

#### **Tipping point**

With robust GST revenues, the next government must prioritise reforms

evenues from the Goods and Services Tax (GST) crossed the ₹2 lakh crore mark for the first time in April. The month of April has usually delivered the highest GST kitty as it involves taxes paid for activity undertaken in March, when taxpayers close their books for the year, scurry to meet tax filing deadlines, and make adjustments to square off dues sought by the revenue department owing to oversights or interpretation differences. With slightly over ₹2.1 lakh crore of gross revenues, last month's GST collection was 12.4% higher than the April 2023 tally of ₹1.87 lakh crore, which marked the highest monthly intake prior to the latest data set. Minus the year-end effect, revenues in subsequent months will moderate so the ₹2 lakh crore figure may not be the new normal for monthly GST collections just yet. However, assuming the present momentum of the economy continues and GST revenue growth persists in last year's 11%-12% range, last April's high of ₹1.87 lakh crore could well be this year's monthly average. Bear in mind that the average monthly revenues last year were ₹1.68 lakh crore, and before the year began, the highest monthly collection was seen in April 2022, at ₹1,67,540 crore

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has termed last month's ₹2 lakh crore-plus GST revenues a "landmark", attributing them to a strong economy and efficient collections. This should put to rest the Centre's concerns from a few years ago that returns from the GST regime, now 82 months old, had been underwhelming. No doubt, sustained action against frauds, such as fake invoicing, and stricter compliance norms have helped shore up revenues. With central GST revenues overshooting last year's targets, meeting the goals set in the interim Budget for 2024-25 now requires less than 10% revenue growth. For the next government, the easy part would be to upgrade revenue targets in the full Budget. The more critical imperative is to plan and execute the expansion of the GST net, and expedite the long-awaited reboot of its complex rate structure to make it a truly simple tax for consumers and investors, now that revenue worries are relatively muted. Incidentally, the BJP's election manifesto, which takes credit for ringing in GST, only promises to make its portal simpler for small businesses to use. The Congress has assured a switch to a single, moderate tax rate with few exceptions, no levies on farm inputs, and sharing of revenues with panchayats and municipalities. Smart GST reforms, informed by stakeholder consultations, need to be at the forefront of the agenda of whoever comes into office, to correct anomalies that hold consumption back and set the foundations for the next virtuous cycle of investment and growth.

#### **Eastern front**

Polarisation of votes in West Bengal is edging out the Left and the Congress

he Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) nurtures high hopes in West Bengal, where it won 18 of the 42 seats, and 40% vote share in 2019. This dramatic rise from two seats in 2014 gave the party the confidence to present itself as the principal opposition in the 2021 Assembly polls, but the Mamata Banerjee-led All India Trinamool Congress (TMC) stormed back to power for a third term. With 77 of the 294 Assembly seats, and a 38.1% vote share, the BJP came a distant second. This year, the polling in the State is spread across all seven phases of the general election, and the BJP is pulling out all stops in the hope it could improve its tally which could also compensate for any electoral loss elsewhere. The BJP is keeping the TMC on the defensive with allegations of corruption, the land grab and sexual assault at Sandeshkhali, and the school recruitment scam. The Calcutta High Court terminated about 25,000 teacher appointments which is a shot in the arm for the BJP. The TMC's campaign against the BIP is centred on New Delhi's stoppage of funds to the State under central schemes and the Citizenship (Amendment) Act. It is also banking on its cash transfer schemes such as Lakshmir Bhandar for women. Highlighting the issue of women's safety, the BJP has fielded a woman from Sandeshkhali, the constituency that saw reports of assault on women.

The BJP hopes to perform better in the districts of north Bengal, where it had won seven out of eight seats in 2019, while the Trinamool's focus is more in the southern districts with a high proportion of Muslim voters. For this, the TMC is also battling the Left-Congress coalition. The alliance may turn out to be a factor in certain seats in the minority-dominated districts of Malda and Murshidabad, and the decision of the Indian Secular Front to walk out of the alliance is likely to work to the advantage of the TMC. The BJP is bringing up Ram Mandir, violence during Ram Navami processions and the illegal movement of people across the India-Bangladesh border. Polarisation of voters on religious lines had helped the BJP in the 2019 Lok Sabha election and the Trinamool in the 2021 Assembly polls, edging out the Left and Congress from the field. The Trinamool is also harping on the Bengali identity by presenting itself as its custodian and portraying the BJP as an interloper and being insensitive to the interests of the State. For the BJP, West Bengal is not merely about winning more seats but is also about expanding its foothold into a region that claims exceptionalism. Some of the earliest arguments for a Hindu polity had originated in Bengal, and this gives the BJP hope.

#### The judiciary's shadow over standard essential patents

here is a possible crisis brewing in India over the manner in which certain technology companies are wielding 'standard essential patents' (SEP) against the telecom manufacturing sector in India. This is a complex policy issue which has direct ramifications for India's effort to build a domestic manufacturing industry for cellular phones. So far, the issues of regulating SEPs have been left to the judiciary, which, as an institution, has mostly missed the ball.

To begin with, it is important to understand the importance of SEPs. These are patents that cover technologies which are adopted by the industry as "standards". For example, technologies such as CDMA, GSM, LTE are all industry standards in the telecom sector. Such technological standards are especially important to ensure interoperability of different brands of cellular phones manufactured by different companies. For example, once GSM was adopted as a standard, all manufacturers had to ensure that the handsets that they manufactured were compatible with GSM. Otherwise there would be no demand for their phones.

#### Opaque model

The process of setting standards in the technology sector is largely privatised and dominated by "standard setting organisations" (SSOs) run largely by private technology companies. Countries such as India with little innovation in the telecom sector, have very little influence over how standards are set or how SEPs

Theoretically, the companies which own the SEPs, gain enormously because every manufacturer of cellular phones has to licence the technological standards in question in order to survive in the market. The lack of alternatives also means that owners of SEPs can demand extortionary royalties or licensing terms from manufacturers that block competition. In economics, this is called the "patent holdup" problem. In theory, the SSOs are supposed to prevent such a scenario by requiring the owners of SEPs to licence their technologies at a fair, reasonable and non-discriminatory (FRAND) rate.

In practice, this model of self-regulation by the technology industry has been marked with opacity and has failed rather spectacularly, as evidenced by the record fines that some of these SEP owners have had to cough up across the world for engaging in anti-competitive practices. The largest of these SEP owners, Qualcomm, has been fined \$975 million by China (2015), \$873 million by South Korea (2017), \$774 million by



**Prashant Reddy** 

is the co-author of 'Create, Copy, Disrupt: Property Dilemmas' (2017)



#### The effect of judicial lethargy and activism

The Indian response to the issue has been characterised by both judicial lethargy and judicial activism at the Delhi High Court. This may seem contradictory but a few facts will help explain how India landed in this situation.

In 2013, the Competition Commission of India (CCI), acting on a complaint by Micromax began an investigation under the Competition Act into the issue of whether Ericsson abused its dominant position by demanding extortionate royalties for its SEPs. Ericsson challenged the power of the CCI to do so, before the Delhi High Court, on the grounds that the Patents Act vested the power to remedy an abuse of patents only with the Patent Office.

The first round of litigation was resolved in favour of the CCI by a single judge on March 30, 2016. Ericsson then challenged this decision before the Division Bench of the Delhi High Court, where it remained pending for an astounding seven years until a judgment was delivered against the CCI on July 13, 2023. The CCI has appealed against this decision to the Supreme Court of India, where the matter remains pending. As a result, India is the only major economy to not yet investigate the potentially abusive licensing practices of technology companies that own SEPs.

