And that would go for the rest of the

Indian entries at the festival: British-Indian director Sandhya Suri's *Santosh*, a trenchant look at law and order in a north Indian town through the eyes of a newbie female cop played by Shahana Goswami, would have to go up against the "showing-India-in-a-bad-light" hardliners. As would UK-based Indian director Karan Kandhari's madly funny *Sister Midnight*, which has Radhika Apte headlining an unconventional Indian bride with strange appetites. Will the celebratory chatter surrounding Anasuya Sengupta's Best Actress award for her striking performance as an on-the-run sex worker, in Bulgarian director Konstantin Bojanov's *The Shameless* (in the Un Certain Regard section), translate into a spate of parts?

While the box office is no arbiter of merit, and in several instances, it is the dispiriting reminder that cinematic excellence of the kind programmed at A-list film festivals has nothing to do with fat profits, the Cannes celebration can be rendered hollow if these films do not get to be seen in the country they were made.

Some of the best Indian films made in the last few years have gone straight to streaming platforms. My hope, and the hope of the billion people who cheered when Kapadia held aloft her prize, exhorting the Cannes festival not to wait another 30 years to have another Indian film, is that her winner gets to see the light of day. And that we don't just have to imagine the future.

shubhra.gupta@expressindia.com

MAY 28, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO

DACOIT GANG KILLS 15

FIFTEEN PERSONS WERE killed by the Lala Ram-Shri Ram gang of dacoits in Asta village, about 15km from Auraiya on the bank of the Jamuna in Etawah district. Chief Minister Sripati Misra, accompanied by the Director-General of Police, J N Chaturvedi, and the Inspector-General of Police (Intelligence) D K Agrawal rushed to the scene of the massacre around noon upon receiving the report.

POLICE NAB TERRORISTS

TERRORISTS FIRED AT a Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) sentry posted at Akhara

Balanand situated near the Golden Temple complex. The CRPF sentry returned fire in self-defence, the police headquarters said. One Mangal Singh of Sultanwind was hit by a bullet in his left arm. After a hot chase, the CRPF personnel rounded up Joga Singh of Sarhali, Ravinder Singh of Mochian Bazar, Amritsar, and Ravinder Pal Singh of Chowk Ghantaghar.

UP MINISTRY SHAKE-UP

A DECISION ON drastic changes at all levels of the Congress (I) ministry and the party in Uttar Pradesh may be taken next week after Prime Minister Indira Gandhi gets a full report on the causes of the party's defeat in the Malihabad

assembly by-election. An explosive situation within the ministry has been developing following accusations and counter-accusations among senior ministers.

A QUIETER THANE

WHILE BHIWANDI, THANE and Kalyan remained completely quiet, violence on a reduced scale was reported from various parts of Greater Bombay. The police, paramilitary forces and the Army continued to patrol troubled spots. While one person was stabbed at Bharatnagar, Trombay, shortly after midnight, two others were stabbed at Kherwadi after dawn.





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EXPLAINED SCIENCE

EXPLAINED ECONOMICS

How tiny satellites will track heat loss from Earth's poles

ALIND CHAUHAN
NEW DELHI, MAY 27



PREFIRE CubeSat is loaded on to the rocket payload on May 15. NASA

ON MAY 25, NASA launched one of two climate satellites that will study heat emissions at the poles of the Earth. The satellite was launched by Rocket Lab's Electron rocket from Mahia, New Zealand.

The shoebox-sized 'cube' satellites, or CubeSats, will measure how much heat the Arctic and Antarctica — two of the coldest regions on the Earth — radiate into space and how this influences the planet's climate. The mission has been named PREFIRE (Polar Radiant Energy in the Far-Infrared Experiment), and was jointly developed by NASA and the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

A large amount of the heat radiated from the Arctic and Antarctica is emitted as far-infrared radiation — with wavelengths of 3 µm to 1,000 µm within the infrared range of electromagnetic radiation. However, there is currently no way to measure this type of energy, resulting in a gap in knowledge about the planet's energy budget.

What are CubeSats?

CubeSats are miniature satellites with a basic design size of 10 cm x 10 cm x 10 cm (which is "one unit" or "1U") cube — just a little bigger than a Rubik's Cube puzzle — and weigh not more than 1.33 kg. Depending on the mission, the CubeSat can be 1.5, 2, 3, 6, or 12U, according to NASA.

These satellites were first developed in 1999 by California Polytechnic State University at San Luis Obispo and Stanford University as educational tools. However, owing to their low cost and mass in comparison to traditional satellites, they began to be put in orbit for technology demonstrations, scientific research, and commercial purposes.

Each of the PREFIRE satellites is a 6U CubeSat. They are around 90 cm in height, and will be 120 cm in width after the solar panels, which will power the satellite, are deployed. The satellites will be placed in a near-polar orbit (a type of low Earth orbit) at an altitude of about 525 km.

Why measure heat emissions at the Earth's poles?

Temperature and climate on Earth is determined by the difference between the amount of heat incoming to Earth from the Sun and the amount of heat outgoing from Earth into space. This balance is known as the Earth's energy budget.

How will the PREFIRE mission help?

The PREFIRE CubeSats will study far-infrared radiation from the Earth's poles, and the data collected by them would help scientists better understand the energy budget of the planet.

"Their observations will help us understand the fundamentals of Earth's heat balance, allowing us to better predict how our ice, seas, and weather will change in the face of global warming," Laurie Leshin, director of NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, said in a statement.

Each PREFIRE CubeSat is equipped with a Thermal Infrared Spectrometer (TIRS) to measure the amount of infrared and far-infrared radiation. The spectrometer has specially-shaped mirrors and detectors for splitting and measuring infrared light, NASA said.

The CubeSats will also measure the amount of far-infrared radiation trapped by atmospheric water vapour and clouds at the poles, and how this influences the greenhouse effect in the region.

NEW FINDING MAY IMPROVE ABILITY TO FORECAST SOLAR STORMS

THE SUN'S magnetic field, which causes solar storms like the one that hit the Earth this month and produced beautiful auroras, may originate at shallower depths in the star's interior than previously thought.

The Sun's outer 30% consists of an "ocean" of churning gases plunging more than 210,000 km below the solar surface. New research, comparing latest theoretical models to observations by the Sun-observing SOHO spacecraft, provides strong evidence that its magnetic field is generated near the top of this ocean — less than 5% inward, or about 32,000 km — rather than near the bottom, as long hypothesised.

In addition to providing insight into

the Sun's dynamic processes, the findings may improve the ability to forecast solar storms and guard against potential damage to electricity grids, radio communications, and orbiting satellites, the researchers said.

Most stars have magnetic fields, apparently generated by the motion of super-hot gases inside them. The Sun's ever-changing magnetic field drives the formation of sunspots — shifting dark patches — on its surface and triggers solar flares that blast hot charged particles into space.

The mechanism of the generation of the Sun's magnetic field has been an unsolved problem in theoretical physics. The researchers hypothesise that these flow patterns are the key. **REUTERS**



Why dal imports have surged

Domestic production is down and imports are at a seven-year high. Food inflation pressures in an El Niño and an election year have reversed the relative self-sufficiency that the country has achieved in pulses

HARISH DAMODARAN
NEW DELHI, MAY 27

IN APRIL 2024, the consumer price index for cereals was 8.63% higher than in April 2023. But this may not have significantly hurt most poor and lower middle class Indians, thanks to the government's flagship food security scheme that provides 5 kg of rice or wheat monthly, free of cost, to 813.5 million people.

The same cannot be said about pulses, which posted an annual retail inflation of 16.84% in April 2024. This inflation would have hurt all the more given that dal, unlike wheat for rotis, is hardly sold through the public distribution system. Even low-income households have to meet their requirement substantially, if not entirely, through open market purchases.

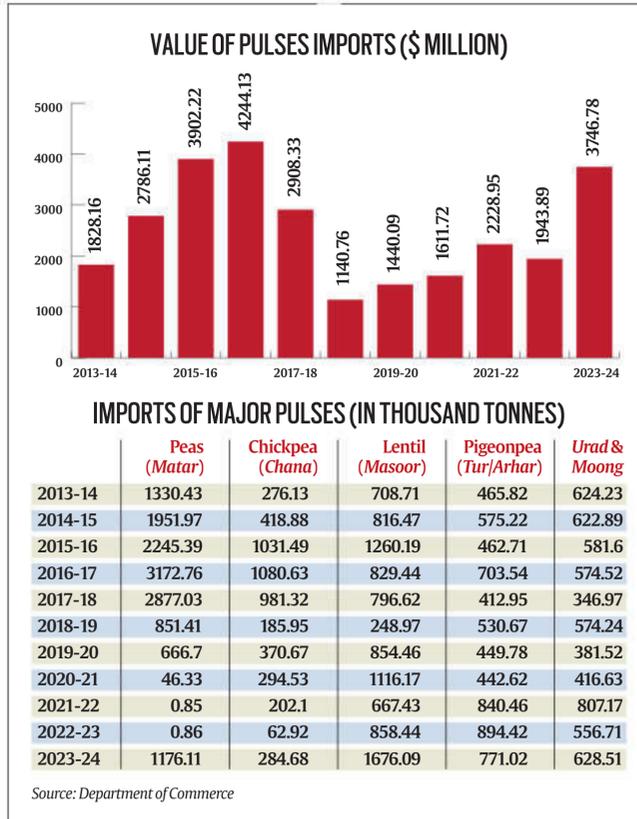
According to the Department of Consumer Affairs, the average all-India modal (most-quoted) price of chana (chickpea) — the cheapest available dal — was Rs 85 per kg on Monday, as against Rs 70 a year ago. The corresponding price rise has been even more for arhar/tur or pigeon pea (from Rs 120 to Rs 160 per kg), but less (from Rs 110 to Rs 120 per kg) for urad (black gram) and moong (green gram), and from Rs 90 to 100 per kg for masoor (red lentil).

Decline in domestic production

The El Niño-induced patchy monsoon and winter rain has led to a decline in domestic pulses production from 27.30 million tonnes (mt) in 2021-22 and 26.06 mt in 2022-23 to 23.44 mt in 2023-24, as per the Agriculture Ministry's estimates.

The two pulses to register the highest inflation have both seen sharp output declines: chana, from 13.54 mt in 2021-22 to 12.27 mt in 2022-23 and 12.16 mt in 2023-24; and arhar/tur, from 4.22 mt to 3.31 mt and 3.34 mt in these same years. Trade sources peg this year's chana production at less than 10 mt and arhar/tur production at below 3 mt.

The poor crops — especially in Karnataka, Maharashtra, Andhra and Telangana, where farmers planted less area due to irregular/deficient rainfall — is reflected in chana currently trading at an average of Rs 6,500 per quintal in Latur (Maharashtra) and arhar/tur at Rs 12,000 in Kalaburagi (Karnataka), well above their corresponding government-declared minimum support prices (MSP) of Rs 5,440 and Rs 7,000 per quintal. Even during their harvesting season in March-April and January-February re-



spectively, the two pulses wholesaled at Rs 5,700-5,800 and Rs 9,500-10,300 per quintal.

Surge in imports of pulses

The chart shows that India's pulses imports were valued at \$3.75 billion in 2023-24 (April-March), the highest since the record \$3.90 billion and \$4.24 billion of 2015-16 and 2016-17.

In quantity terms, the import of major pulses totaled 4.54 mt in 2023-24, up from 2.37 mt and 2.52 mt in the preceding two fiscals, but lower than the all-time highs of 5.58 mt, 6.36 mt, and 5.41 mt in 2015-16, 2016-17, and 2017-18 respectively.

The resurgence in imports marks a reversal of the relative self-sufficiency achieved

by India in this sector. Enabled by government policy measures incentivising farmers to grow pulses — such as MSP-based procurement and import duties, particularly on yellow/white peas (matar) and chana — domestic production increased from 16.32 mt to 27.30 mt between 2015-16 and 2021-22.

Breeding of short-duration chana and moong varieties, cultivable with little or no irrigation, also boosted domestic production. The 50-75 day varieties of moong now allow planting of as many as four crops a year.

Phasing out tariffs and QR

Renewed food inflation pressures have forced the government to phase out tariffs

and quantitative restrictions (QR) on imports of most pulses. On May 15, 2021, the annual QRs of 0.2 mt on arhar/tur and 0.3 mt on urad and moong imports, along with a 10% basic customs duty, were lifted. On July 26, 2021, the duty on imports of masoor was slashed from 10% to nil.

Until quite recently, matar imports were subject to a yearly QR of 0.1 mt, in addition to a 50% duty and a minimum price of Rs 200/kg, below which no consignment was cleared. All these curbs were removed on December 8, 2023. On May 3 this year, the 60% import duty on desi (small-sized) chana was done away with. Only in the case of moong the earlier import restriction was restored on February 11, 2022.

The effects of these actions — a response to El Niño and electoral compulsions to check dal prices — can be seen in the accompanying table. Imports of masoor, mainly from Australia and Canada, touched a record 1.7 mt in 2023-24. Matar imports — from Canada, Russia and Turkey — surged from virtually nothing to 1.2 mt. Chana imports (mostly from Tanzania, Sudan and Australia) rose as well, despite the duty abolition coming only earlier this month.

On the other hand, imports of arhar/tur (from Mozambique, Tanzania, Malawi and Myanmar) and urad (predominantly from Myanmar) have been flat, if not lower.

The road ahead

Dal inflation in the coming months would largely depend on the southwest monsoon. Global climate models are pointing to El Niño transitioning to a "neutral" phase next month and even to La Niña — associated with good rainfall activity in the subcontinent — by the second half of the monsoon season.

But the precarious domestic supply position (government agencies have procured barely any chana from this year's crop, compared to 2.13 mt in 2023 and 2.11 mt in 2022) make higher imports inevitable.

The government has permitted duty-free imports of arhar/tur, urad, masoor and desi chana till March 31, 2025. It may have to extend the same for matar imports too — beyond October 31, 2024 now.

Matar, being imported at Rs 40-41/kg, are a cheaper substitute for chana, just as masoor dal is replacing arhar/tur for making sambar in many restaurants and canteens. It is imports of these pulses — from Canada, Australia, and Russia — that could go up more than arhar/tur and urad from East Africa and Myanmar.

AI in legal cases: what the courts have said

AJOY SINHA KARPURAM
NEW DELHI, MAY 27

THE MANIPUR High Court last week stated that it "was compelled to do extra research through Google and ChatGPT 3.5" while deciding on a case. This is not the first time a High Court has used artificial intelligence (AI) for research. But in India — as in the rest of the world — courts have been rather cautious about the use of AI for judicial work.

Use of ChatGPT by Manipur HC

Zakir Hussain, 36, was "disengaged" from his district's Village Defence Force (VDF) in January 2021, after an alleged criminal escaped from the police station while Hussain was on duty. He never received a copy of the order dismissing him.

After Hussain approached the Manipur High Court challenging his dismissal, Justice A Guneshwar Sharma, in December 2023, directed the police to submit an affidavit detailing the procedure for "disengagement of VDF personnel". But the affidavit submitted

was found wanting, and did not explain what the VDF was. This "compelled" the court to use ChatGPT for further research.

ChatGPT said that the VDF in Manipur comprises "volunteers from the local communities who are trained and equipped to guard their villages against various threats, including insurgent activities and ethnic violence" — information that Justice Sharma used in his ruling.

Ultimately, he set aside Hussain's dismissal, citing a 2022 memorandum issued by the Manipur Home Department which stated that upon dismissal, VDF personnel must be given "an opportunity to explain in any case of alleged charges" — which the petitioner was denied in this case.

High Courts' differing stances

In March 2023, Justice Anoop Chitkara of the Punjab & Haryana High Court used ChatGPT to deny the bail plea of a certain Jaswinder Singh, accused of assaulting an individual, and causing his death. Justice Chitkara found that there was an element of

"cruelty" to the assault — a ground which can be used to deny bail.

To supplement his reasoning, Justice Chitkara posed a question to ChatGPT: "What is the jurisprudence on bail when the assailants are assaulted with cruelty?" The court's eventual order contained the AI chatbot's three page response which included that "the judge may be less inclined to grant bail or may set the bail amount very high to ensure that the defendant appears in court and does not pose a risk to public safety."

Justice Chitkara, however, clarified that this reference to ChatGPT was not the same as expressing an opinion on the merits of the case, and that it "is only intended to present a broader picture on bail jurisprudence, where cruelty is a factor."

The Delhi High Court has been less receptive to the use of AI in courts. In August 2023, Justice Pratibha M Singh ruled in favour of luxury shoe designer Christian Louboutin in a trademark case. Louboutin's lawyers had used ChatGPT-generated responses to show that the brand had a reputation for "spike shoe style"

with a "red sole" — a design which was being copied by another brand called Shutiq. Justice Singh held that ChatGPT cannot be used to decide "legal or factual issues in a court of law", highlighting the possibility of "incorrect responses, fictional case laws, imaginative data etc. generated by AI chatbots".

Elsewhere in the world

This "fictional case laws" scenario is not a mere hypothetical. In 2023, a Manhattan federal judge fined a lawyer \$5,000 for submitting fictitious legal research generated using ChatGPT. The lawyer had filed a brief with fictitious cases with titles such as *Varghese vs China Southern Airlines* and *Shaboon vs Egypt Air* in a personal injury suit involving Colombian airline Avianca.

Last December, the UK judiciary released a set of guidelines about the use of generative AI in courts. While judges were allowed to use ChatGPT for basic tasks such as summarising large bodies of text, making presentations, or composing emails, they were cautioned not to rely on AI for legal research or analysis.

No such guidelines exist in India.



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Philippines is one of 2 countries where divorce is illegal. Could that change?

RISHIKA SINGH
NEW DELHI, MAY 27

THE PHILIPPINES, the only country other than the Vatican where most married couples are not allowed to legally divorce, has taken a first step towards remedying the situation.

The lower house of Philippines' Parliament last week passed a Bill to legalise divorce. Representative Edcel Lagman, the Bill's author, said: "As the only country in the world besides the Vatican where divorce is still illegal, this is a clear and resounding victory and signals the imminent liberation for Filipino wives who are entombed in toxic, abusive, and long-dead marriages."

The Bill will go to the Senate in August, and will require presidential assent to become law. Lagman said its passage in the House of Representatives "signifies a significant shift in societal attitudes towards marriage and relationships".

Similar legislative attempts have failed earlier. What explains the Philippines' unique position on divorce, and what rights of separation exist for married couples at present?

Why is divorce not legal for Filipinos?

It has to do with the religious composition of the population and the outsized role that religious institutions play in influencing views on social issues. According to the 2020 Census, Roman Catholics account for 78.8% of the household population, which is among the highest in the world in terms of percentage.