While the competition law issues remained mired in litigation, the Delhi High Court proceeded to hear lawsuits filed by Ericsson and other SEPs owners against manufacturers of cellular phones on the question of whether the latter were infringing SEPs owned by the former and whether damages were payable. Ideally the infringement lawsuits should have been stayed until the competition law issues were resolved. The ordinary course of such litigation in most countries is for the courts to conduct a trial on the validity of the patents, whether there has been infringement and, if so, the damages payable. These trials are complex and can take time. For example, one of the early lawsuits filed by Ericsson against Lava International took eight years to be decided in a remarkable judgment, running into 500 pages, and delivered by Justice Amit Bansal of the Delhi High Court, recently.

The problem, however, is the manner in which Delhi High Court has granted "interim" remedies pending the conclusion of these long-winded trials. For the last decade, the Delhi High Court has short circuited the entire process by granting a series of orders requiring manufacturers, many of them Indian companies, to "deposit" money with the court in order to continue manufacturing during the pendency of the trial.

Such "deposit" orders, often running into crores of rupees, before trial, are unprecedented in the history of commercial law for the simple reason that there is no provision in the law granting judges such powers. In addition to being unprecedented, these orders are also unfair to defendants because they deprive them of working capital (which is very expensive in India) for the entire duration of the trial (which can take up to eight years).

Yet, such judicial activism has been justified by the Delhi High Court by invoking its "inherent powers to do justice". Such similar logic has been used in the past by the judiciary to justify activist measures such as "public interest litigation". That the same argument has been used to justify activism in the name of the oppressed and also in the name of multinational corporations demonstrates how specious an argument it was in

the first place. This judicial activism combined with judicial

delays will have a negative impact on the government's attempt to attract more investment in the manufacturing sector. These measures, by government, have included payouts to manufacturers under the "production linked incentives" scheme for manufacturing in India. It is worth questioning the rationale of putting money in the pockets of manufacturers, while turning a Nelson's eye to the manner and the amount of money that is being removed from the same pockets by the owners of SEPs. More pertinently, unlike manufacturers who are investing in India to create jobs, the owners of SEPs are only taking their money out of the

#### The case of Europe

It is time for the Indian government to intervene and put in place measures to regulate SEPs before the judiciary causes further damage to India's manufacturing dreams. India will not be an outlier if it intervenes. The European Parliament has already enacted one such set of measures to regulate SEPs. India, arguably, has a much stronger case to push for similar, if not stronger regulatory measures, since it has no say in how SEPs are selected by SSOs, while also being compelled by international agreements to enforce patents of foreign technology companies.

#### Recognise 'this leave' as a woman's right

ometimes, elections throw up an acceptance of and solutions to deeply institutionalised gender biases and discrimination against women. In the run-up to the general election 2024, the election manifesto of the ruling political party in Tamil Nadu, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), has made a promise (under the topic "Women's welfare") that the "DMK will insist that the Union government enact a law providing menstrual leave to women, emphasizing the journey towards gender equality." This promise has been made after a debate in the 17th Lok Sabha, in December 2023, on menstrual leave, but with no

#### **Legislators and Bills**

In December 2021, S. Jothimani, Congress Member of Parliament (MP) from Tamil Nadu, had introduced a Private Member Bill named, 'Right to Menstrual Hygiene and Paid Leave Bill, 2019', which sought to bring menstrual leave into the ambit of the rights of a woman, and a refusal of such leave into the domain of The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013. It also sought to impose a penalty for refusal.

The Bill that envisaged menstrual rights for women stipulates that every woman shall be entitled to the right to self-perception of her menstruation, including but not limited to menarche (first menstruation), menopause, menstrual cycle, primary or secondary dysmenorrhea (menstrual pain). The Bill sought remedies in the form of: rights, including paid leave for three days; right to leave or absence for three days for students above class eight; right to 30 minutes rest twice a day during the menstrual period for employees/workers, and right to menstrual hygiene management facilities and equity for all women.

Ninong Ering, who was a Congress MP from Arunachal Pradesh, introduced a private member Bill on menstrual leave in 2017 (the Menstruation Benefit Bill, 2017). This was followed by Shashi



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similar Bill named The Women's Sexual, Reproductive and Menstrual Rights Bill, 2018. Hibi Eden, Congress MP from Kerala, also introduced a private member Bill titled The Right to Women to Menstrual Leave and Free Access to Menstrual Health Products Bill, 2022. The Supreme Court of India, early in 2023,

Tharoor, Congress MP from Kerala, introducing a

refused to entertain a public interest litigation in Shailendra Mani Tripathi vs Union of India which sought direction to the state on menstrual leave; it was of the opinion that it is in the policy domain of the government. By December 2023, the central government refused to agree on such a policy, and the Bharatiya Janata Party manifesto for the general election 2024, the 'Sankalp Patra 2024', has made no mention of it. The Congress party's manifesto for the general election 2024, the 'Nyaya Patra' has also not mentioned menstrual leave, but under the subject of "Health" has promised that "all employers shall mandatorily grant paid maternity leave for their employees".

#### **Progressive Indian States, Asian nations**

History shows us that some States were ahead of the times. For instance, the Kerala Sahitya Academy published work, Kerala in 19th Century, mentions that Kerala was the first (in then Cochin State) to recognise the need for "period leave" for students and allowed it during examinations in 1912. In a recent progressive attempt, Kerala has encouraged the use of other menstrual hygiene products and made them available for students. Bihar, in 1992, allowed government employees two-day menstrual leave. Kerala, in January 2023, introduced menstrual and maternity leave to all students above the age of 18. Other States must be reminded that the existing laws are not a hindrance for State governments to go ahead and notify the right to menstrual leave.

On the other hand, many other Asian countries have ended the prejudices and stereotypes around menstruation using

legislation. For instance, Japan introduced menstrual leave in 1947, Indonesia in 1948, and South Korea. Taiwan and Vietnam have also implemented paid leave. In relation to the Asian countries, the progress made by the western world, except in Sweden and Spain, is still abysmal. Several international organisations have promoted menstrual leave as a women's right. For instance, an International Labour Organisation report, in 2003, asked nations to recognise menstrual leave. The World Health Organization recognised a non-governmental organisation driven World Menstrual Hygiene Day on May 28 from 2014. However, India's new code on Social Security, 2020, passed by Parliament, which consolidated existing labour laws (yet to be notified), has not included the aspect of menstrual leave in its code.

Women labourers in the sugarcane fields of Maharashtra and agricultural labourers in Telangana have been documented to have hysterectomies as menstrual-related absences could endanger their livelihoods. It is time the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act and laws governing industrial labour and other establishments recognise menstrual leave like the way progressive gig worker platforms such as Swiggy and Zomato

#### Greater gender sensitivity needed

Policy solutions to gender inequalities that are defined by differentiated gender experiences of women owing to socio-cultural and biological reasons will not only ensure equity but also bring new social change. The instrumentality of public policy and discussions on menstruation also lies in shattering taboos and creating a gender-sensitive world that is open to issues which are hitherto considered to be clandestine by conservative-gendered social standards. In the political domain, recognition of the issue by political parties this election season will be a major step to promote women's rights and gender equality.

#### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Hill stations, summer rush There is no doubt that

many of the hill stations in India, especially in the South, are facing grave environmental pressures caused by the massive influx of tourists. In connection with the e-pass plans for Kodaikanal and the Nilgiris, having battery-operated mini buses to all the important tourist spots in these hill stations, and at a fixed charge, can

could board and alight at their will after ensuring that these buses operate to all tourist locations every five minutes. All private cars should be left in specific parking spaces and not allowed to operate to these points. Chaotic parking of vehicles is a very common issue in the hills. The hills deserve better.

T. Murali. Madurai

the Nilgiris are cause for worry. The district has had cloudless blue skies for long. It is also a fact that the residents of the Nilgiris will be thought of last when it comes to the rationing of water as the priority is to meet the needs of commercial establishments.

J.W. Prabakar, Udhagamandalam, The Nilgiris

the Nilgiris is only in May.

many of the reservoirs in Local people will be put to hardship if curbs are imposed on vehicular movement. This must be thought of in any move to impose a cap on the number of vehicles into the district. N.R. Ramachandran.

singer Uma Ramanan is The peak summer season in deeply saddening (May 2). It

Udhagamandalam, The Nilgiris **Uma Ramanan** 

was her collaboration with

The passing of playback

special place in the hearts of music lovers. It is unfortunate that her great potential was not utilised by many music composers. R. Sivakumar,

her popular singer husband

composer Ilaiyaraja, which

nationwide stardom. Her

unique voice earned her a

A.V. Ramanan, and star

catapulted her to

Uma Ramanan sang some of the most soul-stirring

melodies ever. Once while at a bus stop opposite a tea kiosk, her song, "Aagaya Vennilavae", began to play on the radio in the shop. It was one time when I wished that the bus would reach late as I wanted to listen to the song in full. Her songs will live forever.

#### T.S. Karthik, Chennai

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

The water storage levels in be thought of. Tourists

THE HINDU

#### Does PMJAY need a design change?



is Visiting Scientist, Banyan Academy of Leadership in Mental Health



Visiting Fellow, Centre for Policy Research and Founder-Director Foundation for Responsive Governance

**PARLEY** 

yushman Bharat, the government's flagship programme to achieve universal health coverage (UHC), was launched in 2018. The scheme has two inter-related components: health and wellness centres and the Pradhan Mantri Ian Arogya Yojana (PMJAY) that aims to provide a health cover of ₹5 lakh per family per year for secondary and tertiary care hospitalisation to over 12 crore families that form the bottom 40% of the population. PM-JAY has issued 34.27 crore cards. About 6.5 crore have received treatment and there are over 30,000 empanelled hospitals. However, over the past year, hospitals in some States have reported they are owed hundreds of crores in dues, and some are reportedly turning away or taking in fewer PMJAY patients. Does PMJAY need a design change? Avani Kapur and Nachiket Mor discuss the question in a conversation moderated by Zubeda Hamid. Edited excerpts:

Does PMJAY's design need to be changed to make the scheme more sustainable?

Nachiket Mor: PMJAY was required as there was a belief that while the public sector exists and is supposed to offer universal healthcare for free, there were deficiencies in what it could do. Therefore, there was a need to allow patients to access the private sector. I don't think this scheme was ever designed to deal with comprehensive universal health coverage or comprehensive healthcare costs – it is currently at under 2.5% of total health expenditure. Our research suggests that if you pool government departmental expenditure with PM-JAY expenditure in many States, government health expenditure may be enough to offer universal health coverage, including drugs and diagnostics. The reason we see high out-of-pocket expenditure in Kerala, for example, is that the public sector, despite being well funded, is unable to deliver universal healthcare. Its primary care is underutilised and there is enormous waste and inefficiency. I worry that if schemes are layered on top of a hospital-centric design, it exacerbates misallocation of government resources. In fact, there are distortions now: even a government hospital that is supposed to give you free care is now checking whether you're authorised to receive PMJAY. Why? Have we created a barrier now? Because, while a high-income family can handle a claim rejection or delay, a low-income family cannot. How can you deliver better healthcare to people to eliminate out-of-pocket expenditure? Where can the National Health Authority (NHA) and the State Health Authority (SHA), with their ability to purchase care in an organised, high quality manner, help you? I think that's the question we should pursue.

Avani Kapur: Nachiket spoke about the supply side, and I wanted to bring in the demand side. It's interesting that of empanelled hospitals,



The Rajiv Gandhi Institute for Chest Diseases in Bengaluru. THE HINDU

while 43% are private, the rest are government. There is a belief that a private hospital delivers better services and so people choose to go to a private hospital even when they have a public hospital close to them. It's possible that this is not just an assumption: in most places, the chances of getting better quality care in a private hospital could be higher than in a public hospital. We have not done enough to increase belief in the public health system.

Why would the private sector turn away patients? One, capacity. In many States, the number of people per empanelled healthcare provider (EHCP) is really high. In Bihar, it was over 10,000 families per EHCP. So, you don't necessarily have an adequate number of beds and facilities to be able to cater to that demand. Two, the delays in claim payments despite the guidelines being clear about turnaround time. Three, there are claim rejections too, which means a hospital takes in a patient, does the surgery, and then the insurance company rejects that claim because of documentation errors or a technicality. Four, the Union government has put a cap on the amount you can charge for different treatments. That doesn't always work well for private providers.

To deliver PMJAY will be difficult until the public sector is strengthened. This is because patients will choose to go to an already overburdened private player. Of course, private hospitals charge more and may do unnecessary procedures, but what is often not spoken about enough is that there is a burden on them because the public sector either isn't performing or people don't trust the sector to perform.

How wide is the performance disparity among States under PMJAY?

AK: Not only do hospitals not exist [in many parts], but even empanelled hospitals haven't been active. In Uttar Pradesh, for instance, 39% have been inactive since empanellment, and only 50% have been active in the last six months. The States' [performances] vary. In



To deliver PMJAY will be difficult until the public sector is strengthened. This is because patients will choose to go to an already overburdened private player.

AVANI KAPUR

coverage, some have been quite low compared to others, and even within States, the dispersion of hospitals is skewed. Governance processes make a big difference. In terms of claim payments, some States saw a delay of more than 45 days, while others paid the claims faster. What is also interesting is that there is a concentration of claims in Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu. More research is needed to understand why this is the case.

NM: The issue of delays [in payments] should not have anything to do with poor or rich States; these are technology-enabled platforms. The fact is, in Shravasti district in U.P., for example, there isn't enough hospital capacity. This is the driver of these differences. In most jurisdictions around the world, there is an obligation for the insurer to have network adequacy. This means you can't offer an insurance scheme unless you have hospitals nearby. That restriction is not there in India, so you can offer a card to somebody even though there is no way for him to go and claim it. And that is a key deficiency in much of the northern and north-eastern States. And that's where we need to pay attention. The private sector is unlikely to go to Bastar and build a hospital. It would have to be led by the public sector for the foreseeable future.

India's out-of-pocket expenditure for health has decreased, but it still hovers around the 47-50% mark, which is much higher than global average. Do we need to look at a system where outpatient care, diagnostics and drugs can also be covered?

NM: We are making an error in equating PMJAY and health and wellness centres with government efforts on the healthcare side. The largest component of healthcare expenditures are government expenditures through the State and Centre and they are multiples higher than what these two schemes are doing. These are supposed to include outpatient (OP) care: in fact, the bulk of the expenditure is on drugs and OP care. Are there governments (in the world) that have a separate government-financed public sector and then added an insurance layer on top of it? I have not seen [this] because it adds to the fragmentation of the overall health landscape. And that is something we need to address to solve the problem of out-of-pocket expenditure.

**AK:** In the current design and given the fiscal cost, it may be too much to expect the current model of PMJAY to cover everything. But there are lots of interesting State schemes that are taking care of providing free medicines: Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan are doing great work in trying to provide some form of universal healthcare. India is ranked 67th out of 189 countries in terms of out-of-pocket expenditure. Also, the Union government is meant to allocate 60% of PMJAY funds, but the amount [it is] actually spending is less than this. In some ways, PMJAY was designed to take care of [healthcare cost] shocks, as inpatient treatments can cost a lot relative to outpatient treatments. But we need to think about it in its entirety rather than looking at it as bits and pieces.

The government said this was a step towards providing UHC. Would you argue that the insurance model is not correct for India's path towards achieving UHC? Has any other country been able to achieve it through an insurance model?