Muslims (6.4%) are the second-biggest group. Notably, Muslims have the right to divorce as they are governed by Sharia law in personal matters.

What does the Catholic faith in the Philippines have to do with divorce?

For traditional Christians, especially Catholics, marriage is a sacred commitment made not just to the spouse but to God and

society. Married Catholic couples may separate in some cases, but they cannot remarry in church.

Henry VIII of England (1509-47) famously broke from the Catholic Church and appointed himself Supreme Head of the Church of England after Pope Clement VII refused to allow the annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon so that the king could marry Anne Boleyn.

Over the centuries the Church has relaxed its position in most parts of the world — barring the Vatican, the seat of the Pope. Countries such as Spain, Argentina, and Ireland, all with large Catholic populations, allowed divorce in the 1980s and 1990s.

The case of the Philippines is unique. Before colonisation by Spain in the 16th century, divorce was an acceptable practice in the islands. Divorce was allowed subsequently too, during parts of the American colonial period (1898-1946), and the

Japanese occupation (1942-45).

In modern Philippines, however, politicians, the Church, and much of the population strongly backed a ban on divorce. Sociologist Jayeel Cornelio of Ateneo de Manila University told *The Economist* in 2020 that the slight decline in the influence of Catholics over the country's politics and lawmakers had been "offset by the growing importance of various Protestant sects" who hold strong views against divorce, abortion, and same-sex marriage.

So what rights of separation do Filipinos have?

Divorce is not allowed — but legal separation and annulment of marriage is. The former allows parties to live separately but does not end the marriage, which means neither party can marry again. In an annulment, the marriage is declared void — as though it never happened.

Grounds for separation include physi-

cal violence or grossly abusive conduct and marital infidelity; the grounds for annulment are insanity, fraud, force, intimidation at the time of wedding, etc.

These grounds have to be proven in court, and the legal remedy is costly and could take years. Women in bad marriages could continue to face domestic abuse, and their legal documents and assets may stay linked with their husbands' even after separation.

And what does the Bill propose?

The Bill stipulates the grounds for "absolute divorce", which include psychological incapacity, irreconcilable differences, domestic or marital abuse, etc.

Petitioners can approach a family court, which will give a mandatory 60-day cooling-off period in certain cases, if there is scope for reconciliation. If the petition goes ahead, it must be decided within a year. "The decree of absolute divorce shall have the effect of judicial dissolution of a marriage where the divorced spouses return to

their status of being single with the right to contract marriage again," the official Philippine News Agency (PNA) reported.

Will the Bill become law?

The proposed Absolute Divorce Act passed in the House 131-109 with 20 abstentions, PNA said. In the past, however, similar Bills have failed to progress beyond a point.

In 2018, after one such Bill passed the committee level in the House, a senior Catholic clergyman said: "Divorce is a direct affront to the law ordained by God and specifically reiterated by our Lord Jesus Christ!" The Bill ultimately failed in the Senate.

This time, some surveys have shown about half the population to be accepting of divorce — a higher percentage than earlier. President Bongbong Marcos has extended his qualified support to divorce. "There are cases where it (the marriage) can't really be worked out... But let's not be like other places where getting a divorce is so easy," he had said during his 2022 campaign.

Opinion

TUESDAY, MAY 28, 2024



INDIA'S TECH ACHIEVEMENTS

Vice president Jagdeep Dhankhar

“In last two years, India's space accomplishments have come to be globally recognised. Both in the field of defence and also in the shape of things like Chandrayan-3

Steady showing

BFSI has lifted headline numbers for March quarter. Street caution over earnings upgrades is prudent

GOING BY THE smart 24% year-on-year (y-o-y) rise in net profits, it would seem like India Inc had an excellent March quarter. However, it's the performance of the banks and other financial entities that has lifted the headline numbers. Excluding the banking, financial services and insurance sector, the results come across as a lot more sober; net sales for a sample of 1,518 companies grew just 6% y-o-y. While net profits were up a good 18% y-o-y, this was partly boosted by a big jump in other income of nearly 40% y-o-y. Operating profits for this sample were up 11% y-o-y, but this was a much slower pace of growth than seen in Q3, Q2, and Q1 when it was 21%, 44%, and 29% respectively. In fact, the expansion in the operating profit margin was largely the result of costs not having gone up as much as the sales. The total expenditure in the March quarter went up by just 5% y-o-y. While a smaller raw material bill—down 104 basis points y-o-y as a share of sales—helped businesses save on inputs, the expenses on employees too were up just 6% y-o-y, the slowest rise in at least four quarters. Again, the interest outgo too was the smallest in four quarters, up just 9% y-o-y while depreciation also rose at the slowest pace in many quarters.

The sluggish growth in the top line is an indication that not too many companies were able to sell big volumes. Moreover, it's clear that not every business was able to earn better prices for its goods and services. With the rural economy yet to recover, several consumer-facing companies, especially fast-moving consumer goods firms, reported low volume growth. Analysts have pointed out that even in the urban markets the underlying demand for several categories of products, such as paints, remains weak. The weak revenues reported by quick service restaurants also points to weak demand. In the case of industrial goods, spreads in the steel business were subdued resulting in some pressure on the margins of steelmakers. Again, several cement manufacturers took price cuts in March, which hurt their realisations.

The good news is that producers of capital goods reported fairly strong order books suggesting that capex is picking up pace. Software services companies reported a set of numbers with revenue growth slowing in the wake of modest discretionary spends by clients. Although deal flows during the quarter were reasonably strong, the smaller hiring numbers indicate caution on the part of managements as they await better demand conditions. Banks continued to do well during the quarter cashing in on the good demand for loans, especially from individuals. While the higher cost of funds meant margins were slightly weaker, there were no signs of deterioration in asset quality. While loan growth is expected to taper off in the current year to levels of 13-14% from 16% in FY24, yields could remain elevated. Top line growth, would, therefore, continue to be strong.

Earnings upgrades, so far, have been few and far between. With the economy tipped to grow at a somewhat slower pace in the current year than in FY24, and competition becoming intense in many sectors, the Street is staying circumspect until there are clearer signs of a sustained demand recovery. Given how valuations are already very rich, with limited room for any disappointments, the caution is prudent.

REDRESSAL MECHANISM

TO MAKE IT A 'GOOD AND SIMPLE' TAX, ITS APPROACH TO DISPUTE RESOLUTION NEEDS A RETHINK

Salvaging the spirit of GST

SOON AFTER THE new government takes over in June, we will have completed seven years of the introduction of the goods and services tax (GST) in the country. Given that a detailed programme for the new government's first hundred days in office is already being drawn up, it is quite likely to feature further reform in this new tax system.

The GST project continues to be a work in progress. Some major concerns persist. Primary among them appears to be the lack of certainty or predictability. Disputes about the applicable rate of tax, availability of exemption or input tax credit (ITC), or even the taxability of certain supplies arise frequently. Investigations are often initiated by multiple central and state authorities. The system churns out thousands of demand notices mechanically based on (what trade perceives to be) "minor" discrepancies or gaps in data submitted in the returns. According to one media report, in December 2023 itself, GST authorities issued demand notices totalling ₹1.45 trillion to around 1,500 businesses for inconsistencies in annual returns and ITC claims for FY18. There is cynicism about whether tax authorities would fairly resolve such a large stock of demands or show cause notices. The chances of prolonged litigation in many cases are high, increasing uncertainties both for revenue and trade and also clogging a burdened dispute resolution mechanism.

A higher incidence of disputes in a new tax regime is understandable. But to salvage the spirit of GST as a "good and simple" tax, its approach to dispute resolution needs a rethink. A multi-pronged approach is necessary both to curb disputes and resolve them early and fairly. A good beginning can be made

VIVEK JOHRI
Former chairman, Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs



by rationalising the rate structure to compress the number of rates, removing rate inversions (for instance, the Council decided to do so for the textile value chain but kept it in abeyance), and, wherever possible, broad-band rates for similar products (e.g. bread, buns, dinner rolls, and paratha). The time to do so is opportune when revenue collections are on a steady uptick. Combining rate compression with expansion in the tax base

not wish to violate the law but are prone to erring. A convention of issuing periodical advisories pointing out common data errors, discrepancies, or other forms of non-compliance discovered during the scrutiny of returns, audit, or even enforcement, should be put in place. One of the major sources of non-compliance is wrong availing of ITC. It may help to clearly stipulate what "reasonable steps" a taxpayer receiving a supply of goods or services

On their part, the taxpayers also need to take responsibility and collaborate, for instance, to make sure that their return data is accurate, consistent, and foolproof

may take to prevent allegations of evasion. Such provisions were included in the erstwhile Central Excise and Service Tax law.

In the same vein, contentious issues that come up during compliance verification should be clarified promptly by the Council to prevent further disputes. If a practice of assessment followed by the trade is found to be at odds with the intended interpretation of law, such clarifications should—unless the practice was based on suppression of information or misdeclaration—certainly rectify the practice, but desist from recovery of tax for the past beyond the normal period of limitation.

Many tax administrations publish a compliance strategy, announcing in advance the industry segments that would be targeted during a period, the

type of non-compliance that they would be looking for, as well as the risk parameters for identifying violators. This has a very favourable impact with many in the targeted segment falling in line.

On their part, the taxpayers also need to take responsibility and collaborate, for instance, to make sure that their return data is accurate, consistent, and foolproof when working in a digitalised environment, lest the hands-free risk-management system pick up gaps and discrepancies that become the starting point for disputes. Greater sensitivity to data quality and consistency by the trade could make the flurry of demand notices a thing of the past. They should also use the legal provisions of voluntary compliance, as and when needed, to prevent protracted disputes and litigation.

The creation of a national online platform for hosting live data on issues or cases where either the central or state administration has initiated investigation would help prevent the exposure of taxpayers to multiple authorities. The recent announcement that GST audits would be conducted jointly by the two authorities in a few difficult sectors would also achieve the same objective.

The most critical yet difficult part is to instill and enforce a sense of fairness and timeliness among officers dealing with disputes. Perhaps the signpost language of such instructions is followed, but owing to a lack of ownership and conviction as well as the tendency to play safe, the outcomes do not inspire confidence in the system. There is no censure for such behaviour, just as there is no reward for resolving disputes constructively and reasonably. Constant training and re-skilling of officers in dispute resolution, coupled with a suitable incentive structure for promoting rationality, would be an important means of reorienting this important business process.

Fake science studies: A problem getting harder to solve

FAKING IT UNTIL you make it may be a common practice in some careers. But it's clearly unethical for scientists and medical researchers. All the same thousands of fake papers are churned out by so-called paper mills and published every year, many of them in peer-reviewed journals. The issue made headlines recently when Wiley, a respected publishing house, announced it would be dropping 19 of its journals associated with a publisher they had acquired, called Hindawi, in part because they were infested with fake papers.

These aren't just papers with fudged data—in many cases, all the data and the text have been invented from whole cloth, generated with artificial intelligence, or plagiarised. They're fake all the way through. The creators of these fake papers have been dubbed paper mills, and they operate by reaching out to scientists and offering to write papers with the scientists' names at the top—for a price.

Paper mills have proliferated because of a pathology that's afflicted many areas of science. Scientists are rewarded for the quantity of their research more than its quality. And peer review is non-functional at many journals.

In that disturbed ecosystem, parasitic companies flourish by helping scientists cheat to bolster their résumés, snag competitive academic jobs, and impress funding agencies. Ultimately that causes some precious resources get routed to cheaters and away from more worthy scientists. The paper mill studies can even get cited in seemingly legitimate review papers if the review authors—who are also trying for volume—don't pay sufficient attention to what they're reviewing.

Now with the help of ChatGPT, paper mills can create much more coherent, plausible papers cheaply and effortlessly. Scientific fields beset by fake papers might do better to address the roots of the problem rather than trying to chase them down.

Ivan Oransky, co-founder of the blog Retraction Watch, has been tracking problematic research for years. He said that paper mill output has been estimated to make up about 2% of papers. That may not sound big, but somewhere between 2 million and 6 million scientific papers are published every year, so 2% adds up to a lot. He said he blames not just shoddy peer reviews, but a perverse system of evaluating scientific merit. "Hiring committees or grant committees don't have the wherewithal to make an actual evaluation," Sanders said. So scientists get rewarded based on the number of publications they author and the number of other publications that cite these.

Even many legitimate journal articles don't advance the state of knowledge, he said, at least in the biomedical arena. Researchers might have gathered a bit of additional data for an ongoing project, which should be deposited into a data bank rather than turned into an unnecessary paper.

“I would say the majority of articles that are published now make no contribution beyond the data they present,” he said. “They are not worth reading.”

The fake papers often use a pre-existing template, he said, filling in words and data like a game of Mad Libs. Paper mill creations are more pervasive in fields where papers tend to be formulaic, like nanotechnology, computer science, and an area of cancer research called microRNAs.

But some fault also lies with other scientists who cite these fake papers in review articles—which are proliferating at a rate far beyond what's beneficial to science or society. Even when initial papers get retracted, their impact remains in the form of citations and mentions in review papers. Eventually, the bad papers can contaminate standards of medical care, said Sanders. Some people are developing cancer diagnostics based on fake papers. He's even heard from cancer patients citing a fake paper to inquire about alternative therapies.

Funding agents could help by refusing to fund work that goes into badly reviewed journals laden with fake findings. They could keep a list of approved journals that do rigorous peer review and only fund work aimed at getting published in those. Sanders said more funding should also go into fraud detection in science.

People don't need millions of scientific papers, most of them doing little to advance our knowledge. We need more scientists to put their energy into quality control or slow, careful research. Science is a competitive field and those who make it shouldn't be fakers.

The growth-unemployment dilemma



RAJAT KATHURIA

Professor of economics and dean, School of Social Sciences and Humanities, Shiv Nadar University

India needs to boost manufacturing growth to absorb more workers and realise the principal intent underlying the 'Make in India' initiative

INDIA IS ON its way to becoming the third-largest economy, yet unemployment among young people with graduate degrees is at an all-time high.

India's glass is half-full—and half-empty. The good news is India is the fastest-growing major economy in the world, on course to overtake Germany and Japan in the next five years in aggregate GDP. It will become the third-largest global economy after the US and China. However, there is a concern that the benefits of fast GDP growth are being undermined by low job growth and an accompanying pro-rich bias.

Unemployment among young people with graduate degrees is at an all-time high of 29%, and overall youth unemployment is hovering around 10%. This has prompted some young Indians to travel to war zones in search of employment and higher income opportunities.

Rapid economic growth in the past two decades has contributed to an unprecedented fall in poverty. The poverty headcount ratio, which indicates the proportion of the population living below the poverty line, fell from 37% in 2004-05 to 22% in 2011-12. This pulled 140 million people out of poverty. Recent estimates by India's Knowledge Commission or NITI Aayog show that multidimensional poverty in India declined from 29.17% in 2013-14 to 11.28% in 2022-23, with about 250 million people moving out of deprivation. At the same time, the share of the national income going to the top

10% of the population has almost doubled in the four decades between 1982 and 2022, to about 60%. The bottom 50% of people had 15% of the national income in 2022. The top 1% share was estimated to be 22.6%.

The wealth distribution is even more skewed. Several factors, including the lack of quality broad-based education and all-purpose skills, are responsible for these disparities. An underlying feature of India's unique structural transformation is also often cited as a reason.

The stage of industrialisation in which a country experiences employment-intensive growth driven by manufacturing has been bypassed here in favour of services-led growth. The services-led economic growth since at least 1991 has had the side effect of increasing inequality. National Sample Survey Organisation data shows that 45.5% of the workforce is employed in agriculture, 12.4% in construction, and only 11.6% in manufacturing, with the rest in services.

India's inability to pull more of its workforce away from agriculture towards more productive and better-paying employment remains a pressing challenge. While the services sector has contributed to growth, its share in employment (approximately 29%) is a little more than half of its share in GDP.

The shortcoming of India's sectoral composition of growth has, therefore, been that it has generated relatively fewer opportunities for productive employment for India's poor.

With more than 7% real GDP growth in the last three financial years, India is now the fifth-largest economy in the world. Growth projections remain optimistic. In April, the International Monetary Fund raised India's growth projection for the fiscal year 2024-25 (FY25) by 30 basis points to 6.8% on the back of strong domestic demand, rising public infrastructure spending, and a growing working-age population. The World Bank forecasts 6.6% growth.

While there is no doubt that growth is necessary for the fight against poverty, it is hardly sufficient. The same is true for productive job creation, which has been high on the political agenda since at least the early 2000s. The ambition of "Targeting Ten Million Employment Opportunities Per Year" in 2002, or close to one million jobs per month, has now doubled to 20 million jobs yearly.

Rural youth unwilling to work in the place of their birth are increasingly seeking non-farm employment elsewhere. This includes foreign countries. In May 2023, India signed an agreement with Israel to send workers for

42,000 jobs in construction and nursing. The government also started a scheme called Agnipath in 2022 to recruit soldiers, sailors, and air force personnel. Marking a departure from past recruitment policy, the Agnipath recruits have a four-year tenure with no gratuity or pension benefits for three-quarters of each batch who will be discharged after the period. The scheme's announcement was met with protests in different parts of the country.

The slow transition away from agriculture and into the non-farm sectors is a bleak characteristic of the Indian labour market. The share of manufacturing employment, despite firm policies, has been stagnant, at around 12%.

Construction and services have absorbed excess labour but on the whole, most people are self-employed or in casual jobs. Nearly 90% of jobs are informal. The share of wages in the net value added by industries has declined while the share of profits has climbed, reflecting a capital-intensive production process, exactly the opposite of what a labour-abundant country like India needs. India thus needs to boost manufacturing growth to absorb more workers and realise the principal intent underlying the "Make in India" initiative. That would also reverse the "jobless" growth stigma which has typified the otherwise flattering Indian growth story.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

India at Cannes 77

India made a remarkable impact at the 77th Cannes Film Festival, showcasing its cinematic prowess. Payal Kapadia's "All We Imagine As Light" won the prestigious Grand Prix, marking the first Indian film in 30 years and the first by an Indian female director in the main competition. Anasuya Sengupta became the first Indian actor to win the Best Actress award for her role in "The Shameless", directed by

Constantin Bojanov. Chidananda S Naik from Film and Television Institute of India, Pune, received the La Cinef Award for best short with "Sunflowers Were the First Ones to Know...". The restored version of Shyam Benegal's "Manthan" was also celebrated, receiving a standing ovation in the Cannes Classics segment. These underscore India's vibrant cinema, diverse storytelling, and creative excellence on the global stage. —Amarjeet Kumar, Hazaribagh

Banning agri exports

Apropos of "Taming food inflation", food inflation hits the poor of the nation the hardest. Therefore, all governments are concerned about the damage that it would cost to their image. The poor outnumber the better off in the nation by a wide margin and therefore could have a direct effect on electoral results. The ban on exports is very unfair to the farmers, but it is the only way the

government knows to keep prices under control. The vagaries of nature are increasing in intensity and agricultural production is going to be adversely affected. The government has often said that India could be a granary to the world. Banning agri exports does nothing to enhance the idea of India becoming a trusted player in becoming a granary. —Anthony Henriques, Maharashtra

Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com

INDIAN EXPRESS IS NOT AN INDUSTRY. IT IS A MISSION.

— Rammath Goenka

INDIAN CRICKET NEEDS TO TRANSFORM TO BRING BACK T20 WORLD CUP

RUNS and more runs seemed to be the theme of this season's Indian Premier League. The stadiums seemed to shrink as batters targeted all parts of the ground. Powerplay dynamics changed with some teams scoring more than 100 runs in six overs. If spectators came to watch sixes, they were treated to a flurry—1,260 sixes were hit this year, the highest the tournament has ever seen. The league seemed to be transforming in its 17th year, with any batter with a strike rate of less than 150 not considered good.

The IPL has also shown it's slowly turning into a young man's game. The batting manual has changed considerably too, with younger players batting like baseball hitters. There were some outrageous hoicks in front and behind the wicket. Record totals were posted and then broken. And the batter to top the list is an uncapped Indian—Abhishek Sharma. What the youngsters have done also had a ripple effect on seniors such as Virat Kohli, who hit 38 sixes and was just behind Abhishek and South Africa's Heinrich Klaasen. The most expensive player at the IPL, Mitchell Starc, lived up to his billing.

A topic that started to swirl into a debate was that of the Impact Player. The rule, introduced last year, gave flexibility to the teams and helped them score big. The general refrain has been that it usually helps the batting team, as if there is an extra batter. Many bowlers, especially India internationals, spoke against the rule and hoped things would change in the future. In a season of changes, some things remained the same, too. The top two teams from the league stage went into the final—KKR and SRH. The team that had the most impactful bowling attack went away with the trophy.

As the IPL brouhaha settles down, India will be focusing on the T20 World Cup. Most players, including captain Rohit Sharma, his deputy Hardik Pandya and pacer Mohammed Siraj, had a forgettable tournament. Even veteran all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja had a modest outing. But Jasprit Bumrah was exceptional with the ball. It's time for all players to pick up the pieces and string together a memorable World Cup. India have not won an ICC title since 2013 and the team needs to transform to secure the coveted Cup. Over to the World Cup now.

CELEBRATING CULTURE OF VIOLENCE MUST END

POLITICAL violence is not new to Kerala. Yet, when a party celebrates the culture of violence, openly patronises criminal elements, and hails those who killed while indulging in or preparing for violence as martyrs, it strikes a disturbing note. Building a memorial for two CPM workers who died while making country bombs at Chettakkandi in Kannur district in 2015 is an act that comes across as irresponsible and sends out a wrong message. It must be noted that Kannur has a shameful history of political violence. Country bombs have been used liberally by all parties in North Kerala and many of their workers have been either killed or maimed in accidental explosions. Such bombs hidden and left abandoned have caused serious harm to innocent people.

The CPM had initially claimed it had nothing to do with the incident. But it is the party's local leaders who procured land and collected funds for the memorial. P Jayarajan, CPM strongman and the party's former Kannur district secretary, justified the memorial saying the two workers had laid down their lives in the fight against 'fascists'. Jayarajan blamed the media and political opponents for remaining silent when the BJP-RSS erected memorials for their cadres who also died in a similar manner.

The belief that violence, even murder, is justified in an ideological fight is symptomatic of an ugly culture that has become a part of Kerala politics. Here, lives do not matter; cadres are expected to sacrifice themselves in the interests of parties, and opponents seem to have no right to practise their politics or stay alive. For example, after a CPM-linked man died while making bombs at Pannur in Kannur district on April 5 ahead of the polling in Kerala, the noise was purely political and the debate was about how it would impact elections. No thought was spared for the life lost.

Whatever be the justification, glorifying people involved in a criminal act does not behove a party that is leading the ruling front in the state. Such acts will only encourage the criminals within, because they create an impression that the party will remain with them in all eventualities. The CPM should take extra care to ensure that the tenuous peace established in the region through difficult processes is not disturbed.

QUICK TAKE

BRING THE GUILTY TO BOOK

THE unravelling investigation into the Pune Porsche crash reveals corruption at many levels. It's alleged that after an inebriated, underage driver crashed into and killed two motorbike-borne men, the teenager's wealthy family pressured another driver to take the fall. The police are now saying the teenager's blood sample was swapped at a hospital to misdirect the probe. The father and grandfather of the accused have been arrested, apart from the hospital staff allegedly involved in the swap. Not only those who corrupted, but the officials who enabled it also need to be held accountable. Otherwise it would be a massive systemic failure with long-term implications.

I recall the lightning campaign of June 1967 when the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) fought on multiple fronts and squarely defeated larger forces in a matter of six days. In 1973, despite being surprised, the IDF fought back. A counter offensive, led by the iconic General Ariel Sharon (later PM) through a two-kilometre gap between two Egyptian Armies astride the Suez Canal in Oct 1973, forced a cease fire when all else seemed to fail. The Israeli military remained at a status where it carved itself a niche position worldwide and came to be recognised for its thorough military professionalism. Given such status and capability, one expected that post the October 7, 2023 incident involving Hamas that initiated atrocities at the Gaza border, there would be swift and surgical retribution, forcing a situation for early release of hostages and setting up of systems never to be surprised again.

Unfortunately, more than seven months down the line, despite mobilising 3,50,000 troops and deploying a host of missiles, rockets and artillery along with drones and armour in the tiny battle space of Gaza, not much has been achieved militarily. In the face of irregulars of the Hamas units, no fronts and no rears, despite a virtual scorched earth policy, not much headway seems to be made. The IDF today seems a pale reflection of its past, trying to defend itself against allegations of major human rights violations and atrocities amounting to what some are calling genocide. Targeting a heavily populated built-up zone that enjoyed the status of a quasi-state, it has withheld humanitarian aid and inflicted over 37,000 fatalities on the civilian population.

It's unfortunate that the terrible atrocities by Hamas are being retaliated through a leaf from the same book. The question we all ask is about the horrendous conditions of the living and the dead, and the unending tragedy of children caught in the middle of the conflict. Yet, not a soul is prepared to intervene politically and from a humanitarian angle to help the sick, wounded, old, women and children suffering from lack of basic human existential facilities. Food, water, shelter and medicine; all are missing in the single-minded purpose of achieving the killing of the last Hamas terrorist. The past professionalism of the IDF would have revealed to its leadership that campaigns against irregulars do not take such shape. The more non-combatants

These days, warring nations seem unable to follow the rudimentary rules of humanism and desist from targeting civilians. All sides need to do more to avoid civilian deaths

THE LONG CONFLICTS THAT ARE CHANGING THE RULES OF WAR

LT GEN SYED ATA HASNAIN (RETD)

Former Commander, Srinagar-based 15 Corps. Now Chancellor, Central University of Kashmir



SOURAV ROY

you kill, maim or displace, the more you stretch this conflict, which is definitely not going to end with the first ceasefire.

War is always an immoral act and never justifiable, because humans claim cerebral powers to resolve conflicts, something no other living being can. Yet, wars very often deteriorate to levels far below human dignity and respect. What common people cutting across boundaries are questioning these days is the inability of nations at war to follow the rudimentary rules of humanitarianism and desist from the targeting of civilians, particularly the old, the sick, women and children. In both the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, there appears no concern for this. Worse still is the fact that the US, as a champion of human rights

and the sole superpower, does not feel the need to do more to ensure an end to civilian casualties. NATO does not do that for the war in East Europe either.

The action by Hamas on October 7, 2023 was the most despicable act of terror by an organisation whose leadership has the unfortunate sanction to reside in various countries in the Middle East region. Even as a quasi-state actor, it chose extreme terror as the means to trigger international concern about the Palestinian cause. Civilian deaths, more than a thousand of them, were designed to create an Israeli and international furore of such proportions that none would be able to pursue status quo on Palestine. Hamas deserves to be made irrelevant. Its leadership of the Palestinian cause

can only spell an extension of the Palestinian conflict for another hundred years. That is because it has virtually attracted the label of 'terrorism' on the entire Palestinian community and triggered turbulence of the kind that could never see peace for the people or solution to the issue.

Perhaps Israel just took its eyes off Gaza and allowed Hamas to build sound military capability. Now, in the face of failure, a couple of factors are at play. Among these are its military reputation of being a quick-fixer of failure, by innovation and superior operational strategy; its status of being a nation of people who had suffered existentially in the past and would therefore always believe in human values; the repute of bringing a leaf out of the advanced western civilisation to the Middle East; the last would place upon it the load of a perceived responsibility of pursuing the path of basic human rights, especially for people that it is in conflict with. It failed to innovate to fight the Hamas fighters. In fact, its greatest failure was to allow Gaza to be built to such a degree right under its nose. Its own information and influence projects, such as the television series 'Fauda', paints a capability of keeping the entire built-up areas of the tiny space of Gaza under drone-based surveillance. It needs to question its proficiency on the reasons why Hamas and Hezbollah were able to build over one hundred thousand missiles and rockets, all trained upon its mainland.

Most military professionals in India remain admirers of the IDF just like I do. However, as Avner Gvanyahu, director of Breaking the Silence, an organisation of Israeli veterans, states, "The idea that the only answer to Palestinian resistance, both violent and nonviolent, is greater—and more indiscriminate—force has shown signs of becoming entrenched in the IDF and Israeli politics."

By fighting with the strategy it has adopted, the IDF is actually embarrassing its biggest supporter, the US. President Joe Biden is forced to grudgingly extend support at the cost of the political capital he loses in the other menacing confrontation, Trump versus Biden. Most of the world perceives that a change of Israeli leadership may afford it to adopt a different strategy, one which will get the release of hostages and allow breathing space for talks. A solution here, however, remains more elusive than ever before.

(Views are personal) (atahasnain@gmail.com)

THE MISDIRECTED DEBATE ON POPULATION CHANGES

SOME recent reports have alarmingly misinterpreted findings from the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (PM-EAC) working paper titled 'Share of Religious Minorities: A Cross-Country Analysis (1950-2015)'. These sensationalised narratives suggest a demographic takeover by the Muslim population in India, a notion that fuels Islamophobic fears and diverts attention from meaningful policy discussions. Such interpretations also ignore broader demographic trends and socio-economic factors influencing population growth.

The PM-EAC working paper does not conclude that Muslims will outnumber Hindus in India. Instead, it points out the reasons for a change in religious demography are "multivariate" and "complex", and "beyond the scope" of the paper's analysis. However, the paper's assertion that population growth reflects minority well-being does not consider complex interplay of factors contributing to demographic change, adding to preexisting misconceptions.

The PM-EAC study highlighted change in the individual shares of religious groups, which caused significant misunderstanding. It says, between 1950 and 2015, the share of the Hindu population declined 7.8 percent, while that of Muslims increased 43.2 percent. This presentation is often misunderstood. The percentage changes concern their own shares and not a share of the total population. The rate of change in shares does not reflect actual population growth numbers. By the same metric, the Buddhist population's share increased 1519.6 percent and the Sikhs 49.2 percent, but this does not imply a dramatic increase in their absolute numbers. Similarly, the decline in the Parsi population by 86.7 percent does not suggest targeted persecution. Such figures can be misleading without proper context.

POONAM MUTTREJA

Executive director, Population Foundation of India

three decades from 32.9 percent in 1981-91 to 24.6 percent in 2001-11 was more pronounced than the decline for Hindus.

The decline in total fertility rates among Hindus and Muslims has been quite similar since 2005-06. The total fertility rate (TFR) among Hindus dropped from 2.65 in 2005-06 to 1.94 in 2019-20; and the TFR among Muslims fell from 3.09 in 2005-06 to 2.36 in the same period. Kerala and Tamil Nadu, where women enjoy greater freedoms including better access to education, employment and



and silver dividend—to effectively address India's diverse needs.

According to Census 2011, the median age of Indians is 28 years. India can reap a demographic dividend by harnessing the potential of its young population. Ensuring equitable and affordable access to quality healthcare, including reproductive health services, is essential for maximising this dividend. However, this window of opportunity is for a limited period.

India has the potential to reap extraordinary benefits by making the most of the gender dividend. Bridging gender disparities, as highlighted in the Global Gender Gap report, can yield substantial social and economic benefits. Investing in women's education, vocational training, healthcare and employment can significantly enhance productivity. Promoting gender equality across all aspects of life, including property rights and leadership, is vital. Ending workplace gender biases and championing equal career opportunities are imperative for harvesting the benefits of gender equality.

India needs to prepare itself to reap the silver dividend. According to a UN report, by 2050, 20 percent of India's population will be over 60 years. This is both a challenge and an opportunity. Promoting lifelong learning, tailored employment options and community involvement is crucial for tapping the potential of elderly to contribute to society. Healthcare services must address needs of older adults and age-friendly infrastructure should be developed to foster independence and inclusion. Social services such as affordable housing and caregiver support are necessary. Labour market policies should be adapted to accommodate older workers, enhancing economic security and taking advantage of the silver dividend.

India ought to enhance the capabilities of all individuals irrespective of their religion. Policies should be directed towards expanding women's freedoms, widening choices, improving education, ensuring universal healthcare, and broadening opportunities for communities. The mantra is simple: take care of people, and population will take care of itself.

(Views are personal)

It's statistically misleading to claim a possible demographic takeover by Muslims. Fertility rates are linked to an enhancement of women's education and income, not religion. India should focus on reaping the demographic, gender and silver dividends if faces

healthcare, exhibit lower fertility rates across religious groups. This convergence highlights that population growth is more closely linked to an enhancement of women's capabilities, especially education and income, than to religious affiliation.

The number of children a family chooses to have is influenced more by socioeconomic conditions and economic opportunities than by religion. Communities with better access to economic and family planning resources tend to have lower fertility rates. The higher growth rate of India's Muslims reflects not a thriving minority, but a community that lags on most human development indicators. Rather than succumbing to divisive narratives, India should focus on harnessing three critical dividends—the demographic dividend, gender dividend

MAILBAG

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Grave allegations

Ref: *The misuse of draconian laws for political gain* (May 27). The author states the PMLA targets individuals in opposition parties in power, citing Hemant Soren and Arvind Kejriwal as examples. He conveniently disregards the grave irregularities committed by these CMs. Kejriwal and Soren deserve no mercy. **SK Ramesh, Ballari**

Proof burden

The article reflects the sentiments of many. We call ourselves the largest democracy, yet we have a number of laws that grossly deny many their rights. The burden of proving innocence lies with the accused while the accuser is left free. Enacting laws that are designed to crush dissent seems dangerously similar to a declaration of dictatorship. **AG Rajmohan, Anantapur**

Enforce regulations

Ref: *Wake-up call for fire safety from Gujarat's horror holiday* (May 27). In light of the recent fires, the government must urgently enforce strict safety regulations to prevent further catastrophic loss of life. If decisive action is not taken, countless innocent lives will be sacrificed to the insatiable greed and negligence of a few. **Narayanan Kizhumundayur, Thrissur**

Charge officials

My heart goes out to the victims of the fires in both Rajkot and Delhi, and condolences to the bereaved family members. The reports say both establishments were functioning without proper authorisation or permits from appropriate authorities and lacked basic facilities to fight such a tragedy. I believe that the officials in charge of ensuring such permissions were taken should be charged with culpable homicide and punished. **Unnikrishnan Nair B C, Kuthiathode**

Sacred river

Ref: *Significance of the Ganga as one of our holiest books* (May 27). The river Ganga is the most sacred of all Indian rivers. It washes away the sin from all devotees. It reminds us not to practice evil and believe in God. **Ravi Nair, Palakkad**

Commanding performance

Ref: *Big Knights eclipse Sunrisers in one-sided final* (May 27). Yet another edition of the IPL has come to an end, with Kolkata Knight Riders lifting the trophy. It was indeed a commanding performance from KKR. The team's fortunes have risen with the return of Gautam Gambhir as mentor. The entire Kolkata team and the support staff deserve appreciation for its performance through the IPL. **S Sankaranarayanan, Chennai**

Hospitality Beyond The Usual Hotspots

Eyes on higher returns in newer locations

India's hospitality industry is seeking to expand the frontier of tourism in the country. Most of the nation's branded hotel rooms are located in urban agglomerations, which has restricted tourism to a narrow field. Given the geographical diversity of the subcontinent, its tourism potential has been exploited timidly. This exerts undue strain on the available hospitality infrastructure where available, and leaves large parts of the country underserved. Broadening the tourism portfolio is a fallout of improvements in connectivity India is undergoing. Tourism can be the economic mainstay for several states in India that do not yet figure in choices of leisure travellers. This is for most part due to gaps in the hospitality value chain, such as upscale boarding and dining facilities in new locations.

The supply response for tourism infrastructure has tended to favour established tourist attractions or religious centres. These offer comfort over occupancy and billings, but margins are squeezed by competitive intensity. A section of the hospitality industry has now set its sights on higher returns in newer, and hence riskier, locations. The scale of India's hospitality sector permits the distribution outreach with proactive local government support to develop employment-generating pockets. It also eases the financial burden on states to spread the infrastructure bill rather than upgrade existing facilities.

Indians are on the move and the domestic hospitality industry has to battle fatigue as international tourism accelerates. The local industry needs to match service quality expectations of a growing proportion of travellers. This has to be done at internationally competitive prices. New destinations offer an easier option on both counts. Policy support is unlikely to be stunted considering the employment potential of the tourism industry. Particularly the gender-neutral profile of jobs the hospitality industry creates and the relatively lower skilling threshold than, say, manufacturing. Emerging tourist attractions also make the industry less cyclical and, thus, more sustainable. Critically, they can wean the country of its overdependence on religious tourism that operates predominantly in the informal economy.

EC, Have a Look at Electoral Roll Glitches

Every election has its clunky bits that need fixing. On top of the pile lies cock-ups involving electoral rolls, the most important basic document for conducting polls. The 2024 general elections had its share of 'roll falls'. Allegations, ranging from deletion of names of voters, incorrect names on rolls, names appearing in unassigned booths and even names of the deceased appearing on rolls, have cropped up. While name deletion is harder than inclusion, many whose names were deleted complained that they never received any notice.

While EC has been doing a sterling job of a massively complex exercise, we can recognise that there is a problem that needs maintenance and repair. For starters, the challenge of compiling an electoral roll is enormous, with different levels of segregated skills and knowledge, motivation and training. Second, there's voter migration and lack of a mechanism to account for this. Also, most voters don't bother to check their names and act until the last minute. Political parties' participation in preparation of the electoral roll is, at best, passive, some only focusing on deleted names. Finally, the task of updating rolls is performed by government employees with 'regular' duties.