NM: The insurance model, if defined narrowly as separating the money from the provider, and not giving budget-based allocations but saying to the provider that if you perform, then you get paid - in India, my own belief is that the insurance model, if restricted exclusively to the public sector, could have a big impact on its performance, particularly in the poorer States. It's almost become the only way many countries have delivered UHC, such as Thailand, Turkey, Vietnam, and Uruguay. India's current model is no longer the dominant model. That is what is exciting to me about the NHA/SHA - we have the capacity to implement something like this. But it wouldn't be in the way you're thinking about insurance perhaps, which is indemnity: I file a claim, I get refunded. Those approaches are a pathway to bad outcomes. This is the error Medicare/Medicaid made in the U.S. in 1965 - it led to massive inflation in healthcare prices. But with the purchaser-provider split, I would say it is the only idea that can take us forward, but if we restrict it only to the public sector and bring all the multiple pools of money together.

AK: I agree. I don't think in its current design, insurance is going to yield what we want it to yield, which is not just reducing out-of-pocket expenditure, but also ensuring quality care. A recent paper on low- and middle-income countries and health insurance said the issue is not just whether government subsidy should be channelled through health insurance or direct subsidies to public facilities, but how do you reach a system where you have specific payment structures and non price mechanisms that can actually change both provider behaviour and also patient choice? In its current form, I don't think PM-JAY is going to get us there unless we focus a lot more on the public health system.



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**NOTEBOOK** 

#### The difficulty of learning how opinions are shaped

During elections, it is a challenge to separate the voter's own personal experience or opinion from propaganda

Sobhana K. Nair

very time I have travelled to rural areas in India during elections, I have run into astute voters who are aware of every aspect of the candidates in the fray, including how many times they have switched parties, and well-versed with the caste equations of the constituency. This hyper awareness is helpful for a reporter. It makes our lives easier when we meet a respondent who is knowledgeable, eager to engage, and does not need to be persuaded to speak.

However, the penetration of the Internet and mobile phone has also meant a surge in disinformation. The challenge then is to separate the voter's own personal experience or opinion from propaganda. Establishing this distinction is essential to understanding the impact of various election campaigns and what may influence voter choices.

In the run-up to the 2017 Uttar Pradesh elections, while touring the western part of the State, I heard a common complaint among people belonging to upper castes and non-Yadav backward communities against the incumbent government led by Akhilesh Yadav of the Samajwadi Party. They lamented that the government had been building boundary walls for graveyards, even as it took away land from cremation grounds. Nearly a week later, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said at an election rally, "If you create a kabristaan (graveyard) in a village, then a shamshaan (cremation ground) should also be created. If electricity is given uninterrupted in Ramzan, then it should be given in Diwali without a break." In hindsight, I feel I should have asked the people whether their opinion was based on their own experiences or whether they had heard this

elsewhere. I did not know whether the Prime Minister's comments indicated that his party had its ear to the ground or whether he was merely amplifying propaganda that had already been running.

This election, in Churu, Rajasthan, I found that people feared that reservation would be scrapped. This time, I asked for the source. Why did they think reservation would go? Pat came the reply: they had heard an election speech of BJP candidate Jyoti Mirdha, who was contesting from the Naguar Lok Sabha seat, on WhatsApp. Building a case for voting the BJP and its allies to at least 400 seats, she spoke of "tough decisions" that needed to be taken in the "country's interest" and that needed constitutional amendments. However, neither her speech nor the reactions to it from the Opposition, which has run a consistent campaign against the BJP saying the "Constitution is in danger", mentioned any scrapping of reservation. I was puzzled.

Then, miles away in Chhattisgarh, I heard people voicing this fear again. It was clearly not Ms. Mirdha's words that had prompted this reaction in Chhattisgarh. When I probed further, the voters said they had been hearing about reservation for the last three or four months. One of them mentioned Mr. Modi saying in a speech in November 2023 that among all the "caste groups", he considered four the biggest – "the poor, the youth, women, and farmers." Mr. Modi's remarks were a counter to the Congress's demand for a caste census. But the voters believed, not without a nudge from the principal Opposition party, the Congress, that if the reality of caste is ignored, then so will reservation.

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#### PICTURE OF THE WEEK

#### In the grip of a heatwave



Women draw water from a well on a hot day in Kasara, a town in Thane district in Maharashtra. Maharashtra has registered 25 deaths from heat stroke since late March, the

The MOA Findu.

highest toll in the past five years. Scientists have linked the early onset of an intense summer to climate change. REUTERS

#### FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO MAY 3, 1974

#### Talks if Ry. strike notice is withdrawn: Mishra

New Delhi, May 2: By an overwhelming majority, the Lok Sabha to-day rejected an

adjournment motion to censure the Government on the arrest of Mr. George Fernandes and other important Railway labour leaders early this morning after a stormy debate. Mr. L.N. Mishra, Railway Minister, vigorously defended the action of the Government and said this was done because Mr. Fernandes was working for a strike even as negotiations were going on.

#### A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MAY 3, 1924

#### Plaintiff in the box

London, May 2: Sir Michael O' Dwyer was in the box all Thursday. In cross-examination he denied he had been guilty of tyranny, but was attacked for his opinions by the members of the would-be oligarchy. Sir Sankaran Nair's book was translated and circulated in the vernacular by most provincial Governments.

### l'extacontext

THEMOHINDU

#### **NEWS IN NUMBERS**

The homes destroyed in Gaza, expected to be rebuilt by 2040

in lakh. If the Israel-Hamas conflict ends, reconstruction of these homes might last until 2040, according to a United Nations report. The Health Ministry reports an additional 28 deaths from the fighting on Thursday. AP

#### The aid pledged to Lebanon by the European Union

n \$ billion. The aid is expected to strengthen border control to halt the flow of asylum seekers and migrants from the small, crisis-ridden country across the Mediterranean Sea to Cyprus and Italy. AP

#### The Myanmar refugees deported amid border tensions

Following the 2021 military coup in Myanmar, India has completed its first phase of deportation. Manipur is set to deport 77 people. Thousands of civilians and troops from Myanmar crossed the border to India after ethnic clashes. REUTERS

#### The forest land in the Garhwal division affected by fires

in hectares. The Chief Conservator of Forests in Garhwal, Naresh Kumar said that there had been more than 300 such incidents in the region. 37 people, all underage, have been apprehended for setting fire to the forests. PTI

#### Highest single-day migrant arrivals in the U.K. in 2024

The illegal migrants arrived in small boats, raising the overall number of crossings this year to 8,278. The highest-ever figure in single-day arrivals was 1,295, recorded on August 22, 2022. AFP

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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### Why are Indian spices facing the heat?

Why have countries such as Singapore, Hong Kong and the U.S. announced an investigation into possible contamination of spice mixes sold by MDH and Everest? How has the Spices Board of India responded? What has the U.S. FDA said?

**EXPLAINER** 

Saptaparno Ghosh Saumya Kalia

The story so far:

t least five countries including Singapore, Hong Kong and the U.S. – have announced an investigation into possible contamination of spice mixes sold by Indian brands, MDH and Everest. The complaints cite the presence of ethylene oxide (EtO), a toxic chemical used as a food stabiliser, beyond permissible limits. The Spices Board of India in response has initiated mandatory testing of products shipped abroad and is reportedly working with exporters to identify the root cause of contamination.

#### Which countries have flagged safety of Indian spices?

The domino first shook on April 5, when Hong Kong's Centre for Food Safety suspended the sale of three MDH spice blends (Madras curry powder, Sambhar masala and Curry powder masala) and Everest Fish curry masala. The spice mixes had high levels of ethylene oxide, the regulator said, and advised consumers against purchasing these products. Days later, Singapore ordered a recall of the Everest spice mix, stating that it is unfit for human consumption.