These issues need the seriousness they require, and solutions — use of new technology, de-linking the election process from preparation of the electoral roll, creation and fixing of a basic unit of electioneering with a dedicated cadre, and continuous updating until the last day of filing nominations, etc. The onus and accountability of fixing the glitch in the system lie with EC.

JUST IN JEST
Careful how you pronounce names — if you're not subaltern enough

Du Bois, Du Bwa, Du Boyss, Dubya, Du Lit

Meanwhile, in Academia La La Land, scholar, critic and pronouncer of the last word Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (pronounced Ga-ye-tri Chok-ro-bor-ti Spee-vaak) set the diphthong among vowels last week, after she called out a student during a Q&A session at JNU. Anshul Kumar (pronounced Un-Shool Koo-maar), asking the Columbia professor about her 'positioning' herself as 'middle-class', made the mistake of pronouncing sociologist WEB Du Bois' name wrong. Instead of enunciating it as 'Dew Boyss', he overfrancophonized the name, and committed postcolonial nomicide by calling him 'Du Bwa', eliciting memories of George 'Dubya' Bush in the phonetician's mind. Spivak pointed out, with 'middle-class' scorn, that Du Bois was finicky about how his name was pronounced, as it meant a lot 'post-colonially' to the American scholar of Haitian (Black)-French (White) descent (his grandfather was the child of a slave owner and slave). Unlike the rest of us who don't mind such pronunciation.

But Spivak took the bread (middle-class don't eat cake) when she explained that Kumar hadn't disclosed he was dalit while introducing himself as 'founder of a Brahmin Studies Institute'. So, she presumed he was a 'brahminist', ripe for some Spivaking. For, a dalit can, presumably, get away by pronouncing Du Bois as, say, 'Spivak'.

Central banks are moving over to the yellow metal to de-dollarise and tackle global uncertainty

More Gold for Their Buck



Madan Sabnavis

Gold prices have reached an all-time high of \$2,400/oz. There are the usual explanations of it being a safe asset in uncertain times et cetera. As a corollary, there's the argument that everyone's switching to gold from financial assets because 'everyone knows' that gold prices can move only upwards.

But when you look at the yellow metal's average price over the last 10 years — it's increased by a paltry 3.7% a year — this optimism isn't very compelling. This rise in price is slightly higher than the rupee depreciation of around 3.2% during the same period. In comparison, a one-year government security would have yielded a return of 6.5%.

But there is, indeed, something interesting going on in the gold market. World Gold Council data shows that demand for gold over the last 10 years has been steady, at best. If the two points of 2013 and 2023 are compared, demand was actually down at 4,468 t in 2023 compared with 4,519 t in 2013. And this has been the range in the interim period — meaning, the world isn't actually consuming more gold.

The higher price is more due to uncertainty than demand. But the composition is even more fascinating. Demand for jewellery has come down from 2,735 t to 2,192 t, which belies the theory that individuals in China and India are buying more gold. The invest-



Collector's item

ment component that includes exchange-traded funds (ETFs) have become important, as investors look more at this market. Which is why demand is up from 800 t to 941 t.

But the so-called 'differentiator' in this period has really been central banks. Their demand has gone up from 629 t to 1,037 t, with 2022 being the turning point. During the period of 2013-21, demand varied between 255 t and 650 t a year. In 2022, it increased to 1,081 t, and was at 1,037 t in 2023. RBI, on its part, bought 1.5 times more gold in Jan-Apr 2024 than in the whole of 2023, when it added some 24 t in those three months — up from 803.6 t in December 2023 to 827.7 t in April 2024. So, just what's happening here?

2022 was a turning point in the geopolitical-economic dynamics. The Russian war on Ukraine met a very ambivalent approach by Western powers, which imposed opportunistic sanctions on

Russia in which oil and gas could still be traded. But the SWIFT (Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication) system was out of bounds for payments, and for assets of Russia impounded. This meant that the 'safest asset in the world', the US treasury, was no longer safe, as the American government could renege on the return if it chose to do so. This made countries turn more to gold to shore up their forex resources.

While the Ukraine war was the starting point for Russia, other countries that were building up strong forex reserves also considered moving progressively into gold rather than the dollar. Hence, if one looks at incremental gold assets held by central banks over this period, there was an increase of 4,327 t, which is a CAGR of just 1.5%.

But these incremental holdings had Russia and China accounting for 58%, with the former leading at 30%, and both countries averaging

around 8% annual growth. The share of Russia in overall forex reserves of China is up from 7.9% to 28%, while for China, the increase has been from 1.1% to 4.6%.

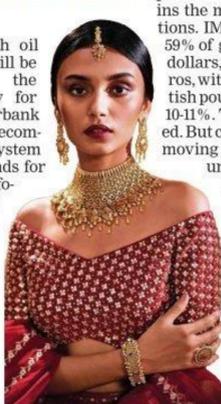
China is potentially a country that remains on shaky ground in the current situation of reshaping global economic and political relations. It can face global (read: Western powers) flak at some time in the future. Turkey is another potential country that has a share of 10%. Other countries that have started diversifying their forex reserves include India, where the share in total incremental gold holdings has increased from 7.75% in December 2023 to about 8.7% in April 2024.

The interesting conclusion that emerges here is that while there has been a lot of talk on de-dollarisation post-Ukraine war, the dollar remains the main currency for transactions. IMF data shows that around 59% of global forex reserves are in dollars, followed by 20% or so in euros, with the Japanese yen and British pound accounting for another 10-11%. This matrix has not changed. But central banks are gradually moving over to gold, which is country-neutral in terms of not belonging to any nation.

Looking internally, the demand for jewellery has come down from 2,735 t to 2,192 t, which belies the theory that people in China and India are buying more gold

relatively high volumes of gold that are being imported are also being partly accounted for by the central bank that has become an important purchaser. This tendency will continue, as gold is a very good diversification tool in holding various assets. But the silent change taking place is unmissable — central banks are furthering de-dollarising, even as the market will take a much longer time to reconfigure payments modalities.

The writer is chief economist, Bank of Baroda, and author of Corporate Quirks: The Darker Side of the Sun



Demand for jewellery has come down from 2,735 t to 2,192 t, which belies the theory that people in China and India are buying more gold



THE SPEAKING TREE

Finding Wholeness

SWAMI SUKHABODHANANDA

Adi Shankaracharya says, 'Punarapi jananam punarapi maranam; punarapi janani jatara shayanam; iha samsara bahu dustare; kripaya pare pahi murare.' You will be caught in this endless cycle of birth and death. Therefore, to end this journey, one has to discover wholeness. Once this is realised, one becomes centred, and the quality of life becomes very different in that centre.

In the Bhagwad Gita, Krishna proclaims, 'Mamavartma eva anuvartante partha sarvasvaha' — everyone is seeking me. When Krishna speaks of 'me', he is not referring to his physical form but to the universal Self, which is whole and complete. It refers to a state of consciousness that is liberating. Krishna says that everybody is seeking him; they are seeking completeness, whether they know it or not.

The Kathopanisad says that those constantly searching outwards have not delved deep within. The search must be within oneself.

Every one of us is a seeker, but a spiritual seeker knows what he is seeking. The unconscious seeker is unaware of what he is seeking, but everybody seeks wholeness. Once this discovery is made by a person, he experiences completeness. He remains unshaken in the most challenging circumstances. Even in the most pleasurable set-up, he is unmoved. He has discovered his Self. It is our responsibility to find it; transformation or enlightenment cannot happen otherwise, and once it takes place, such a person is unruffled in the world.

Chat Room

Knights Ride Home Post-SRH Sunset

Apropos the news report, 'KKKKKKKKKK!' (Sports World Play, May 27), Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) turned the tables on Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH) in a one-sided final to lift its third IPL trophy SRH, a team that had notched up a highest score in the league stages, wilted under pressure from a three-pronged pace attack unleashed by Mitchell Starc, Vaibhav Arora and Andre Russell. KKR knocked off the 114 runs required to win the match without fuss, losing just 2 wickets and with more than 8 overs to spare. SRH big guns who were expected to fire fizzled out, and this cost them what could have been their second IPL title.

C VARAVIND
Bengaluru

Education Lowers Societal Inequality

This refers to 'Gotta Fix Those Inequality Gaps' by Rajesh Shukla (May 25). A large section of the population experiences stagnation or decline in real disposable income because they are not able to acquire the skills necessary for higher-paying opportunities. Improving education outcomes and creating a vibrant vocational education system based on strong partnership with industry will make it possible for more people to benefit from economic growth. If citizens demand quality education rather than get sidetracked by promises of dole, politicians would take notice and act.

CHANDER SHEKHAR DOGRA
Chandigarh

Tough Love to Save Lives

Apropos the Edit, 'Missing On Our Roads: Real Red Lights' (May 22), the Pune car crash reminded us yet again that speeding causes accidents and kills. Drunk driving is a surefire recipe for accidents. Parents and other elders at home fail to inculcate responsibility as well as capability to distinguish between right and wrong in the youngsters. Coupled with a sense of entitlement, it makes for a dangerous cocktail that puts lives at risk. States adopting the tough penalties set out in the Motor Vehicles Act for traffic violations is the only way to reduce drunk driving and related accidents.

G DAVID MILTON
Maruthancode, Tamil Nadu
Letters to the editor may be addressed to editet@timesgroup.com

ChatGPT SHAIRI OF THE DAY

When elections drag on and on, what a blight!
Even the weather gods moan in plain sight.
Heatwaves to the left fry,
Cyclones to the right cry,
End this vote, it's too long, what a plight!

Wettest and Driest

The wettest and driest countries

Country	Average annual precipitation (mm)
Colombia	3,240
Sao Tome & Principe	3,200
Papua New Guinea	3,142
Solomon Islands	3,028
Panama	2,928
Costa Rica	2,926
Samoa	2,880
Malaysia	2,875
Brunei	2,722
Indonesia	2,702

Country	Average annual precipitation (mm)
Egypt	18
Libya	56
Saudi Arabia	59
Qatar	74
UAE	78
Bahrain	83
Algeria	89
Mauritania	92
Jordan	111
Kuwait	121

Source: Visual Capitalist

Bell Curves ■ R Prasad

The subaltern voice in your work is strong and distinct; however, you need to work on your pronunciation of French words.

XX Chromosome Factor



Anil Padmanabhan

Regardless of what happens next Tuesday when votes are tallied, the standout trend in the still ongoing general election will be the role of women voters in influencing the outcome. Aggressive wooing of this cohort — which is nothing but cause and effect — by political parties only confirms the fact.

It will be a transformative moment in the social fabric of India, inspired by growing empowerment of women. Over the last decade, a range of government initiatives, both at national and state levels, have empowered women like never before. As a result, political parties can no longer take this cohort, accounting for half of the 970 mn electorate, for granted.

Significantly, it sets the stage for the structural transformation in Indian politics that will get triggered in the 2029 general election, when the mandatory allocation of one-third seats to women in Parliament and state legislatures kicks in. Together, they pack the potential to rewrite India's polity. Voting trends in recently concluded state elections, as well as opinion polls in the run up to this Lok Sabha election, signal that this unprecedented makeover is underway. Election manifestos of both BJP and Congress — the present and earlier poles of Indian politics — show that politicians are aware of this trend.

Congress has gone out on a limb to highlight its Mahalakshmi scheme (like the Ladli scheme implemented by BJP in Madhya Pradesh in 2007,

which was expanded in other states like Delhi, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh), which promises an annual payout of ₹1 lakh to the oldest woman of every poor household.

BJP, on its part, committed to accelerate its ongoing programmes targeting women, including expansion of 'Lakshmi Didi' — a programme to create rural women entrepreneurs through the aegis of self-help groups (SHGs) — and implementing the law enabling reservation of seats in legislatures that it piloted through Parliament.

The subtext of these pitches is the defining difference between Congress and BJP in their ideological approach to governance: entitlement vs empowerment. The former made entitlement the cornerstone of its 10 years (2004-14) at the helm while leading the UPA government, captured prominently in the massive rural safety net, MGNREGS.

The BJP-led NDA government, while not junking MGNREGS, introduced a new dimension to governance by focusing on a range of government initiatives focusing on women empowerment. Thereby improving their wherewithal



If looks could vote

—the proverbial 'Give a man a fishing rod, not fish'. These include improved access to toilets (11 cr), banking (50.09 cr; of which 55.6% accounted for by women), cooking gas (10.27 cr), housing (4 cr), and creation of SHGs.

Tag to this the effort to reach tap water to the entire country. In 2019 when the scheme was launched, only 1.94% of rural households in Uttar Pradesh had access to drinking water. As on May 26, this proportion is 83.16%. This growing autonomy in voter choices of women isn't happening in isolation. Slowly and steadily, the gender gap on most metrics is being bridged.

Most striking is the reduction in the gap between men and women in voter turnout. It was nearly 15 percentage points in the 1980 general election. This gap shrank to less than 10 percentage points in 2004. In 2019, the turnout of women tipped men for the first time.

Similarly, the gender gap in education and sex ratio is shrinking. National Family Health Survey (NFHS)-5 data reveals that the sex ratio for the total population went up from 991 females (per 1,000 males) in 2015-16 to 1,020 in 2019-21. In the same period, the sex ratio at birth improved from 919 to 929. According to NFHS-5, the literacy gap, too, is shrinking, although at a slower pace. In 2005-06, the gap was 23 percentage points. In 2019-21, this had declined to 14 percentage points.

It's clear, then, that the cohort of women voters is gradually coming out of the gender shadow. They are no longer perceived as mere caregivers and homemakers. This is already apparent in urban India.

It's safe to conclude that this general election will be a benchmark moment for the electoral constituency of women and Indian polity in general. The big question is, who will this empowered cohort settle for as the victor?



Slow Horses

Mick Herron

It was an odd house, though that was none of his doing: it had been odd when he'd bought it. Its oddness lay in its upstairs conservatory; a glass-roofed, tile-floor mezzanine. The estate agent had made much of this feature, pointing out the array of plants that created a microclimate there; natural and green and eco-whatever peppering her spiel.

He had nodded like he cared, calculating how many electronics he could fit into

here once this eco-shit was off the premises. Quite a lot had been his estimate. This turned out to be the precise exact amount.

So, now he sat surrounded by quite a lot of electronics, some quietly awaiting his touch; others humming pleasantly in response to pre-set commands; and one blasting out death metal at a volume that threatened to make the genre literal.

He was too old for this music, and he knew it. He was too old for this volume, and he knew that too. But it was his music, his house, and the neighbours were students. If he didn't make his own noise, he'd have to listen to theirs.



A thought for today

A nation's ability to fight a modern war is as good as its technological ability

FRANK WHITTLE

Sharpening Arms

Theatre commands to tech upgrades, military brass has a long to-do list. GOI must smoothen the process

Army chief General Manoj Pande getting a month's extension has been explained as GOI avoiding any senior appointments during the ongoing Lok Sabha polls. The extension must not affect the line of succession in the 12L strong force that is dealing with multiple security challenges. From the perennial Pakistan problem to the standoff with China and non-traditional threats like terrorism and insurgency, addressing them requires seeing through ongoing structural changes.

Baby steps to jointness | It's the single-biggest agenda of CDS General Anil Chauhan. But establishing theatre commands has been a start-stop affair with inter- and intra-services wrangling over assets and personnel. There's finally some momentum with govt recently notifying the Inter-Services Organisations (Command, Control and Discipline) Act that will support cross-service staffing of army, navy and air force personnel. But this is just the first step. Creating a culture of jointness across services and amalgamating them into the proposed three theatre commands remain big tasks.

Evaluating Agniveers | The Agnipath recruitment scheme has radically changed the intake process for the forces. However, there are questions. Army is conducting an internal survey on the scheme while defence minister Rajnath Singh has indicated openness to change. The scheme was supposed to create a younger profile for the forces and cut down on overall staffing flab. But the forces continue to grapple with operational shortages. The ₹6.2L cr defence budget for 2024-25 allocates just 28% for military modernisation with ₹1.4L cr going towards pensions alone.

A tech-savvy military | The Ukraine war has highlighted the changing technological nature of warfare. Drones are indispensable. But space, cyber and communications domains are equally critical. US now has a dedicated Space Force, while China recently created an Information Support Force for better oversight on tech-driven ops. While India has established a Defence Space Agency and a Defence Space Research Agency, it has a long way to go to fully integrate space & cyber tech with the forces, and produce state-of-the-art indigenous military drones. Thus, a long-to-do list confronts the current and incoming military brass.



Tinderbox India
Countrywide, fire safety rules are a victim of official negligence & public apathy. Hence so many tragedies

As casualties mount in the Rajkot and Delhi fires, and shameful facts of negligence emerge from the charred wreck of a gaming zone and a hospital ward, the enormity of the dereliction of duty is hitting home. Fire incidents have seen a very sharp rise across urban India. Factories, hospitals, residential buildings, schools, tuition centres, restaurants, the risk of fire is omnipresent. It is this acceptance of the lazy approach to fire safety, India-wide, that a Rajkot happens. Or newborn babies are killed.

Haphazard cities | Electrocution deaths are reported almost daily, yet have seen no city fix its indiscriminate cabling, illegal drawing of power lines and high-risk wiring. Builders use substandard material and disregard rules where they exist – nothing that greasing palms cannot handle. Cramped factories, hospitals, tuition centres, restaurants – private enterprises flourish in matchbox set-ups that unsurprisingly, 24x7, risk being engulfed in flames with no emergency exits. Has even one municipality been penalised ever? Fires are all in a day's work, deaths just unfortunate – that can be priced using compensation. Add to that cavalier attitudes of most civilians for whom secure surroundings, like safe disposal of inflammables, is somebody else's responsibility.

Where's the state | Fire is a state subject. Model Building Bylaws issued by ministry of housing and urban affairs is a guidance document for states to revise and update their building bylaws. Enforcement is at the state level. Far too many small and medium towns still lack building bylaws. Naturally, in the absence of regulatory mechanisms towns are a messy bulge, resulting in chaotic conditions.

It's not funds, but priority | Given uptick in fire incidents, and following 15th Finance Commission recommendations, the Centre earmarked ₹5,000cr from 2021-22 to 2025-26, under National Disaster Response Fund to "strengthen fire services at state level". Line of duty injury and deaths are increasing among firefighters who are almost everywhere under-equipped. But the core issue is not about funds alone. The gap is in attitude. Till fire safety is taken seriously, our offices and businesses will remain a tinderbox.

A switch & glitch
How HR took down an IPL franchise

Arnab Ray

It is magnificent but it is not war – *C'est magnifique mais pas la guerre*. Used famously for the Charge of the Light Brigade, for some, this is the perfect summary for the world's richest league of bat and ball. A spectacle, no doubt, they say, but not quite a game of cricket. Maybe it is, or it is not. Still, this League of Extraordinary Gentlemen is definitely an entire *Harvard Business Review* full of case studies of how great teams are made and, in some cases, destroyed.

Consider a team full of the best individual contributors, comprising a proven leader, two of the best engineers in the world feared for their technical skill and prowess, two more engineers of immense potential, and a stellar support cast. More than enough firepower to produce winning products. But no, the owners want more, for nothing succeeds like excess. Into this team, they bring in another rockstar developer, one immensely aware of his awesomeness, who had left the company a few years ago for greener pastures, who comes back, but this time as a King.

And so it happens: a leader for a leader, for HR treats humans as resources, as the name says. Except humans, being pesky, do not work purely for money, even immense quantities of it. They have ambitions and expectations. They feel ownership over what they built, and when that ownership is taken away suddenly and without any notice and for no good reason, no amount of "But this is your job, so do it" is going to make them perform as they used to. Worse it is for those who have been led to believe they are following in succession, those who stayed on while the others left; for now, the management has taken from them the thing that actually keeps high performers in their roles.

Trust. And most importantly: Hope.
The franchise implodes. A carelessly recorded video, like a stinker email sent 'reply-all', makes the fissures hitherto whispered now fully public. The superstars that were and the ones that are brought in all touch the nadir of their careers, and the company, generally at the top of the table, lands firmly on the bottom. This is tragic like the original Charge of the Light Brigade, the fall of one of the greatest franchises symbolic of the very human folly of not understanding how humans work and how they play.

Samvidhan: Sita Of The Election Epic

Why Opposition & BJP both say they're on a mission to save the Constitution. In village & small town campaigns, the C word has become a catch-all for rights to state resources

Anastasia Piliavsky & Vikramaditya Thakur



This year and for the first time ever *samvidhan* – the Constitution – has become as pivotal to Indian electoral politics as it is to American.

A week before polls opened this year, a video suggesting plans were underway to replace the Constitution with another, based on *Manusmriti*, 'which not even Baba Saheb Ambedkar himself could abolish', circulated on social media. The following day, on Ambedkar's 133th birthday, online media space filled with calls coming from all corners of Opposition, from Congress to AAP, to rescue the Constitution. The video turned out to be a fake, but its claim hasn't gone away.

Since then, *samvidhan* has established itself as the Sita of the electoral epic, uniting every player in a shared mission to rescue it from the others.

Branding a copy in Bilaspur last month, Rahul Gandhi insisted that it is the solemn duty of Congress – together with Dalits, tribals, minorities and the poor – to rescue the Constitution from BJP. Modi, in turn, accused Congress of 'hating' India's constitution (and its identity and family values too), and of preparing to turn SC, ST and OBC reservations, which the Constitution guarantees, over to religious minorities, a move that would have shocked Ambedkar.

While Kanhaiya Kumar casts Opposition as 'the Constitution's true guardians' (*hum hain samvidhan ke asli pahladara*), BJP president JP Nadda is busy reassuring voters that govt is better placed to protect constitutional rights and values than a *sankalp rahit* (agenda-less) and *mudda vihin* (issue-free) Opposition.

After all, it is this govt that in 2015 designated Nov 26 as India's Constitution Day. In an early public hint at tensions between RSS and BJP, this was a retort to RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat's suggestion to revise constitutional reservation quotas.

Neo-constitutionalism | Though the Constitution is a brand-new electoral plaything for party bosses, over the past decade it has been a flag flown high by different political movements across the country.

In 2017-18 the Jharkhand Pathagadi movement for the protection of tribal land inscribed 15ft stone slabs, set up at the entrance of many Munda villages, with quotes from the Constitution. And in 2019, JMM

rode to govt in Jharkhand by invoking the Constitution to demand that Adivasis be recognised as bearers of Sarna Dharm, neither Hindu nor Christian.

In 2019-20 agitators against CAA, most notably those in Shaheen Bagh, also referred to constitutional values. Demands for reservations by peasant youth from the Jat, Maratha, Gurjar and more recently even Rajput communities, which rocked northern India over the past decade, have also placed the Constitution into spotlight – although their demands have been more narrowly focused on reservations.

Everyman activists | A sect of Ambedkarite Mahar neo-Buddhists in Maharashtra may well celebrate Nov 26 as Preamble Day in their *Baudh viharas*, as they chant, after their leader: 'One man, one vote, one value.' But most Indian citizens do not have the Constitution on their tongues. While illiterate villagers and educated city dwellers alike have a lot to say about their state or central govt (*sarkar, shaasan*) or administration (*prashaasan*), the world's longest constitution leaves them tongue-tied – an arcane matter best left to lawyers and judges.

A new generation of rural activists has set out to change this. Santosh, a Bhill activist, the first from his family to attend school and now in possession of a master's degree in social work, runs constitutional awareness workshops in tribal northern Maharashtra. Using stories and songs in local languages, he explains to a crowd of barely-literate villagers, gathered after a long day's work: 'The road to your village, govt welfare schemes, forest rights, the court, all come from this *deshachi pustak* (country's book).'

Dhanaji, a lower-caste activist from Kolhapur, Maharashtra, says: 'Dams and electricity, which created rural prosperity, tie back to state planning, and, eventually, the Constitution. So do primary health centres in villages and reservations for women.'

Dadabhai, a Dalit school teacher in Nandurbar, Maharashtra, adds: 'Many historically subordinated groups, especially women, Dalits, and Adivasis are now thinking, what's my problem, and how can it be addressed using the Constitution?'

Everyday un-enlightenment | But is this what they really think? Few people in Nandurbar, an ST district, where activists promote constitutional consciousness, invoke Article 15 guaranteeing equality or Article 342 guaranteeing tribal reservations. The absence of the C word in everyday political conversations stands in sharp contrast to the language of welfare and development, which most freely speak.

Youth across the countryside, where unemployment is pandemic and agriculture increasingly unprofitable and uncertain, have been pursuing reservations as part of their demand for stability. Caste censuses conducted in AP and Bihar and demanded in other states are part of this country-wide preoccupation. As activists rile up villagers in support of their demands, the Constitution is helping them bridge well-familiar welfareism with the latter-day politics of reservation.

For all rural activists' efforts, it is, however, the 'rescuers' of the Constitution in Parliament who are now most effective at adding the statute to people's claim-making lexicon. In just six weeks the C word has been transformed from an obscure technical term into a buzzword of India's political common sense.

Piliavsky is a social anthropologist at King's College London. Thakur teaches anthropology at University of Delaware.



Uday Deb

'BJP talks of Patnaik's age, it has nothing else...CM believes in grace in discourse...Delhi mantris have no connect here'

IAS officer turned BJD politician VK Pandian is the centre of attention and campaign storms in Odisha during the 4-phase simultaneous Lok Sabha and assembly polls, set to end on June 1. CM Naveen Patnaik's poll strategist and star campaigner, Pandian is leading the push-back against an aggressive Modi-led BJP. Pandian tells Ashok Pradhan that Modi and Patnaik have "immense mutual respect", even as he charges state BJP with incompetence.

What's been your experience as BJD's biggest campaigner?

It's humbling to see the people's trust and love statewide. It shows their absolute faith in Naveen Patnaik, and a little bit of that has rubbed onto me. It just inspires us to work harder.

BJP often talks of Patnaik's age. This vote is being seen as a measure of people's opinion of you as Patnaik's 'successor'.

BJP's made this up as a political narrative. On June 4, Odisha will give them a befitting reply. With Jagannath's grace, Naveen Patnaik will take oath on June 9 as CM for sixth term. BJP's not yet announced their CM nominee – they know very well no state leader can measure up to the CM.

They've been talking about his age in their election speeches from 2014 onwards. BJP can't find anything else to talk about. My role, currently, is to help Naveen Patnaik win his sixth term. With people's blessings, it'll happen.

Will Sambit Patra's 'Jagannath is a Modi Bhakt' have an impact?

Lord Jagannath is above everything, eternal, timeless. Mahaprabhu is the greatest symbol of Odia Asmita representing the faith of millions. This statement hurt the sentiments of Jagannath bhakts and Odias across the world. Lord Jagannath should be kept beyond politics. May good sense prevail...

BJP rarely attacks Patnaik. But now the party's attacking him via you.

People of Odisha don't believe in personal attacks, crude language. That is not Odisha's culture. Our CM also believes in

grace in public discourse. A thorough gentleman, he believes work should speak. State BJP hasn't learnt this from their experiences of 2014 and 2019. They have nothing to show in terms of work so they indulge in false narratives and personal attacks. It will only go against them.

But despite their report, Modi's attacking Patnaik.

This happens during elections, but both Modi and Patnaik have immense respect for each other.

What are BJD's main planks?

Our focus is on the youth. Odisha will have the country's first youth budget. ₹1L cr has been set aside for this over the next decade. The next 10 years are very important for us. In 2036 Odisha will celebrate 100 years of its formation. We'll transform Odisha into top three economies in the country with focus on industrialisation and job creation. There'll be huge investment in college education and skilling. Nua-O scholarships for college-goers will provide ₹14,000 to girls and ₹12,000 to boys annually.

As a regional party, we'll continue to fight the Centre for our rights. Demand for special category status, increase in MSP for farmers, revision of coal royalty that hasn't happened since 2004 will be our major demands. We'll increase

coverage of health insurance card. For energy security, Naveen Patnaik announced free electricity, which'll benefit 90% people and also incentivise energy saving. Protection and promotion of our heritage, culture and language will be a priority. The first global Odia language conference's recommendations will be taken up. Heritage sites will be developed. ₹1,000cr budget has been set aside for this.

Modi, Union ministers are campaigning here in full strength. What is BJD's strength?

BJD's greatest strength is Naveen Patnaik, and his work. He's in politics to serve the people, not for power. That's what makes him different. People of Odisha know this. Hence even after five terms, there's only pro-incumbency. It doesn't matter for BJD how many Union ministers or CMs come and go as they simply read out from scripts and have no connect with people. For example, Assam CM says he'll make Odisha No. 1. Patnaik questioned him, what will he do for Assam? He should better concentrate on his own state, which has a much higher per capita debt than Odisha.

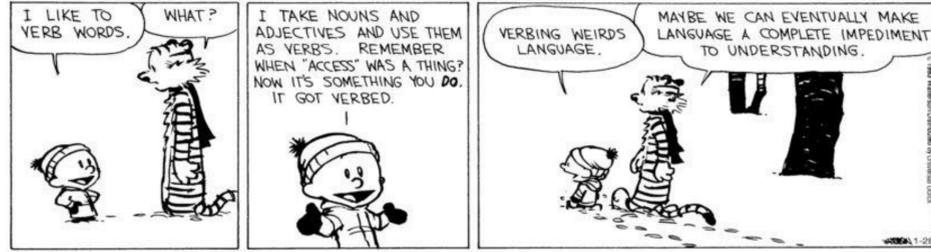
What's been the impact of veterans leaving BJD?

None whatsoever. It's election time; those who didn't get tickets sought electoral prospects elsewhere. It only reveals their commitment and gratitude to the party and people. BJP has welcomed such people. In fact, BJP was waiting for our lists to be announced so it could invite all such people.

Q&A



Calvin & Hobbes



Goddess Sublimates Mahishasura Of Darkness Within

Anandmurti Gurumaa

In most parts of the world, the Divine is commonly perceived in a masculine form, which is why it is often said, 'He is the giver; he is the doer.' However, in India, God is also worshipped in a feminine form. The word 'Durga' means fortress. Durga is the power that creates, sustains, and destroys this fortress-like world. The power through which the body, mind, and nature are created, operated, and destroyed is known as Durga.

From a mythological perspective, it can be said that three energies were born from the vibrations of this Durga shakti – Brahma, Vishnu, and Mahesh. Brahma signifies the creator, Vishnu the sustainer, and Shiva the destroyer. They are with form and also formless. It is like a tree hidden within a seed, even though it is invisible to our eyes. Just because we cannot see it does not mean that the tree does not exist within the

seed. The tree becomes visible only when the seed sprouts.

There is a mythological story about a demon named Mahishasura. He performed intense penance and was granted a boon that no god or demon could kill him. Consequently, he wreaked havoc everywhere. All the gods prayed to Shiva, asking for protection from the demon. Shiva, along with Brahma and Vishnu, worshipped the Goddess, resulting in the emergence of a powerful entity that had the form of a woman and eight arms. The eight arms symbolise power that extends in all eight directions; thus, she is called Durga. Each of Durga's eight arms holds a unique weapon, signifying a distinct facet of her power. The lotus in one hand represents bliss, the conch shell in another signifies knowledge, and the trident

she wields symbolises the three qualities – sattva, rajas, and tamas. Her bow signifies aim or focus, which should be self-directed or introspective, while the sword represents discernment. The spear symbolises concentration and focus, and the gesture of the first hand signifies blessing, assuring the seeker not to worry.

As the Goddess takes on different forms, she embodies different aspects. When she adopts a fierce form to sublimates demons, she is known as Kali. When she blesses, she is known as Mangala. When she creates everything from herself, she is Goddess Kushi-manda. By giving birth to Kartikeya, she becomes Skandamata. After killing Mahishasura and upon the gods' prayers, she relinquished her fierce form and became calm; then she was named Katyayani.

The tale of Mahishasura is essentially the narrative of a seeker. You possess

power, too, but if you misuse it, you become a demon. Wealth, strength, and knowledge are all powers that should be wielded judiciously. Kama, krodh, sobh, mada, moh and matsarya – lust, anger, jealousy, greed, ego, and attachment – can metamorphose one into a demon. Who is Mahishasura? Your subconscious mind. All sins and virtues reside in this subconscious mind. Mahish means fear. Ignorance and fear are symbolised by the colour black. Knowledge is symbolised by radiance, effulgence and brightness. Ignorance, attachment, sin, fear, desires, and possessiveness take the form of Mahishasura and cause distress. How can they be eradicated? For this, the Goddess needs to be awakened. By awakening this power through spiritual practice, you can sublimates the demon Mahishasura dwelling in your subconscious mind. When it awakens, it sublimates your subconscious mind's Mahishasura of darkness and fear.

Sacredspace



There is one thing, and only one thing, in which it is granted to you to be free in life, all else being beyond your power: that is to recognise and profess the truth.

Leo Tolstoy



THE SPEAKING TREE



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Up in flames

Ten fatalities in overnight Delhi fires reflect poorly on CM Kejriwal, who is busy campaigning

A tragedy of the highest order and an act of unpardonable negligence by civic authorities: Two blazes in Delhi have claimed 10 lives in separate incidents. A fire broke out late on Saturday at a children's hospital in East Delhi, resulting in the death of seven babies. The other incident, in the same district, occurred in the early hours of Sunday when three persons were killed in a fire that engulfed a residential building. The hospital fire which burnt seven infants alive is a horrible incident. The Capital, grappling with these tragedies, finds itself in grief and introspection. The Delhi incidents come on the heels of another inferno in Gujarat, where 27 children were charred to death in a gaming arcade. It is summer when, understandably, Delhi is more prone to fire incidents. Before the blame game starts and accountability fixed, someone in the Delhi Government must own moral responsibility and strict action should be taken against those who played with human lives. Prima facie it is a case of utter negligence as oxygen cylinders stored on the ground floor burst open, though the fire may have been triggered by a short circuit incident. Safety protocols exist only on paper and the authorities concerned look the other way when it comes to complying with the norms. Often, fire protocols that mandate safety measures are flouted at will, including fire drills which never happen. In a particularly devastating case, an entire family perished due to a fire caused by an electrical short circuit. Firefighters, despite their best efforts, face significant challenges due to narrow approach lanes and inadequate water supply in certain areas.



These tragic incidents have sparked a public outcry for improved fire safety regulations and more robust enforcement of existing laws. Amidst this sorrow and anger, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's absence has not gone unnoticed. Currently out on interim bail and engrossed in election campaigns in Punjab, his stance that he can manage Delhi's affairs from within jail has become a contentious issue. This claim, though technically plausible with today's technology, seems detached from ground realities that demand immediate and hands-on governance. The Chief Minister's current focus on electioneering in another State raises legitimate concerns about where his priorities lie and whether he can adequately address the urgent needs of Delhi while physically away from home and office. Indeed, the responsibility for these tragic incidents is multifaceted. On the one hand, the immediate causes point to systemic issues; on the other, the wider accountability lies with the city's administration and leadership. But whether it is the Ghatkopar tragedy, the gaming arcade fire or the Delhi blaze, we learn nothing from these incidents. After the initial hue and cry, everything is normalised and life goes on. It is time we at least ensure proper fire audits of at least hospitals and schools and do not put children's lives at risk. Hope our activist Chief Minister will take action and things will improve in the Capital before it is too late.

PICTALK

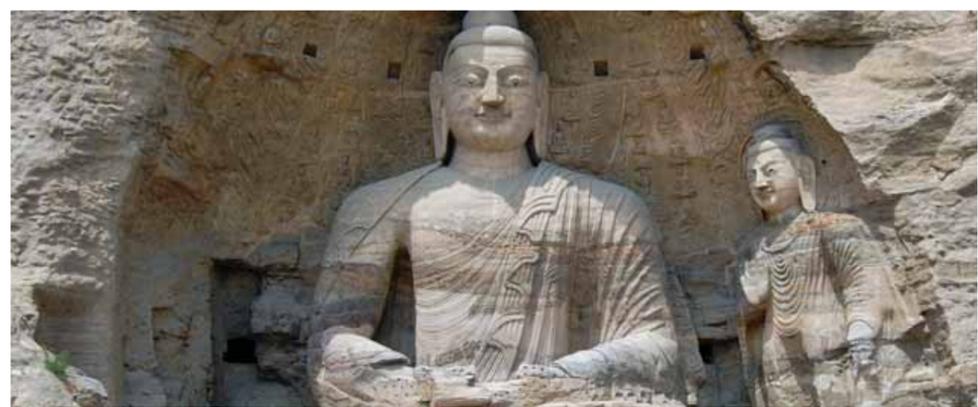


A man feeds pigeons and crows on a hot summer day, in New Delhi

The relevance of Buddha's teachings in the contemporary world is profound. His principles of non-violence and compassion offer a path toward greater harmony in a world often plagued by conflict. The Buddha's teachings also emphasise respect for all forms of life and interdependence, principles crucial for addressing today's environmental challenges. Embracing these values fosters sustainable practices and a deeper connection with nature. Ethical living, as outlined in the Buddha's Eightfold Path, remains pertinent in personal, professional and societal contexts, promoting integrity and cooperation.