MDH has called allegations over EtO contamination "baseless and unsubstantiated". "We reassure our buyers and consumers that we do not use ethylene oxide at any stage of storing, processing, or packing our spices," the company said in a statement. It added that neither the Spices Board nor the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) have received communication or test reports from Singapore or Hong Kong authorities.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), which had previously rejected food and spice imports from India, told *Reuters* that it is "aware of the reports and is gathering additional information about the situation". Regulatory bodies in Maldives, New Zealand, Bangladesh and Australia have announced similar plans.

#### What are the health concerns?

MDH and Everest's spice mixes allegedly contain high levels of EtO, a prohibited pesticide. EtO is a colourless, flammable gas that was originally intended for sterilising medical devices. It is used as a chemical in industrial settings, agriculture, and as a sterilising agent in food products, including spices, dried vegetables and other commodities. The chemical lends life to the spice industry it reduces microbial contamination, and in turn, extends products' shelf life.

However, this process is not always airtight. The improper and excessive use of EtO may leave behind residues, causing toxic and even carcinogenic compounds to form, thus contaminating the product. One such compound is ethylene glycol, an ingredient which was found in Indian-made cough syrups that were linked to the deaths of more than 300 children in Cameroon, Gambia, Indonesia and Uzbekistan. Long-term exposure to ethylene oxide is associated with cancers including lymphoma and leukaemia, some evidence shows.

#### Is there a history of rejections in U.S.?

A scrutiny of FDA's import refusal report, for the calendar year 2023, cites at least 30 instances wherein entry was refused because the products appeared to contain salmonella. These are agents known to cause salmonellosis – a common bacterial

Indian spices and herbs rejected by the U.S. FDA in 2023 A scrutiny of FDA's import refusal report, for the calendar year 2023, cites at least 30 instances wherein entry was refused because the products appeared to contain salmonella

Company	Products rejected	Reasons for rejection	
Ramdev Food Products Pvt Ltd	Cumin	Appears to contain salmonella, a poisonous and deleterious substance which may render it injurious to health	
	Mixed spices and seasoning	Salmonella	
	Coriander	Salmonella	
	Nutmeg	Salmonella	
	Cumin	Salmonella	
	Ginger	Salmonella	
	Fennel	Artificial colouring, misbranding	
Mahashian Di Hatti (MDH)	Paprika	Filthy, putrid, or decomposed substances otherwise unfit for food; and salmonella	
	Mixed spices and seasoning	Salmonella	
	Mixed spices and seasoning	Misbranding + salmonella	
	Capsicums (cayenne chili, hot peppers) spice	Salmonella	
	Spices and seasoning, ground, cracked with salt	Salmonella	
Everest	Capsicums (cayenne chili, hot peppers) spice	Salmonella	
	Spices and seasoning, ground, cracked with salt	Labelling violation of FPLA because of its placement, form and/or contents statement	
	Black pepper	Salmonella	
	Curry powder, ground, cracked without salt	Salmonella	
MTR Foods Private Limited	Spices and seasoning, ground, cracked with salt	Salmonella	
	Spices and seasoning, ground, cracked with salt	Labelling violation	
Dharampal Satyapal Ltd. (DS Group Catch)	Mixed spices and seasoning	Appears to be misbranded in that the label or labeling fails to bear the required nutrition information; appears to contain a poisonous or deleterious substance which would ordinarily render the article injurious to health	
Patanjali Ayurved Ltd.	Natural extract or flavour	Appears to be a new drug within the meaning of Section 201(p) without an approved New Drug Application (NDA)	
Nestle India	Spices and seasoning, ground, cracked with salt	Salmonella	
Badshah Masala Pvt. Ltd.	Spices and Seasoning, ground, cracked with salt	Labelling violation	
Tulsi Foods	Black pepper	Filthy and salmonella	
Speciality Indian Food Parks & Exports	Black pepper	Filthy and salmonella	

ISTOCKPHOTO

U.S. FDA's Import Refusal Report

food-borne illness. Other than this, there have been at least 11 counts of products being rejected because of misbranding, adulteration, artificial colouring or incorrect labelling. The two causes have existed in combination as well. The report tabulates Ramdev Food Products to have had the maximum rejections in 2023 (about 30), followed by MDH (about 19), MTR (7), Everest (5), makers of Catch: DS Group (2) and Badshah (1).

In fact, in September 2019, a recall of MDH's Sambhar Masala was initiated in the U.S. after FDA discovered the product was contaminated with salmonella. The recall terminated in December 2021. Another such recall involved Everest's Garam Masala and Sambhar Masala, and Maggi's Masala-ae-Magic in June last year.

The U.S. Dept of Agriculture had in February 2022 stated that India and Mexico were the top sources of pathogen-based food import refusals. Their study, from 2002-19, held Indian imports had the maximum number of

pathogen-related violations. With 5,115 refusals - the figure represented 22.9% of overall import refusals for pathogen/toxin

#### How has India responded?

On April 25, the Spice Board in India announced a slew of corrective measures including initiating mandatory testing of consignments shipped to Singapore and Hong Kong and gathering technical details and analytical reports from the relevant food and drug agencies. It also sought to propose corrective measures to the concerned exporters and initiate inspections to ensure adherence to relevant standards. A circular dated April 30 contains guidelines to exporters on preventing EtO contamination. The guidelines prescribe norms for testing at raw and final stages, storage of EtO treated products and use of alternate methods curtailing the use of the chemical compounds. The Spices Board issued a similar advisory in September

2021, after the EU observed EtO contamination in certain Indian exports. Furthermore, the FSSAI has directed state regulators to collect samples of major spice brands, including MDH and Everest, to test for EtO.

Activists have called for stringent safety checks of curry powders and spices to detect and control the use of EtO in food products and ensure proper implementation of regulatory norms. A recent CUTS report also recommended updating food safety standards to align with global practices, and improving information flow to food industries so that they better comply with regulations.

#### Is food safety in India lacking?

Simi T.B., who works with CUTS International, a global advocacy group for consumer welfare told The Hindu, notwithstanding stringent food laws in place, that the recent controversies "collectively underscore the persistent nature of food safety challenges across various sectors of the food industry".

One challenge is operational – India's diverse food landscape, the lack of standardised record-keeping and intentional food fraud may prevent manufacturers from tracing ingredients and assessing potential risks which compromise the safety of the entire food supply chain. Traceability is particularly challenging for small and medium sized businesses with limited resources.

Some are logistic barriers. At least 10 States/Union Territories lack government or private notified food testing labs, as mandated under the Food Safety and Standards Act 2006. These labs are distributed unevenly across regions; have insufficient number of food safety officers; and were found to operate ineffectively due to resource constraints, showed the FSSAI Annual Report of 2021-22. FSSAI's operations often lack transparency, which "hinders efforts to meet safety standards", build accountability and trust, adds Ms. Simi.

#### What next?

Delhi-based think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) in a recent note held, "With nearly \$700 million worth of exports to critical markets at stake, and potential losses soaring to over half of India's total spice exports due to cascading regulatory actions in many countries, the integrity and future of India's spice trade hang in delicate balance." According to the think tank, the issue demands urgent attention to uphold the reputation of the entire ecosystem.

Vijoo Krishnan, General Secretary of the All-India Kisan Sabha explained that the chain of events could put other small companies or co-operatives' exports under a cloud of suspicion. Importantly, Mr Krishnan explained that in the event of potential losses, farmers of such crops too could find themselves at the receiving end. "We have instances where companies have not paid appropriate prices to farmers even when they were making profits," he stated, adding, "Should the companies make losses now, it could be used as a pretext to reduce prices, thus, burdening the farmer."

GTRI also assessed that if regulators in China follow their peers in Hong Kong, and ASEAN based on that by Singapore, Indian exports could see a "dramatic downturn". This could affect exports valued at \$2.17 billion - about 51.1% of the country's global spice exports. The paradigm could further worsen if the EU, which it states, "regularly rejects Indian spice consignments over quality issues", follows suit. The impact could be an additional \$2.5 billion, bringing potential losses to 58.8% of India's global exports.