Practitioners of this philosophy such as the Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, alias Thich Nhat Hanh, have advanced the principles of non-violence, compassion and mindfulness to promote global peace. Their "Engaged Buddhism" encourages integrating mindfulness into everyday life and social activism, advocating for peaceful conflict resolution and environmental care. His teachings on deep listening and loving speech, help bridge divides and heal communities. Similarly, the Tibetan spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama promotes interfaith dialogue, compassion and ethical responsibility, inspiring global movements for human rights and sustainability. These leaders illustrate how ancient Buddhist principles can address modern challenges, fostering a culture of peace and understanding worldwide.

Nobel Laureate Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore drew inspiration from Buddhism, which can be seen in his work. His vision of universal humanism aligns with the Buddha's teachings of compassion and loving-kindness. Tagore's works often reflect themes of inner peace and self-realization, akin to Buddhist concepts. His holistic approach to education also emphasised the development of the whole person and mirrored the Buddhist focus on the cultivation of wisdom. Buddha's teachings emphasise inclusivity, compassion and the inherent potential for enlightenment in everyone, regardless of



RAJDEEP PATHAK

Buddhist influence on Tagore's work

Gurudev drew heavily from Buddha's teachings on non-violence and respect for all life, which resonate deeply in a world starved for peace, offering tranquillity

social status. He rejected the caste system, asserting the importance of ethical behaviour over birthright. British Historian and author Karen Armstrong notes that Buddha challenged the social and religious norms of his time by not endorsing the caste system. Even Buddha's monastic community, the 'Sangha', welcomed individuals from all backgrounds, promoting spiritual equality and inclusiveness.

In one of his plays "Chandalika," Tagore articulates the notion of oneness through the character of Prakriti, a woman from the untouchable caste and Ananda, a revered Buddhist monk. Drawing inspiration from Buddhist scriptures, Tagore reimagines the narrative to explore the enduring struggle against societal divisions, particularly the historical plight of untouchables in ancient India. Ananda's humble acceptance of water from Prakriti poignantly rejects caste prejudice and acknowledges her intrinsic dignity. Despite Prakriti's attempt to ensnare Ananda with a spell in a desperate bid for affection, his unwavering faith in Buddha's teachings serves as a beacon of purity. Divine intervention ultimately frees Ananda from the enchantment, symbolising the triumph of spiritual integrity over worldly desires - which is one of the characteristics of



BUDDHA'S TEACHINGS EMPHASISE INCLUSIVITY, COMPASSION AND THE INHERENT POTENTIAL FOR ENLIGHTENMENT IN EVERYONE. HE REJECTED THE CASTE SYSTEM, ASSERTING THE IMPORTANCE OF ETHICAL BEHAVIOUR OVER BIRTHRIGHT

meditation in Buddhism. Through Tagore's lyrical prose, the story transcends its narrative framework, evolving into a profound meditation on the enduring power of love, redemption and the unity that connects all souls. This legacy, left by Buddha, urges his followers to break free from societal constraints, form a 'Sangha', and become messengers of peace.

Further, Tagore uses Prakriti's character elevating her to question societal norms restricting the freedom of women and thereby restoring her own identity. In his bid, Ananda's compassionate attitude — a specific characteristic of the Buddhist philosophy — rekindles Prakriti's sense of self-worth, asserting that all humans are fundamentally equal. The water she pours on Ananda's hands symbolises her purity and love, as well as his boundless benevolence and humanity. Tagore explores the themes of spirituality and untouchability through the symbolic union (read elevation) of Prakriti through the medium of Ananda. This (union) represents the harmony between man and woman, purity and impurity and spirituality and passion. Tagore uses this synthesis to depict a balanced and civilised society. Similarly, the Buddha emphasised the importance of compassion (karuna) and loving-kindness (metta) towards all

beings, advocating for empathy and support within the community, especially towards those who are suffering or marginalised.

His First Noble Truth, addressing 'dukkha' (suffering), underscored the universal human experience of suffering, fostering a shared commitment to alleviating it for everyone. To this, Thich Nhat Hanh reflects, "Understanding suffering gives rise to compassion and from compassion, understanding deepens" (The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching). Buddha's teachings on right livelihood and ethical behaviour promoted social justice and fairness, contributing to a more inclusive and compassionate society.

In Buddhist philosophy, the 'Middle Way' focuses on avoiding extremes and finding balance, a principle reflected in Rabindranath Tagore's works. For example, in his play "The King of the Dark Chamber," ('Raja' in Bengali), Tagore explores the themes of light and darkness and ignorance and enlightenment, mirroring the Buddhist search for harmony. The main character's journey to understand and accept both the light and dark aspects of life represents the Middle Way's emphasis on balance.

(The writer is Programme Executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

GUIDELINES FOR A HEALTHY LIFE

Madam — Apropos the news story "Key takeaways from ICMR's new dietary guidelines," published on May 27, this is my response. The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and the National Institute of Nutrition (NIN) have released new dietary guidelines to address the significant burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in India. With 56.4 per cent of diseases linked to poor dietary habits, these guidelines aim to promote healthier eating and lifestyle choices. The recommendations emphasise a balanced diet incorporating a variety of food groups, with a focus on whole grains, millets and natural protein sources. Limiting fat intake to 30 per cent of daily calories and including fresh vegetables and fruits in every meal are also crucial.

In addition to dietary changes, the guidelines highlight the importance of regular physical activity—at least 30-45 minutes for adults and 60 minutes for children. Special advice for pregnant and lactating women includes exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months. For cooking and storage, using air fryers, granite-coated utensils and earthen pots is recommended to maintain nutritional quality and safety.

Aman Kumar | Dhanbad

LIVE HAPPILY ANONYMOUSLY

Madam — Apropos the news story "Embracing silence in the age of social media," published on May 27, this is my response. Recently, I came across a famous quote by Khalil Gibran: "Travel and tell no one; live a true love story and tell no one; live happily and tell no one; people ruin beautiful things." This reminded me of the cautionary advice from our elders to avoid flaunting good fortune to ward off the evil eye. Back then, we cherished and shared our joys within close circles.

The times have changed. The shift from letters to emails marked a significant transition in communication, though Government and corporate sectors still

Chabahar's strategic masterstroke



Apropos the news story "India-Iran revitalise Chabahar Port," published on May 27, this is my response. The recent 10-year, \$370 million agreement between India and Iran to develop the Chabahar Port marks a significant milestone in regional connectivity and economic collaboration. As an avid newspaper reader, I see this project as a testament to

India's strategic foresight. Chabahar not only offers India a crucial gateway to Afghanistan and Central Asia but also provides an alternative route that bypasses Pakistan, mitigating geopolitical roadblocks.

The port's strategic location on Iran's south-eastern coast enhances India's regional influence, countering China's dominance with its Belt and Road Initiative. Moreover, Chabahar offers Afghanistan a viable alternative to the Karachi Port, potentially fostering greater economic stability in the region. Despite the hurdles posed by US sanctions and regional instability, India's commitment to Chabahar underscores its readiness to navigate complex diplomatic landscapes. This port symbolises India's assertive global stance, promoting regional stability and economic growth through enhanced connectivity.

Roshan Daa | Rourkela

cling to physical signatures for validation. Despite technological advances, the reluctance to embrace complete digital transformation persists, often due to the sender's unfamiliarity with digital tools. Reflecting on the past, I recall the anticipation of waiting for responses to my manuscript submissions. Today, a quick rejection email highlights the impersonal nature of modern communication. Social media's omnipresence underscores this shift, contrasting starkly with Gibran's timeless wisdom. In an age where oversharing is the norm, his advice feels both radical and refreshing, challenging our constant urge to broadcast every aspect of our lives.

Riya Aggarwal | Jind

INNER STRENGTH HELPS ENJOY LIFE

Madam — Apropos the news story "Strategies for Inner Peace and Empowerment," published on May 27, this is my response. Are we pursuing an illusion, like the golden deer of the Ramayana? This chase often feels like a self-destructive mission, driven by a mind over-

whelmed with 70,000 thoughts a day. Our lack of focus and the influence of negative environments and unhealthy habits cloud our judgment. I understand this deeply, having battled alcoholism myself. Recovery through Sudarshan Kriya and Pranayama showed me the importance of a strong mind and healthy surroundings. Effective time management is crucial. Techniques like the POSEC method help us prioritise, while a SWOT analysis and delegation aid efficiency. Tackling tough tasks first and maintaining flexibility prevent burnout. Developing hobbies and practicing gratitude can transform our outlook. To quiet our minds, we should embrace activities like walking, talking through problems and pursuing passions. Exercise and cold baths can invigorate our spirits. Ultimately, we must accept our inner strength, declutter our minds and cultivate positivity to truly celebrate life.

Priyanka Singh | Lucknow

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Science archives preserve our scientific legacy

Establishing a National Science Archives Centre in India is crucial to safeguarding our scientific heritage for future generations

As an ever-evolving discipline, science continually shapes our understanding of the world and our place within it. Each discovery, innovation and technological advancement contributes to the present and builds the foundation for future generations. Most scientific activity in our laboratories may become part of tomorrow's history. People who have seen and overcome the COVID-19 pandemic may understand the hardships people faced during the pandemic. The innovations and discoveries developed to combat the global pandemic are now part of scientific history. Similar is the case with most of our scientific discoveries and inventions. Scientific knowledge is inherently cumulative. Each generation of scientists builds upon the work of their predecessors, advancing our understanding of complex phenomena. For instance, the development of quantum mechanics in the early 20th century paved the way for modern advancements in quantum computing. Scientific developments also



help in driving the economy and civilisations. We can see the imprint of the scientific strength of our pre-historic period through archaeological pieces of evidence. Science is a critical component of our cultural and intellectual heritage. It reflects our collective curiosity, ingenuity and drive to understand the world around us. Historical scientific documents, such as Darwin's notes on evolution or Einstein's manuscripts on relativity, are valuable for their scientific content and cultural artefacts that highlight the intellectual milestones of humanity. Preserved scientific materials handled by great scientists serve as invaluable research and educational resources. Original research papers, laboratory notebooks, communications with contemporary researchers and policymakers, email communications and prototype instruments can

highlight the pain the researchers undertook during that time. It can act as an inspiration for future researchers to move forward. Unfortunately, we dig into the past of a scientist only when their work gets global recognition. By this time, we might have lost all resources related to the discovery except for the research publications available on the public database. Science archives are essential for preserving human knowledge's vast and intricate tapestry. They store various materials, including research notes, correspondence between scientists, experimental data, publications and even artefacts such as laboratory equipment and specimens. This preservation is critical because it ensures that valuable scientific information is not lost over time. For example, the archives of the Royal Society in London contain records dating back to the 17th century, chronicling the early days of modern science. These documents provide insights into the time's experimental techniques and intellectual debates, allowing historians and scientists to trace the evolution of scientific

thought and practice. In India, the Archives at NCBS (https://archives.ncbs.res.in/) serve as a novel initiative to preserve the scientific history of modern India. The centre has over 250,000 processed objects across 30+ collections in various forms, ranging from paper-based manuscripts to negatives to photographs, books, fine art, audio recordings, scientific equipment, letters and field and lab notes.

The documents stored in volatile electronic or digital storage are susceptible to being permanently erased by a single button press or the malfunction of a hard drive. If these artefacts are not systematically conserved, they will be permanently lost, leading to what has been referred to as the Digital Dark Age. The Government should also make it mandatory for every researcher to periodically submit the documents to archives so that age and memory don't fade the significance of their research work.

(The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru; views are personal)



BIJU DHARMAPALAN



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MITIGATING THE E-WASTE CRISIS

It can be tackled with innovations, regulations and corporate responsibility



SHAINY SHARMA

Today with the advancements in the field of science and technology, computers and other mobile devices have become such an integral part of everyone's work and personal lives that it is hard to imagine life without them. Not only that, but along with that the problem of e-waste continues to grow every year as consumers frequently upgrade their gadgets leading to the high turnover of electronic devices. E-waste or electronic waste refers to discarded electronic devices and appliances that have reached the end of their useful life or are no longer wanted by their owners. It is one of the significant problems due to its complex composition, rapid generation and the challenges it poses to human health and the environment. Due to the presence of various toxic substances such as lead, mercury and cadmium present in batteries and semiconductors can cause neurological damage and can even damage the kidneys and bones. Not only this the toxic chemicals released from such wastes can leach into soil, making it infertile and unsafe for agriculture.

Not only will the soil get contaminated but the other sources of the environment that is water and air will also be affected badly as improper disposition of e-wastes can contaminate the waterbodies thereby affecting the water supplies and aquatic life and; toxic fumes released for extracting valuable metals will contribute to respiratory problems. It is believed that airborne toxins can travel long distances, affecting air quality and human health. Quite often in many developing countries, informal e-waste recycling activity is a significant source of income. Such activities are often unregulated and the workers are exposed to high levels of toxic substances without adequate protection.



This exposure can lead to respiratory problems, skin disorders and other severe health issues. The improper disposal and recycling of e-waste contribute to greenhouse gas emissions thereby contributing to environmental degradation and increased carbon footprints. According to the Global E-waste Monitor 2020, the world generated 53.6 million metric tons of e-waste in 2019 and this figure is expected to grow to 74.7 million metric tons by 2030. Only a fraction of this waste is properly recycled, with much ending up in landfills posing significant environmental and health risks.

Proper recycling of such wastes is the only solution that can help recover valuable materials and reduce the need for new resource extraction and the same is possible only and only when the Government enacts and enforces stringent regulations for e-waste management, including proper collection, recycling and disposal practices such as e-waste collection drives and recycling centres to facilitate proper disposal. Manufacturers should also be held responsible for the entire lifecycle of their products, including take-back programs and recycling initiatives. Investing in advanced recycling technologies can help improve the efficiency and safety of extracting valuable materials from e-waste. Encouraging the manufacturers to design such products that are easier to recycle, repair and upgrade can reduce e-waste generation. Educating consumers at the same time about the importance of proper e-waste disposal and the available recycling options can reduce improper disposal practices. Establishing international standards for e-waste management can help ensure safe and efficient recycling practices worldwide. Strengthening international regulations to prevent the illegal export of e-waste to developing countries where it is often processed unsafely. Remember, from gadgets to green initiatives, every individual living on this planet should recycle their e-waste and pave the way for a cleaner greener tomorrow.

(The writer is an educator, views are personal)

Raisi's legacy endures in Iran, despite West

Over three million mourners gather in Mashhad to honour the late President Raisi. The hold of hardliners in the country is much stronger than the West might think



NILANTHA LANGAMUWA

Over three million Iranians have gathered in Mashhad, Iran's second-largest city, to honour the late President Raisi, who tragically perished in a helicopter crash along with eight others. The massive turnout, which filled the streets to capacity, reflects the deep respect and admiration many citizens held for Raisi, contradicting assertions by Washington that he was widely despised. Raisi's interment at the holy shrine of Imam Reza, a significant and unprecedented honour for a political leader, accentuates his esteemed status in the country. This unprecedented event defies the distorted and often misunderstood sentiments of the Iranian populace towards their leaders. Often, those who are demarcating the enemies, forcing others to accept their version of the story as gospel truth, are met with a ground reality that tells us the exact opposite.

The circumstances of the incident, however, have fuelled a wave of conspiracy theories. Moments after the crash, US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer declared there was no evidence of foul play, citing intelligence officials, despite Iran's rescue teams not yet having reached the crash site. Subsequently, some blame the secret organisation of Iran's arch-enemy State, Israel's Mossad. Others speculate that the death was the result of an inside job. However, this tragedy marked a significant event not only in Iranian politics but in the constantly growing West versus Rest dynamic, which is now more strongly questioning the partiality of international organisations while strengthening the established strong alternatives such as BRICS and the New Development Bank. Iran is playing a pivotal role in this.

Meanwhile, a segment of Western media recently published a series of stories about the helicopter crash suggesting that American sanctions have severely hindered Iran's ability to maintain its fleet of American-manufactured helicopters. It was suggested that a technical failure caused the crash, but so far there's no evidence to support this. The helicopter was one of three Bell 214 models; the other two returned safely, but President Raisi's did not. An Iranian defence firm, under the Iranian Aviation Industries Organisation (IAIO), specialises in maintaining and reverse-engineering US-model helicopters for Iran's military and the IRGC. Added to the US Department of the Treasury's SDN list in January 2018, its assets under US jurisdiction are frozen and transactions with US parties are prohibited under Executive Order 13382, targeting WMD proliferators. However, contrary to suggestions that Raisi's helicopter was overloaded and that this put undue strain on its engines, the aircraft was not operating beyond its capacity. The helicopter was carrying nine passengers and crew combined, well within its maximum capacity of 15 persons. The notion that the helicopter's age contributed significantly to the crash is also questionable. While the media has painted the Bell 214 as ancient, in reality, it was built in 1994 by Bell Helicopter Textron in Canada. With a global average age for commercial helicopters at around 23 years, Raisi's helicopter, though slightly older, was not exceptionally outdated. Moreover, helicopters used for presidential transport typically receive meticulous maintenance.

As Stephen D. Bryen, a leading expert on technology security who led the Pentagon's technology policy efforts during the Reagan



PRESIDENT RAISI WAS FOCUSED ON COOLING DOWN BORDER TENSIONS AND EXTENDING HIS DIPLOMATIC OUTREACH TO NEIGHBOURING ARAB COUNTRIES. HIS CHOSEN FOREIGN MINISTER, AMIR ABDOLLAHIAN, WHO ALSO PASSED AWAY WITH HIM, WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN REENGINEERING IRANIAN FOREIGN POLICY

administration, pointed out, the engines of Raisi's helicopter, Pratt and Whitney PT6Ts, are also Canadian-made and widely regarded for their reliability. The implication that the helicopter's maintenance was compromised due to sanctions lacks substantiation, especially considering the high-profile nature of the passengers. The critical question of whether Canada currently supplies spare parts to Iran remains unclear, adding another layer of complexity to the narrative. Nonetheless, the assertions of technical failure due to sanctions remain speculative without concrete evidence and the focus should be on a thorough and unbiased investigation into the actual causes of the crash.

President Raisi was focused on cooling down border tensions and extending his diplomatic outreach to neighbouring Arab countries. His chosen Foreign Minister, Amir-Abdollahian, who also passed away with him, was instrumental in reengineering Iranian foreign policy. A notable example of this effort was the steps taken to normalise Iran-Saudi Arabia diplomatic relations. This Chinese-backed diplomatic initiative is crucial for reshaping the West Asian diplomatic terrain. Similarly, the recent irrigation project constructed across the Aras River, which Raisi jointly inaugurated with his counterpart in Baku, is a demonstration of this new diplomatic approach.