#### THE GIST

On April 5, Hong Kong's Centre for Food Safety suspended the sale of three MDH spice blends (Madras curry powder, Sambhar masala and Curry powder masala) and Everest Fish curry masala.

MDH and Everest's spice mixes allegedly contain high levels of EtO, a prohibited pesticide. EtO is a colourless, flammable gas that was originally intended for sterilising medical devices.

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#### FROM THE ARCHIVES



#### The movies and documentaries that Satyajit Ray couldn't film

Ray was always assessing the cinematic potential of literary sources that ignited his imagination. Some of his unfinished projects are well known — The Alien, A Passage to India and the Mahabharata. But there were many more which only Ray aficionados are aware of

#### Amitabha Bhattacharya

May 2 was Satyajit Ray's 103rd birth anniversary. In this article, dated June 15, 2021, Amitabha Bhattacharya talks about the ideas and scripts of the legendary auteur which did not make it to the screen.

atyajit Ray is universally admired for his cinematic creations. However, to understand his mind, it may be worthwhile to reflect on the literary ideas that he could not transform on celluloid. Some are well known - The Alien, A Passage to India and the Mahabharata. But there were many more which only the Ray aficionados are aware of. Fortunately, the essays and letters of Ray and his son Sandip; the biographies by Marie Seton (Portrait of A Director, 1971) and Andrew Robinson (Satyajit Ray: The Inner Eye, 1989); Suresh Iindal's My Adventures with Satyajit Ray – The Making of Shatranj Ke Khilari (2017), Nasreen Munni Kabir's Conversations with Waheeda Rehman (2014): and articles by Bangladeshi photojournalist Amanul Haque and others throw some light on the subject.

#### An idea about aliens

Based on his own story and ideas, and encouraged by the famous author Arthur C. Clarke, Ray drafted the screenplay of his sci-fi film The Alien in 1967. Columbia Pictures agreed to produce it with Peter Sellers in an Indian role. Steve McQueen was contacted and even Robert Redford considered, and the Indian cast was almost finalised. Columbia even advanced some money for the project. However, there were many unexpected twists and turns, as recounted by Ray in "Ordeals of the Alien" (The Statesman, October 4 and 5, 1980), and the project had to be abandoned. Ray wrote to Sellers:

"Dear Peter, if you wanted a bigger part Why, you should have told me so right

By declining at this juncture You have simply punctured The Alien balloon, Which I daresay would be grounded

soon, Causing a great deal of dismay To Satyajit Ray."

The project was revived later, but by then Steven Spielberg's E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial was released (1982), with 'striking parallels' noticed by Clarke and others. Ray held, as Robinson quotes, that E.T. "would not have been possible without my script of The Alien being available throughout America in mimeographed copies". However, Spielberg commented, "Tell Satyajit I was a kid in high school when his script was circulating in Hollywood'. Despite advice, Ray did not pursue the matter further. His depiction, as communicated to Jindal, that the aliens were "benign by nature, small and acceptable to children, possessed of certain supernatural powers, not physical strength but other kinds of powers, particular types of vision, and that they take interest in earthly things" was indeed influential.

#### The West's image of India Ray met E.M. Forster at Cambridge in

1966 with the intention to film A Passage to India . Robinson quotes Ray, "... but he knew my name. He kept shaking his head much of the time which meant that he didn't want the book to be filmed. That was the drone – no! – in words, gestures, looks, everything. He was adamant. And I felt there was no point in asking why." Later, much after Forster's death, Ray was approached in 1980 by the trustees at King's College, but by then he had lost interest in the subject. David Lean's version (1984), understandably, could not satisfy Ray – "... The whole thing is too picturesque... For me none of the characters come alive... Peggy Ashcroft's performance notwithstanding..." In a famous essay "Under Western Eyes" (Sight & Sound, Autumn 1982), Ray had

touched upon the limitations of the West's interest in India and how its views were often distorted and unreal, sometimes even with "grotesque stereotypes as Hurree Jamset Ram Singh..." He ended, "Slighted for so long, India will not yield up her secrets to the West so easily..." It is a pity that A Passage... could not be filmed by Ray.

#### All on paper

The Mahabharata fascinated Ray from his early childhood. From the late fifties he had been planning to film it. But in what language? "How to introduce even the main characters to a non-Indian audience?" At one time, he intended to cast Dilip Kumar, Toshiro Mifune and others. Ray was interested in the dice game part. More than the war, it was the exploration of personal relationships between the characters that appealed to him cinematically. In jest, he once told Jindal, "I gave up, because I couldn't imagine Kirk Douglas playing Arjuna."

Waheeda Rehman, who acted in Ray's Abhijan (1962), said that Ray had been keen to adapt R.K. Narayan's The Guide and had contacted her for the female lead. As she observed, the approach and treatment of the film would have been entirely different under Ray's direction. But then we would have missed the Bollywood blockbuster.

There were many Bengali film ideas that Ray had nurtured at some point or the other, as detailed by Sandip Ray in Ananya Satyajit (1998) and others. Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's Rajasimha (with Balraj Sahni) and Devi Chaudhurani (with Suchitra Sen), Saratchandra Chattopadhyay's Mahesh, Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyay's Drabamayeer Kashibash and Ichhamati, Manik Bandyopadhyay's Padma Nadir Majhi, Mahasweta Devi's Bichhan, Buddhadeva Bose's Ekti Jiban, Prafulla Roy's Ram Charitra, Shibram Chakraborty's Debotar Jonmo,

Banaphool's Kichhukshan, Bangladeshi writer Shahed Ali's Jibrailer Dana and Selina Hossain's Hangor Nodi Grenade were thought of. For a variety of reasons, including non-availability of actors (Chunibala Devi and Suchitra Sen, for example), these ideas had to be abandoned at different stages. According to Sandip, his father moved on with his work, never regretting what could not be pursued.

Ray was approached by Indira Gandhi to make a documentary on Jawaharlal Nehru for whom he had admiration. Besides, in a letter of June 1, 1978, Ray wrote to Jindal about the proposals he had been requested to consider "... (a) documentary on Rajasthani music for French TV... (b) a 3-part film for BBC (each 90 minutes long) on any subject or subjects of my choice... (c) a proposal from UNO to make a film on 'the horrors & miseries of war', for worldwide TV screening... (d) a revival of The Alien under a major U.S. company backing with an updated script and a new title..." UNICEF approached him for a film or child labour. Ray was also interested in the operatic form of Balmiki-Pratibha, and documentaries on notables like Radhanath Sikdar who first calculated the world's highest mountain peak. None of these eventually took off for reasons not publicly known.

Conscious of what's happening all around, Ray was immersed in ideas. A storyteller, both in celluloid and print, he was always assessing the cinematic potential of literary sources that ignited his imagination. Now, on the occasion of Ray's 100th birth anniversary celebrations, it is for the researchers to probe and delve into the available material in order to fathom why many of these ideas couldn't get transported to the medium of cinema.

Amitabha Bhattacharya is a retired IAS officer who has also worked with the UNDP. Views are personal



FROM THE ARCHIVES

#### Know your **English**

#### K. Subrahmanian

"Wake, waken, awake, awaken (D. Ashok, Madras)."