The Aras River, spanning 1,072 km, originates in Eastern Turkey and flows along several borders: Turkey and Armenia, Turkey and Azerbaijan, Iran and Azerbaijan and through Azerbaijan into the Kura River. This region, a small riverine area in the Caucasus between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, has witnessed numerous tragedies, including the often-overlooked Armenian Genocide, which claimed around 1.5 million lives. The 689 km Iran-Azerbaijan border, demarcated by the Aras River, highlights the geopolitical sensitivity and strategic importance of this area. After the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991, Azerbaijan gained independence and assumed control of part of the Iran-Soviet border, leading to

escalating disputes. The 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War saw Azerbaijan seize full control of the western border with Iran, heightening tensions. Relations between Iran and Azerbaijan slightly improved under President Hassan Rouhani, but Baku never hesitated to provide Israel with a strategic opportunity. Israel strengthened its alliance with Azerbaijan, turning it into a significant market for advanced weaponry. The 2020 conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh resulted in approximately 5,700 deaths, with Israel supplying a significant portion of Azerbaijan's arms, highlighting the deepening strategic ties between the two nations. As a result, Azerbaijan was able to absorb the Artsakh Republic, also known as Nagorno-Karabakh, a self-proclaimed republic dissolved in January this year.

In exchange for Israeli weapons, Azerbaijan provided oil. Ilham Aliyev, president since 2003, was re-elected for a fifth term on February 7 with over 92 per cent of the vote. Aliyev, who succeeded his father, Heydar Aliyev, a former Soviet KGB officer, has strengthened Azerbaijan's ties with Israel. Aliyev amended the constitution in 2009 to permit unlimited presidential terms and, in 2016, extended the presidential term from five to seven years. Azerbaijan can be seen as a family-run State prioritising clan interests, yet Aliyev has skillfully navigated relations with Eastern and Western powers to serve his political aims. It is not hyperbole to say Aliyev is a skilled Machiavellian politician in contemporary politics. An investigation by Israeli media outlet Haaretz published recently detailed the strategic relationship between Israel and Azerbaijan, through which Tel Aviv has supplied Baku with billions of dollars worth of weapons in exchange for "oil and access to Iran."

This extensive military cooperation underscores the depth of the strategic alliance between the two nations. Azerbaijan has reportedly permitted Israel's Mossad intelligence agency to establish a presence in the country to monitor Iran, its southern neighbour. Additionally,

Azerbaijan has facilitated the setup of an airfield for Israel to potentially strike Iranian nuclear facilities from its territory. In exchange, Azerbaijan receives the most advanced weapons, including ballistic missiles, air defence systems and kamikaze drones. However, as Yossi Melman, a noted Israeli writer and journalist who is an expert on intelligence and strategic affairs, affirmed, it is unlikely for Israel, particularly Mossad, to be involved in such an assassination as it never targets such individuals. But one should not forget that it was under President Raisi that Iran launched its first-ever direct attack on Israel, the single largest drone attack ever carried out by any country.

President Raisi and his top diplomat left a legacy far greater than what they achieved while in power. Their deaths are more impactful than the assassination of President Mohammad Ali Rajaei and Prime Minister Mohammad Javad Bahonar, who were cut short in an explosion set by the Mojahedin-e Khalq Organisation, in August 1981. Despite expectations of seclusion and controversy, Raisi navigated international relations adeptly, maintaining uranium enrichment and escalating tensions with the West, but also restoring ties with Saudi Arabia, which advanced peace talks in Yemen and prevented military escalation.

This diplomatic success, seen as strategic pragmatism, opened dialogue with other regional powers and reduced tensions. Raisi revived the Chabahar port deal with India, defying US sanctions and facilitated a major prisoner exchange with the US, demonstrating diplomatic flexibility. Though Iran was blamed for supporting Hamas in the October 2023 attacks on Israel, no concrete evidence linked Iran directly, yet its backing of such groups has increased its regional influence and garnered support for Palestinians from other Arab countries. Iran lost two great politicians, but it is hard to assume it will change the Iranian political structure rather it will be strengthened.

(The writer is a Sri Lankan journalist and author. Views are personal)

The crisis in Kerala's State-run hospitals runs deep

The alarming frequency of medical mishaps in Kerala's Government hospitals paints a dire picture of the State's healthcare system

The day is not far off when all the Government-run hospitals in Kerala will spot the hoarding "Patients, enter at your own risk". This is not an exaggerated Statement as botched-up surgeries and wrong diagnoses have become the hallmarks of State-run hospitals.

Recently, a four-year-old girl was admitted to Government Medical College Hospital in Kozhikode for the removal of her sixth finger. However, the doctor who performed the surgery operated on her tongue while leaving the finger untouched. Though her parents alerted the hospital authorities, the initial reaction was denial of the faux pas by the latter. Remember, the Kozhikode Medical College



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

and Hospital is a most sought-after institution by prospective medical students! The police have filed a FIR against Bejohn Johnson, the doctor who performed the surgery and has slapped charges on him under IPC Sections 336 (endangering the life or personal safety of others) and 337 (causing hurt by an act endangering the life or personal safety of others). In all probability, the general public

would forget this incident as more and more cases like this come up daily from the Government hospitals.

Controversies are not new to the GMCH Kozhikode. In 2023 July, it was reported that a woman who underwent a caesarian in the hospital in 2017 developed severe pain in her abdomen. It was found that a pair of forceps was accidentally left in her stomach after the 2017 surgery and she was living with the same till acute pain made her approach the hospital in 2023. The hospital authorities found to their surprise that Harshinia, the patient, had a pair of mosquito to artery forceps in her stomach post the caesarian which was caused by medical negligence. The police as well as the investigating doctors con-

firmed the finding and sent their reports to the minister for health Veena George. The minister, a former newsreader in a private TV channel who made a lateral entry into the CPI(M) is yet to take any action on the incident while Harshinia is staging a sit-in in front of the medical college hospital demanding solatium. The standard reply given by the Department of Health is that it was an isolated incident that is being blown out of proportion by vested interests.

In yet another shocking incident, a patient admitted to the ICU post-surgery was raped and molested by a hospital employee who is a trade union leader affiliated with the CPI(M). The nursing officer who reported the matter to the

higher authorities was shunted out to a far-off hospital while the rapist is walking free in search of his next victim. Even doctors and nurses are not free from attacks by patients and their relations. In May 2023, Vandana Das, a 22-year-old doctor working as an intern in Kottarakkara Government Hospital was stabbed to death by a drug addict suffering from withdrawal paranoia while the police and her colleagues remained mute spectators. Even as this article is written, here comes a report from GMCH Kozhikode about a complaint from a patient. The implant meant for another patient was wrongly inserted into the complainant's hand. These events are sufficient to prove the CPI(M)'s claim that

Kerala is the State with the best healthcare facilities is a blatant lie. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan exhorts people from other States and countries to visit Kerala for world-class health care.

The authenticity of the Kerala Model of Development and Health Care has come down like a pack of cards. According to senior doctors who have been in Government service for more than three decades, the ruling CPI(M) itself is behind the collapse of Kerala's health sector. "The CPI(M) owns super speciality hospitals across the State named after its late leaders. Since the State-run hospitals have collapsed, the party can make a giant kill by forcing the patients to these party-run hospitals which are no different from corporate

hospitals. The CPI(M) is the leader of the hospital mafia in Kerala," said a veteran doctor. There are not enough specialist doctors to meet the requirements of patients. The trust deficit between doctors and the Government has reached a point of no return.

Kerala is one of the States that saw maximum casualties during the COVID-19 pandemic though the Government managed to cover up the details with its carrot-and-stick policy. The claims by both the ministers K K Shylaja (2016-2021) and Veena George (2021-till date) were found to be stranger than fiction as nearly one lakh deaths have been reported from the State since the pandemic was detected for the first time in 2020. Though the Kerala

Government declared time and again that the State would develop its vaccine, K-Vaccine, the announcement remains on paper. The State of health in Kerala is such that whenever he is afflicted with a common cold, Pinarayi Vijayan takes the first available flight to the USA where Mayo Clinic is his favourite destination. The same is the case with ministers as well as CPI(M) leaders who have an inherent weakness for anything associated with the imperialists. While the chief minister himself asks people from other countries to come to Kerala for medical treatment, he is not sure about the quality of treatment in the State-run hospitals.

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

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Cancer challenge

Vulnerability of younger people worrying

A new study has concluded that cancer is increasingly affecting younger people in India. According to the Cancer Mukta Bharat Foundation, launched by a group of oncologists, 20 per cent of the cancer cases in the country are being detected in men and women below the age of 40; around 60 per cent of these patients are men. The most prevalent cases are of head and neck cancer (26 per cent), followed by gastrointestinal cancer (16 per cent), breast cancer (15 per cent) and blood cancer (9 per cent).

Experts have linked the rising risk of cancer in the younger generation with obesity, a sedentary lifestyle and higher consumption of ultra-processed food, besides tobacco and alcohol. Another worrying factor is the late detection of cancer in two-thirds of the cases, indicating low levels of awareness about screening.

India, described as 'the cancer capital of the world' in a recent report released by a leading multinational healthcare group, records more than a million new cases every year. The surge is estimated to surpass the global average by 2025. A focused approach is needed to handle cases of people under 40, who form an important segment of the working-age population. The case burden can be reduced by lifestyle modification and effective screening strategies that detect cancer in the early stages. India needs to be well prepared for this silent epidemic, which threatens to reverse the economic gains made during its remarkable post-Covid recovery. Affordable and effective cancer care should be prioritised. Cancer research, too, must get the importance it deserves. Findings of various studies, such as the one which says that people with tattoos are at a higher risk of developing blood cancer, need to be widely publicised so as to raise awareness. A multipronged strategy can help India strongly combat the emperor of all maladies.

Cannes acclaim

Talent of Indian filmmakers, financing in focus

INDIA's presence at the 77th Cannes Film Festival marked a significant milestone for its independent filmmakers. This year, India celebrated multiple firsts, showcasing its film industry's immense talent and potential on a global platform. The festival's recognition of Indian films and artistes is cause for national pride, highlighting their artistic excellence and the evolving landscape of cinema.

Payal Kapadia's *All We Imagine as Light* securing the prestigious Grand Prix, the festival's second-highest honour, is a landmark achievement. This film's nomination in the main category — the first for India in 30 years — represents a noteworthy breakthrough for our cinema. Kapadia's film offers a nuanced perspective that challenges conventional narratives. Anasuya Sengupta becoming the first Indian actor to receive the Best Actress award in the Un Certain Regard segment for her role in *The Shameless* exemplifies the growing appreciation of Indian talent beyond Bollywood. Chidananda S Naik's *Sunflowers Were the First Ones to Know*, which won the La Cined top prize for best short film, underscores the creative prowess of emerging filmmakers. The accolades extended to the technical side, with cinematographer Santosh Sivan receiving the Pierre Angénieux ExcelLens in Cinematography award — the first Asian to receive this honour.

While commercial successes like *RRR* and *Pushpa: The Rise* have garnered global attention, the wins at Cannes are a testament to the diversity and depth of Indian cinema. Notably, the success of these films was made possible through innovative financing strategies, including crowd-funding, international co-production and support from the government in the form of incentives. These funding avenues were instrumental in bringing genre-bending works to life, allowing filmmakers to explore the broader spectrum of Indian culture and creativity. Sustained support and promotion of indie films are essential to expanding India's presence on the world stage.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, WEDNESDAY, MAY 28, 1924

The Lee Commission report

THE report of the Royal Commission on the Superior Services in India has been just published. It was appointed by the Royal Command on June 15, 1923, with Viscount Lee as Chairman and Sir Reginald Craddock, Sir Cyril Jackson, NM Samarth, Sir Mahmud Habibulla, RB Harikishan Kaul, David Patrie, Bhubendranath Basu and Reginald Coupland as members. In the terms of reference made to the Commission, it was stated that with regard to the declared policy of the increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration and in view of the experience gained of the operation of the system of government established by the Government of India Act in respect of the Superior Services of India, the Commission should enquire into: (1) the organisation and general conditions of service, financial and otherwise, of the Superior Civil Services of India; (2) the possibility of transferring immediately or gradually any of their present duties and functions to services constituted on a provincial basis; and (3) the recruitment of Europeans and Indians, respectively, for which provision should be made under the Constitution established by the said Act and the best method of ensuring and maintaining such recruitment; and make recommendations. The Commission met at Delhi on November 4, 1923, and after a rapid tour through the principle centres of India, submitted the report in a comparatively short period. The main part of the report deals with the appointment and control of the service and the pay and allowances. The question of pay and allowances is more elaborately dealt with than the other.

Limitations of Modi's Punjab outreach

The bigger challenge for the PM lies in his economic policies and the ongoing farmers' protests



SURINDER S JODHKA
PROFESSOR, CENTRE FOR THE
STUDY OF SOCIAL SYSTEMS, JNU

PUNJAB will go to the polls on June 1 to elect representatives for 13 Lok Sabha seats. Last week, Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed three rallies in the state. As expected of BJP leaders and particularly PM Modi, he pitched his appeal in emotional idioms, underlining his personal bonding with Punjab. Wearing a *kesri*-coloured turban, he reminded Punjabis (read Sikhs) that one of the Panj Pyaras — Guru Gobind Singh's five beloved ones who had been baptised on Baisakhi day in 1699 — was a Gujarati. Thus, his bond with the Sikh community was that of a shared kinship (*khoon ka rishta*), he said.

Punjab has been an enigma for the Prime Minister. Defying the national trend, his appeal among the Punjabi voters has been rather limited. This is despite the fact that unlike southern states such as Kerala and Tamil Nadu, the BJP and its earlier version, the Jana Sangh, have had a stable presence in the state. Although its appeal has been mostly among urban Hindus, the party has been in power in the state in alliance with the predominantly Sikh party, the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD). It won two Lok Sabha seats in 2019. Both were constituencies with a substantial Hindu population. This time, however, the BJP is independently contesting all seats in the state.

Recognising that its identification solely with the urban Hindus limits its chances of success, the BJP has focused this time on winning over Sikh voters. To establish that it can indeed represent



BATTLEGROUND: Never before have the stakes been so high for PM Modi in Punjab. ❧

the Sikhs, it began to aggressively recruit Sikh leaders from other political parties and make them its candidates for the Lok Sabha elections, often at the cost of ignoring its own cadre. This has not been a difficult ideological proposition for the BJP as, unlike the Muslims, it sees the Sikhs as being part of the larger Hindu fold (as also does the RSS, its founding head and patron).

Though post-Partition Punjab has rarely seen large-scale communal violence, sectarian divisions have been quite sharp in the state's politics. Sikh identity politics is mostly articulated by invoking the fear of Hindu majoritarianism. The advocates of Punjabiyat, too, have mostly been Sikhs. Likewise, until recently, the urban Hindu elite of Punjab rarely identified with the regional interests and identity concerns of the state.

The story of the Hindu-Sikh divide goes back to the late 19th century and was framed by the politics of the Arya Samaj and the Singh Sabhas. The narrative survived the Jana Sangh/BJP-Akali divide. Interestingly, despite their communal hostility, the two easily aligned for pragmatic electoral reasons while contesting against the Congress, as their political con-

Punjab has been an enigma for PM Modi. Defying the national trend, his appeal among Punjabi voters has been limited.

stituencies remained exclusive.

This divide began to weaken with the Parkash Singh Badal-led SAD deciding to turn the party non-sectarian. While it continued to have sway over Sikh religious politics and controlled the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), it recruited Hindus and even gave them positions of leadership. The farmers' movement of 2020-21 also played an active role in weakening the Hindu-Sikh divide. Even though the Punjabi farmers actively invoked the lan-

guage of Sikhi, their mobilisation strategies were proactively inclusive. They also received enthusiastic support from all sections of the Punjabi society.

The success of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in the 2022 Assembly elections further showed that Punjabi voters were not keen to vote for their identities, religious or regional. With the BJP, too, changing its political idiom and presenting itself as being as much a party of the Sikhs as of the Hindus, a significant shift has occurred in the regional political arena.

While the 2024 parliamentary election in Punjab is critical for all major players, the Akalis, the AAP and the Congress, it is the most crucial election for the BJP and personally for PM Modi. It is not the first time that Modi has campaigned in Punjab. However, never before have the stakes for him been so high. What are the chances of his success? What is likely to be his biggest challenge?

In his speeches delivered at three places, he raised obvious questions about the failure of the ruling party (AAP) in the state and repeatedly raised the issues that the Sikhs have had with the Congress in the past. Despite his efforts to shift the identity of his party from being exclusive rep-

resentatives of the Hindus to that of a Hindu-Sikh party, his narrative has remained largely emotional and structured around religious and communitarian idioms. He has attempted to strike a chord with the Sikhs by his identification with the community and referring to them as a core constituent of India's national pride.

A large majority of the Sikhs would welcome such an affirmation of their nationalist credentials, given that, until recently, some leaders of the ruling regime have repeatedly conflated the Sikhs with Khalistanis or separatists. Also, Sikh/Punjabi nationalists tend to be suspicious of the BJP's anti-Pakistan rhetoric. They are happy with the opening of the Kartarpur corridor and may also be willing to give due credit to PM Modi for it, but they do not want tensions with the neighbouring country to escalate. After all, in case the temperatures rise at the border, among the first to pay the price for it would be the Punjabis once again.

The bigger challenge for Modi lies elsewhere, in his economic policies and the ongoing farmers' protests against them. While he withdrew the three farm laws after a year-long sit-in by farmers at the borders of Delhi, their discontent remains. Several of their demands remain pending and their protests continue to go unheard. They have not been allowed even to travel to Delhi to protest for their demands.

Demographically, the number of those engaged in active farming is no longer very large, perhaps less than a quarter of the entire electorate. But they have come to occupy the core of the Punjabi/Sikh sensibility. The moral weight their protests carry is felt far beyond those engaged in farming. They have also articulated a critique of the neo-liberal economic policies, which have a wider appeal, perhaps even among the urban Hindu-traders of Punjab, the traditional vote bank of the BJP. Would all this matter electorally? We will have to wait for the June 4 verdict.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

The object of oratory alone is not truth, but persuasion. — Thomas Macaulay

Moderation is the key to a fulfilling life

JAYANTI DUTTA

MY father often quoted a Bengali proverb, *Kom khao, beshi khabe*. This oxymoron of a phrase, which meant 'eat less, you will eat more', would whet our curiosity.

Recently, I came across a study involving rhesus monkeys, conducted by the National Primate Research Centre at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, US. The study began in 1989 with 76 monkeys, which were divided into two groups. One group continued having a normal diet, while the other was put on a 'calorie restriction' diet. The monkeys in the second group ate smaller meals but not so small as to cause malnutrition.