"Those are simple words, but are not easy to distinguish. Fowler's "Modern English Usage" revised by Cowers deals with the distinction between the forms thus: "Distinction between the forms is difficult, but with regard to modern usage certain points may be made: (1) Wake is the ordinary working verb (You will wake the baby; Something woke me up; I should like to be waked at 7.30; Wake the echoes) for which the others are substituted to add dignity or formality, or to suit metre, or as in (3) or (5) below. (2) Wake alone has (and that chiefly in waking) the sense be or remain awake (Sleeping or waking; In our waking hours). (3) Awake and awaken are usually preferred to the others in figurative senses (When they awoke, or were awakened, to their danger; This at once awakened suspicion; The national spirit awoke, or was awakened; A rude awakening). (4) Waken and awaken tend to be restricted to the transitive sense; when he wakens is rarer for when he wakes than that will waken him for that will wake him. (5) In the passive, awaken and waken are often preferred to awake and wake, perhaps owing to uncertainty about the p.p. forms of the latter part; it wakened me is rare for it woke or waked me, but I was wakened by it is common for I was waked or woke or woken by it; see also the alternative forms in (3) above. (6) Up is very commonly appended to wake, rarely to waken, and never to awake and awaken."

In American English, the past and past participle of 'wake' are 'woke' or 'waked' respectively. 'Woken' is used only in British English. Again in American English, the past and past participle of 'awake' are 'awoke' or 'awaked' respectively. 'Awoken' is used only in British English, 'Awake', 'waken' and 'awaken' as verbs are generally used in literary writing."

"Social, sociable (Amrit Kaur, Chandigarh)."

'Social' means 'pertaining to society.' Social service, social problems, social disorganisation, social evil. There was a time when it meant friendly, companionable. Even now some use it in this sense. But the word that is used these days to convey the sense of 'friendly' is 'sociable.'

*She is a very sociable person.* A social club is a club where you spend some time with others. Not all of them may be sociable! 'Unsociable' means 'not disposed to seek the company of others, not companionable, reserved'.

He is an unsociable person. The opposite of 'sociable' is 'unsociable.'"

"Selenology (S. K. Banerjee, Calcutta)." " 'Selenology' means the scientific study of the moon. In Greek, 'selene' means 'the moon.' The first 'e' is pronounced like the 'ee' in 'feel,' the second 'e' like the 'i' in 'fill,' the first 'o' as in 'hot' and the second 'o' like the 'a' in India.' The stress is on the third syllable."

Published in The Hindu on November 12, 1991.

#### THE DAILY QUIZ

Please send in your answers to

dailyquiz@thehindu.co.in

#### On May 3, 1715, a total solar eclipse occurred over Europe. A quiz on the event

#### Vasudevan Mukunth

#### **QUESTION 1**

The English astronomer X is famous for, among other things, predicting the onset of the eclipse with an accuracy of four minutes. As a result, the event is also known as "X's eclipse". Name X.

#### **QUESTION 2**

At the time the eclipse occurred, the date was April 22 and not May 3 (the year was 1715 in either case). The reason for this is that Great Britain would adopt the

#### only 37 years later. Fill in the blanks. **QUESTION 3**

Before the eclipse occurred, the English cartographer John Senex had published maps of the eclipse's path created by both X (in Q1) and Y in March. Y is famous for pushing the

parliament of Great Britain to pass the Longitude Act in 1714. It promised rewards for anyone who devised a simple method to estimate a ship's longitude while at sea. Name

#### **QUESTION 4**

While X (in Q1) had predicted the eclipse to within four minutes, he'd got the path of the eclipse wrong by around 30 km. X later realised he'd used the wrong lunar \_ table that describes the path of the moon). Fill in the blank.

#### **QUESTION 5**

In 1686, X (in Q1) coined the name ' to refer to a period of about 6,585.3 days, which could be used to predict the occurrence of solar and lunar eclipses. X said he was inspired by a term in an 11th century Byzantine book. Fill in the blank.



Name the man whose bust is depicted here. X (in Q1) succeeded to his title in 1720, and his work helped Y (in Q3) prepare the eclipse map. PUBLIC **Questions and Answers to the previous** day's daily quiz: 1. This British football legend was the runner up for the Ballon

D'Or in 1999. Ans: David Beckham 2. The party to which Tony Blair belonged to. Ans: Labour party. He was the U.K. **Prime Minister for three terms** 

3. Identify this novel that won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1932. Ans: The Good Earth by Pearl. S. Buck

4. This movie based on a popular comic book saga was released in 2008. Ans: Iron

5. This song by Pink Floyd was banned in South Africa. Ans: 'Another Brick in Wall

Visual: The reason why May 2 is celebrated as International Harry Potter day. Ans: It is the day the battle of Hogwarts was fought and Lord Voldemort was defeated

Early Birds: Vasumann Yadav Neha Vaddiparti| ViswanadhaRao Batchu| M. Suresh Kumar

#### Word of the day **Acquisitive:** eager to acquire and possess things especially

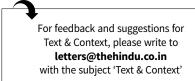
material possessions or ideas

Synonym: to get

**Usage:** She has an acquisitive mind.

Pronunciation: bit.ly/acquisitivepro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /əkwizitiv/



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#### Concocted claims

Patanjali episode raises larger regulatory issues

he Supreme Court late last month rightly expanded the scope of the misleading ads case against Patanjali Ayurved to include the promotion of fast moving consumer goods as well. The judges observed that "FMCG/pharma companies who have been issuing misleading advertisements.. adversely affecting the health and well-being of babies, young children, women (including lactating and pregnant women), senior citizens and the sick and infirm" must be 'closely examined'.



On the issue of AYUSH (ayurveda, unani, siddha and homoeopathy) medicines, there are two regulatory lacuna — one that pertains to mis-selling, which the Supreme Court called out in its April 23 hearing with respect to Patanjali, and the second that deals with the approval of proprietary AYUSH medicines. On the first, the court has taken a serious view of the Centre's move last August to 'omit' Rule 170 of the Drugs and Cosmetics Rules, 1945, which empowers the State licensing authorities to take pre-emptive steps against misleading ads of AYUSH products. Curiously enough, Rule 170 was introduced by the Centre in December 2018. Over time, going by the Centre's August 29, 2023 letter, the Ayurvedic Siddha and Unani Drugs Technical Advisory Board pushed for the omission of Rule 170. It is strange, as the judges have noted, that the Rule has not actually been dropped through a formal order; yet, its implementation has been stalled.

According to the Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisments Act) 1954, promoting any medicine (AYUSH or allopathy) that claims to cure cancer, heart disease, hypertension, among 50 other ailments, is not allowed. Rule 170 would have supplemented this law. However, it seems that this law is observed more in the breach. This is also because it is somewhat sweeping in scope, thereby encouraging violative behaviour. It could be clubbed into the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, with a more granular set of rules on permissible promotional activity. A 'positive list' could usher in more responsible business behaviour.

It is also not clear whether AYUSH producers who put out proprietary medicine comply with Chapter IV A of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act (DCA). Under this Chapter, classical ayurveda, siddha and unani medicines made in accordance with the ancient texts listed under the DCA do not have to go through clinical trials. But proprietary AYUSH medicines, where the producers make their own combinations, cannot avoid such trials. These 'medicines' often come with outlandish claims, including Patanjali's Coronil. The Health Ministry should shed more light on the ecosystem here. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India is tasked with monitoring misselling of food products. While the FSSAI is reputed to conduct rigorous tests and often tones down the 'ad line', there are products that slip through the cracks. These foods and nutraceuticals would escape the 'Magic Remedies' Act. Such issues will hopefully be addressed in days to come.







**POINT** BLANK.



**LOKESHWARRI SK** 

he period since the beginning of 2023 has been marked by growing uncertainty. Even as all nations struggled with stubborn inflation and slowing growth, continuation of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, breakout of Israel-Palestine war last October and elections in two of the most populous democracies have heightened the risks. But amidst this bedlam, Indian government bonds have been in a zen mode; with the 10-year bond trudging nonchalantly in a small range of 7-7.4 per cent.

This behaviour is in contrast with other sovereign bonds which have been swinging wildly over the last two years. Indian government securities (G-secs), on the other hand, seem to have been insulated from the volatility in global markets in this period.

This was corroborated by a businessline analysis of the correlation between the 10-year US treasury securities and 10-year sovereign bonds of India, China, Brazil, Indonesia and South Korea. It was found that the link considerably in the period between January 2023 and April 2024 even as to move in step with the US treasury securities yield.