The researchers meticulously monitored the monkeys' diet and behaviour over the years. What they discovered was nothing short of extraordinary. It seemed that those monkeys which consumed fewer calories exhibited signs of slower aging compared to their counterparts which indulged in lavish feasts. Twenty years down the line, 37 per cent of the first group of monkeys on a normal diet died of age-related diseases, while only 13 per cent in the restricted diet group died. About 16 monkeys in the normal diet group became diabetic or pre-diabetic, while those in the other group were virtually free of diseases. They rarely developed heart diseases or cancer; their brains were agile and they appeared to be biologically younger. They also lived longer than the average age. Since rhesus monkeys are closely related to humans, this study is significant for us. It is not about deprivation or draconian dieting regimes. It's about finding a balance between nourishment and longevity, a concept that resonates deeply with the wisdom passed down through generations. The proverb *Kom khao beshi khabe* makes sense because if you eat less, you will live longer and thus eat more. Therein lies the beauty of ancient wisdom: it often reveals profound truths in seemingly simple phrases.

Let's approach the dinner table with the wisdom of the ages guiding our choices. Instead of mindlessly devouring one plateful after another, we should savour each bite, cherishing the flavours and nourishing our body. It's not about restriction but rather about mindful consumption, a practice that honours the delicate balance between indulgence and longevity.

As we peer through the lens of science and tradition, we begin to see a harmonious convergence of knowledge. The US monkey experiment and the Bengali folk wisdom may seem worlds apart, but their message rings clear: moderation is the key to a vibrant and fulfilling life. So, when you sit down for a meal, take a moment to reflect on the sagacity of ages past and the discoveries of modern science. In that moment, you will find a path to a healthier, happier and more nourished existence — one where you eat less, live longer and ultimately, have more of what truly matters: the richness of life itself.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Comply with safety norms

Refer to the editorial 'Rajkot tragedy'; several fire incidents, from the inferno at the Delhi hospital to the blaze at the Rajkot game zone, have been caused by negligence on the part of the authorities concerned. A lot of these mishaps are man-made. Such accidents occur because fire safety rules are often not implemented in letter and spirit. Every time a tragedy strikes, it is followed by a probe and the announcement of financial aid for the victims and the kin of the deceased. But within days, the incident is forgotten, and we move on. The administration must make sure that no industrial unit, mall, hotel or hospital functions without the requisite firefighting equipment. Ensuring compliance with the safety regulations is the key to preventing such horrors.

BAL GOVIND, NOIDA

Regulations go for a toss

With reference to the editorial 'Rajkot tragedy'; the deaths of newborns in the fire at the Delhi hospital are tragic. Unfortunately, the authorities only swing into action in the aftermath of a mishap. It takes a tragedy like this one for the government to wake up to the blatant irregularities and norm violations that lead to such accidents in the first place. The need of the hour is to make sure that such violations are detected in time and those behind the lapses are penalised. If the norms can go for a toss at medical facilities in the Capital, what happens to the safety of patients undergoing treatment at hospitals in less developed areas?

BHUPINDER KOCHHAR, PANCHKULA

Take preventive measures

Apropos of the editorial 'Rajkot tragedy'; a series of fire-related incidents in the past couple of days have snuffed out precious lives. Understandably, there is a lot of hue and cry over the avoidable loss of life. Calls for accountability are growing. The public wants steps behind the lapses punished. But what steps are being taken to make sure that such mishaps do not recur? Are the authorities identifying more establishments and medical facilities that have not been adhering to the fire safety regulations? It is imperative that the

government take preventive measures so that no more lives are lost because of negligence.

RAVINDER MITTAL, LUDHIANA

Ensure representation of women

Refer to the editorial 'Muted voices'; it is unfortunate that the voices of women in Haryana are still being muffled. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has pledged that his party, if voted to power, will reserve 50 per cent government jobs for women. But is that enough? Women and girls, not just in Haryana but in various parts of the country, enjoy far less freedom than men and boys. Women are even judged on the way they dress. The fact that only 16 of the 223 candidates in the state this time are female highlights the yawning gender divide. Affirmative action is necessary to tackle the issue. Women must have at least 33 per cent representation in social, political and economic spheres.

SUBHASH VAID, NEW DELHI

BJP's outreach to farmers

Will BJP leaders really gain anything from holding back-to-back rallies in Punjab ahead of the final phase of the General Election? The farming community of the state is not going to forgive the saffron party for the poor treatment meted out to the cultivators by the ruling regime and its failure to fulfil the demand of a legal guarantee for MSP. PM Narendra Modi has tried to evoke Sikh sentiments by claiming that had he been in power in 1971, he would have taken Kartarpur Sahib from Pakistan. The PM can do all he wants to please farmers and Sikhs, but ultimately, the people will decide the fate of the candidates.

KIRTI WADHAWAN, KANPUR

Misuse of public office

Apropos of the editorial 'Modi in Punjab'; the PM is banking on politics of religious polarisation to gain votes just days ahead of the Lok Sabha elections in the state. He has even gone as far as reopening old wounds of the Partition to win over Sikhs. The office of the PM or the CM is meant for public service. Whether it is PM Modi or the Chief Minister of a state, leaders must realise that the public office is not meant for campaigning. The misuse of office or authority to promote the parties in power does not bode well for democracy.

JAGVINDER SINGH BRAR, PATIALA

Let's assure our children they are not commodities



AVIJIT PATHAK
SOCIOLOGIST

LET me begin with the mental state of the parents of a boy I am familiar with. They hoped that their son would do extremely well in the Class XII CBSE exams. But then, his 88 per cent marks seem to have brought the entire family into a state of mourning and despair. In fact, in the age of inflated marks (imagine the 'toppers' getting 500/500), nothing — even 98 per cent marks — satisfies the parents. As I converse with them, I realise that they are unhappy; they are anxious; and they are worried about the 'future' of their son.

What adds to their nervousness is that their son could not do so well in the NEET, the screening text for getting admission in medical colleges. Will he be able to become a doctor, or even a dentist? And even if he manages to become a dentist, will he get a job in a good hospital? Or, for that matter, will he be able to earn sufficient money through his

'private practice'? There seems to be no end to their chronic nervousness and fear. They seem to have fallen into the trap of overthinking. Needless to add, their son, too, is terribly broken. Possibly, for the recovery of his self-esteem and renewal of his life-energy, he needs a qualitatively different kind of environment — an environment that understands him or recognises him as what he is; or an environment that doesn't equate his essence with his marksheet.

The boy I am referring to is not alone. There are many like him — wounded, broken and humiliated. Yes, this is a structural/societal problem — a problem characterised by the scarcity of opportunities and rising unemployment, the normalisation of hyper-competitiveness in everyday life, and the middle-class dream of achieving what a market-driven society valorises — a set of select careers that fetch money or attractive salary packages, and enables one to come closer to a mode of living the cult of consumerism prescribes. But then, this structural problem cannot be combated unless we acknowledge and empathise with the pain of the victims of this system — say, the likes of the boy I am referring to.



UNREASONABLE: In the age of inflated marks, nothing satisfies students' parents. PTI

Moreover, if we really wish to change this system, and want our children to evolve as humane, sensitive, compassionate and life-affirming beings, we need to radically alter our ways of looking at them.

In this context, let me make three points. First, let us be aware of the danger of the growing commodification of life — the way the logic of the market is fast colonising the most intimate domain of family relations. Even our own children, we begin to think, ought to evolve as 'products' — yes, the

Life has its own poetry and uncertainty, but in the name of 'safety' and 'security', we tend to transform it into straightforward mathematics.

commodities the market values and appreciates. The human essence of your child is not sufficient; she/he must be seen as a 'thing' the worth of which has to be measured through degrees, diplomas, social capital and above all, the job profile or the salary package. No wonder with an appropriate 'price tag', your child becomes your status symbol — the way your SUV or your new apartment in a gated society is. The result is that our children are living with immense mental and psychic pres-

sure. Possibly, some of them begin to think that even parental love is not unconditional; and they fall into the trap of despair and nothingness, if the market refuses to buy them. It is high time we assured our children that they are not commodities.

Second, it is terribly wrong on our part when we impose our own fear on our children. This fear emanates from the belief that many of us as conservative adults uphold — if you do not follow the crowd and walk the same path, you are in danger or are risking your life!

Hence, quite often, we pressurise our children to follow the same standardised path — opt for physics, chemistry, mathematics and biology; join the Kota factory; repress all other aptitudes and emotions; and satisfy the egos of your parents. Naturally, the idea of any other path causes immense fear and anxiety. Possibly, some of them want to become a wildlife photographer, an archaeologist, a social activist or a musician. But then, it is quite unlikely that they will be encouraged by their parents. This repression is creating a generation that is afraid of doing new things or experimenting with life. Life has its own poetry and uncertainty,

but in the name of 'safety' and 'security', we tend to transform it into straightforward mathematics. This is nothing but what Erich Fromm would have characterised as 'escape from freedom'. This is anti-life.

And finally, as parents, when do we realise the gravity of the crisis? The narrative with which I began this article indicates the trend — the obsession with the market-defined notion of 'success' and the unbearable pressure on our children. As we refuse to give any importance to the need for inner fulfillment, creative joy, the union of work and play and the rhythm of a simple/modest living, our children are compelled to carry the burden of mental fatigue and neurosis. No wonder students' suicide is becoming the new normal in the country. As the latest report published by the National Crime Records Bureau shows, over 13,000 students took their lives in India in 2022.

Yet, the game, I apprehend, would go on. As adults/parents/teachers, we would refuse to introspect. We would fail to initiate a movement for saving education from the life-killing rat race. And our children will continue to be deprived of an emancipatory vision of education, vocation and life.

Becoming water-smart holds the key to tackling scarcity



HIMANSHU THAKKAR
COORDINATOR, SOUTH ASIA NETWORK ON DAMS, RIVERS & PEOPLE

AS a somewhat belated summer in north India reaches its peak, with Delhi and surrounding areas reeling under a heatwave, there is an increasing fear of water scarcity. To highlight this situation, the media generally cites live storage in some 150 reservoirs in the Central Water Commission's (CWC) weekly reservoir bulletin (WRB), which is published every Thursday afternoon (why this cannot be given on a daily basis is a mystery).

The first thing to note about the water storage position given in CWC's WRB is that this is expected to be low when we are getting ready to welcome the southwest monsoon (SWM) that has already arrived in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. According to the Bhakra Beas Management Board (BBMB), the reservoir-filling period for Bhakra, Pong and Pandoh reservoirs began on May 21.

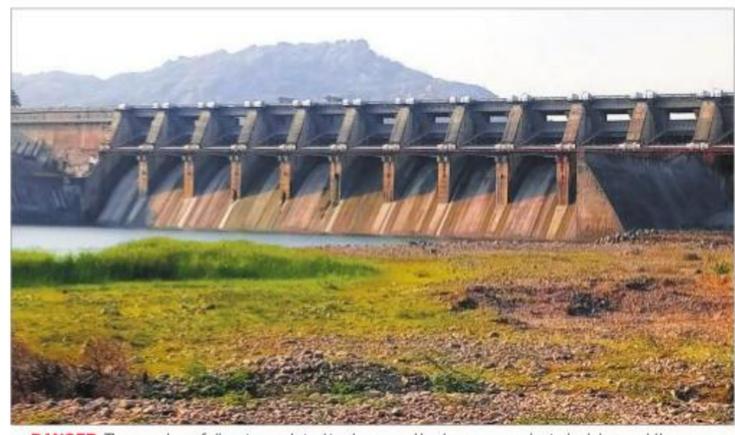
Reservoirs, in any case, are constructed to use up water before the onset of the next monsoon. An optimum utili-

sation of the created capacity would mean that the live storage capacity of the reservoirs should be the bare minimum when fresh inflows into these reservoirs start. To have a substantial quantity of water in these reservoirs when fresh inflows begin would also be non-optimal, as that would mean much less capacity in these reservoirs to store them. It would also mean an increased potential for avoidable flood-related disasters.

Since the IMD (India Meteorological Department) has already forecast above-normal rainfall in SWM 2024 and because the La Nina factor is likely to be active during the monsoon, which generally brings surplus rain, the lower storages we have at the onset of the SWM, the better it is for us.

According to the CWC's bulletin, north India includes Himachal Pradesh, Punjab and Rajasthan. But strangely, Uttarakhand, which is also a part of north India, is included in east India. And the rest of north India (Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir, Delhi and Chandigarh) is absent since these states/UTs do not have any water reservoir worthy of being included in the CWClst.

So, in north India, the CWC bulletin includes 10 reservoirs, where the live water storage on May 16 was 5,618 BCM (billion cubic metres) or 29 per cent of the total live capacity. This is only 3 per cent below the 10-year average figure of 32 per cent, which is defined as



DANGER: The number of disasters related to dams and hydropower projects is rising rapidly. ISTOCK

'normal'. So while this is lower than last year's or normal storage, it cannot be called alarming. India had rainfall 5.55 per cent below the normal in SWM 2023, so some deficit in storage is expected. However, north India also had more than one round of severe floods during SWM 2023, so we need not have alarmingly low reservoir levels.

The key question here is: does the CWC's WRB provide accurate or even widely applicable figures for water available across India? The CWC's bulletin includes water storage figures in just 150 reservoirs across India. The country has 6,138 completed large dams, as per the CWC's National Register of Large Dams (September 2023). Thus, the CWC's WRB includes less than 2.5 per cent

If the catchments are healthy, rivers will have more distributed flows, particularly in the months after monsoon.

of India's large dam reservoirs. In terms of the storage capacity, it includes a larger proportion of live storage behind these completed large dams, but the key point is that it does not provide the applicable useful information for a large majority of Indians, as it is the smaller local reservoirs that are useful for them and not some distant mega water body.

If the CWC wanted to provide a more accurate picture of water stored in India's reservoirs, it could easily do so as illustrated by the SANDRP (South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers & People) in 2018 ('How India Measures Water Storages'). We showed that state government websites provided the water storage position in 3,863 reservoirs across India more frequently

and accurately than possibly the CWC's WRB.

India has lakhs of smaller water reservoirs and millions of groundwater aquifers that people depend on, which provide the largest proportion of the water India uses, and clearly, the CWC's weekly bulletin does not provide accurate water availability figures that the vast majority of Indians depend on. The BBMB's reservoirs, for which the filling period started last week, get their water in the summer from the melting of glaciers and other snow masses, which is a different source altogether, and for that we have no figures.

But this outdated focus on large dams by the authorities in India, neglecting all other options, has also rubbed off on the media, it seems. The world is realising that this advocacy of large dams is no longer useful. In fact, there is an increasing movement across the world to decommission large dams. With the increasing impacts of climate change on rainfall patterns, this movement is only going to gain strength.

Moreover, in 2023-24, India saw one of the lowest generations from large hydropower dams. The number of disasters related to dams and hydropower projects is rising rapidly. Next month, when peak power demand will be the highest, hydropower generation is projected to be at the lowest. The

operators of the Tehri project in north India have added to the bad news by saying that power generation from the project will be suspended from June 1. This will also affect the water supply in Delhi and UP.

The main question in the context of water scarcity is: what is the most optimal way of maximum harvesting, storage, recharge and utilisation of rainwater and flows? The key component to achieving this objective is the catchment of any river. The greater the capacity of the catchment to harvest, hold, store and recharge rainwater at its source, the closer we will be to achieving this objective. This capacity of catchments can be improved when there are more natural forests, more water bodies and more carbon content in the soil and when we have a greater ability to recharge the groundwater. Thus, we will have more wetlands in the catchments and more floodplains will be saved from destruction. The barometers for this are our rivers. If our catchments are healthy, rivers will have more distributed flows, particularly in the post-monsoon months.

'Sponge cities' is the name of the scheme for our urban areas. It is all about harvesting, holding, storing and recharging higher proportion of the rainwater and flows in the city. The sooner we adopt these measures and implement commensurate policies and programmes, the smarter our cities will become.

QUICK CROSSWORD

ACROSS

- Affectedly superior (5-2)
- Horrify (5)
- Besides (4)
- During the whole time (3,5)
- Abolish (3,2,3,2)
- Trifling (6)
- Appease (6)
- All the details (3,3,4)
- Person or thing detested (8)
- Irritate (4)
- Ghastly (5)
- Plant-growing establishment (7)

DOWN

- Characteristic mark (5)
- Make anxious (8)
- Country of east Europe (6)
- Innovation in the arts (5-5)
- Walk heavily (4)
- Friivolously (7)
- Dug in (10)
- Imitate (8)
- A hidden danger (7)
- Opera by Bizet (6)
- To tarnish (5)
- Two of a kind (4)

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

Across: 1 Out-of-the-way, 9 Ideally, 10 Hover, 11 Hope, 12 Autocrat, 14 Ulster, 16 Nicety, 18 Stimulus, 19 Lame, 22 Extra, 23 Typhoon, 24 On the market.

Down: 2 Use up, 3 Oily, 4 Try-out, 5 Ethiopia, 6 Adverse, 7 Sight unseen, 8 Pretty penny, 13 Bequeath, 15 Smiten, 17 Custom, 20 Abode, 21 Spar.

SU DO KU

			8		4	5	
5	8			4		1	
9		5					
	9	4	8	5		1	
			7				
7	2	6	9		4		
			6			3	
2	3				8	5	
6	9		5				

MEDIUM

FORECAST

SUNSET: TUESDAY 19:17 HRS
SUNRISE: WEDNESDAY 05:23 HRS

CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	44	29
New Delhi	46	29
Amritsar	46	27
Bathinda	47	28
Jalandhar	44	28
Ludhiana	46	27
Bhiwani	46	28
Hisar	47	28
Sirsa	48	29
Dharamsala	36	24
Manali	29	16
Shimla	31	20
Srinagar	33	16
Jammu	42	25
Kargil	29	11
Leh	24	07
Dehradun	38	24
Mussoorie	28	19

CALENDAR
MAY 28TH 2024, TUESDAY

- Shaka Samvat 1946
- Jyeshtha Shaka 7
- Jyeshtha Parvishite 15
- Hijari 145
- Krishna Paksha Tithi 5, up to 3.24 pm
- Brahma Yoga up to 2.06 am
- Ultrashadha Nakshatra up to 9.34 am
- Moon in Capricorn sign

TEMPERATURE IN °C

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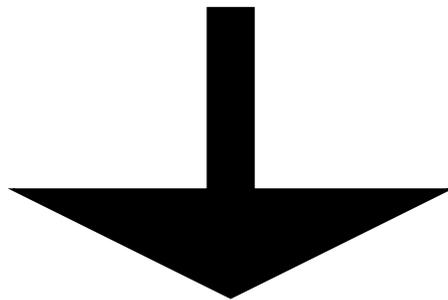
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