Why is India on a different plane when compared with other emerging economies? Numerous factors seem to be contributing including declining government borrowing, increasing demand due to the global bond index inclusion and a stable rupee. This resilience provides room for the RBI to follow a monetary policy independent of the Fed and other central banks.

#### RATE HIKE CYCLE

Indian 10-year government bond yield had hit a low of 5.7 per cent following the Covid onset in July 2020. Yields began inching up from those levels in 2021, caused by massive FPI selling of Indian G-secs in 2020-21. But yields began hardening sharply from 2022, following rate hikes by the Fed and RBI, and rising US treasury yields. By June 2022, Indian bond yields had risen to 7.45 per cent. But they have not surpassed that level in the following 22 months, moving in the 7-7.4 per cent range.

US 10-year bond yields too began rising sharply from 2022 when the Fed began its aggressive rate hikes; 10-year yields shot up to 3.8 per cent that year, marking a 13-year high. The commencement of the Russia-Ukraine war in February 2022 further added to the volatility.

But US yields have continued to move higher in 2023 too, moving close to the 5 per cent mark in October 2023, when the Hamas attacked Israel. Yields have

Indian bond yields stop swaying to the US tune

between Indian and US bonds weakened other emerging market bonds continued

#### WEAKENING CORRELATION

vield movement.

level again.

Typically, the US treasury yield plays pied piper to the yields of sovereign bonds of emerging markets. The reasons behind this link is simple. As bond yields in the US increase, they become more attractive when compared with other sovereign bonds. This makes institutional investors based in the US sell the sovereign bonds of emerging markets and invest in US treasuries. This leads to sell-off in government bonds of emerging economies, pushing their yields higher. The converse takes place when US treasury yields decline.

been volatile since then as bond market

first anticipated sharp rate cuts in 2024

doused those hopes, bond prices have

sold off, pushing yields to 4.6 per cent

other emerging economies such as

mimicked the movement of the US

with it, in contrast with Indian bond

Of interest is that sovereign bonds of

Brazil, Indonesia and South Korea have

treasuries since 2023, rising and falling

and sent bond prices higher. As Fed

Indian G-sec yield too closely followed the US treasury yields in the period before 2023. The correlation coefficient (which shows the strength in

Indian sovereign bond vields are moving in a narrow band since 2023 while global bond market has been witnessing intense volatility

the relationship between two variables, and ranges between -1 and 1) between 10-year US treasury bond yield and 10-year Indian government bond yield for the period January 2019 to December 2022 was quite high, at 0.90. This indicates a very strong linkage.

Indian sovereign bond yields have delinked from US treasury yields as lower govt debt,

global bond index inclusion and a stable rupee, support prices

But the correlation has weakened to 0.15 for the period January 2023 to April 2024. This means that Indian bonds are not following the US treasuries closely any more, though the direction of moves is similar.

A similar analysis on the link between 10-year US treasury bonds and 10-year bonds of Indonesia, Brazil, China and South Korea showed that the  $correlations\, remained\, strong, above$ 0.78 in the period January 2023 to April

In other words, only Indian government bonds appear to be disassociating from their US peers.

#### MANY BOOSTERS

Why are Indian sovereign bond yields displaying resilience?

The fundamental strength to Indian government bonds came from the fiscal prudence of the government, which resulted in keeping government debt under check. According to the IMF, government debt to GDP ratio of India is 77.55 while the ratio is at 133.8 for the US, 110.08 for the UK, 115.16 for France and 110.07 for China. India has budgeted for lower market borrowing in FY25, pleasing the bond markets further.

While the supply of paper is reducing, the demand has been good thanks largely to the FPI inflows caused by the

inclusion of Indian sovereign bonds in the JP Morgan and Bloomberg bond indices. Foreign portfolio investors have pumped in ₹1,21,059 crore in Indian debt in FY24, anticipating the increase in weights for Indian sovereign securities after this inclusion.

The stability in Indian bond yields could also be, to a large extent, influenced by the stability in the rupee in the last couple of years. A stable currency enhances the returns of global investors. The Indian rupee lost almost 10 per cent in 2022 when the sharp increase in Fed Funds rate caused immense volatility in all financial markets.

But the tide turned for both Indian equity and debt markets in 2023 with net inflow of ₹1,71,107 crore in Indian equity and ₹68,663 crore in Indian debt instruments. The RBI began adding to its reserves using these flows, thus keeping the rupee from appreciating much. The result was that the rupee moved sideways in the range between 81 and 83 against the dollar since the begining of 2023.

#### WHAT IT MEANS

The resilience in sovereign yields spells good news for the RBI. The risk of large foreign fund outflow destabilising the currency and the govt bond yields, tends to play a large role in monetary policy decisions. The RBI typically weighs the impact of its rate hikes or cuts on foreign investors before deciding on the policy rate trajectory. But the differing paths being taken by the bond yields of two countries means that the RBI may not have to worry too much about that.



Initiate industry-academia exchanges to recognise skill needs; issue work permits for students to validate knowledge gained

**Keshab Nandy** 

hen about 40 per cent of the students from Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) could not secure placement this year, it created uncertainties in the minds of the students, their parents and well-wishers. The reason cited by the companies as well as the placement committees of the IITs was that the students did not have the skill-sets that industries require of them in the time of high scale digitalisation with machine learning and AI enabled delivery models in companies.

The situation is more or less the same with regard to management and law graduates even from premier business and law schools. Though we talk a lot about demographic dividend, it is not going to materialise unless our young population possesses contemporary technical and technology-driven managerial skills to innovate and lead.

The government should come out with a policy that makes it mandatory for industry and academia to have a compulsory exchange programme.

Under this, faculty will work in industry for a period of one month every year to familiarise themselves with contemporary skill requirements, through discussion and job analyses.

Similarly, industry managers should teach at technical and management institutes by helping the faculty to pedagogically adopt an applications-oriented approach. When the students join a corporate job, they will have ready-to-use skills instead of trying to solve today's problems with yesterday's skill solutions.

#### NEW SKILL-SET TEMPLATE

Faculties after working for one month with industry can give the new skill-set template required for next year to the board-of-studies of the university, which will incorporate them into the dynamic syllabus.

A model of 'work-permit' for the students should be developed so that a student is assured of one or two years of work in the industry after his degree, not only to validate the knowledge learnt but also to possibly become financially sound to repay the loans taken from banks and financial institutions, like the



**STUDENTS.** Must look to innovate

way Indian students manage when they go to the US, Europe and Canada for higher studies.

Every institute of higher education must have an 'innovation laboratory'. The laboratory should allot space to every student to work there for developing a start-up project. This should constitute compulsory course-work for all with full credits that students need to clear to get the degree at the end of the course. The university, in consultation with industry bodies like CII, chambers of commerce, etc., will annually arrange a job fair where industry will participate and select

students on the basis of their project in the innovation laboratory for issue of work-permit/placement.

One of the reasons for Indian universities not figuring in the top 100 world ranking is the poor presence of foreign students and faculty. A number of Indian universities are better or at par in their teaching standards compared with their peers abroad. Most students go abroad on the prospect of a good education leading to a work permit, a green card or a permanent residency card, a passport to a good salary and

quality of life in their perception. Hence introducing a 'work permit' system will not only help mitigate the unemployment problem of inland students but also attract many foreign students to Indian universities. Regarding having enough foreign faculty in Indian campuses, we need to pay a competitive compensation package to them as also to the inland faculty, so that a university teacher does not put teaching as his last preference while choosing a career.

The writer is Professor of Management, NMIMS

• 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.

#### **KYC** compliance

This refers to 'KYC confusion' (May 2). KYC compliance is mandatory for a plethora of investment avenues including stock market transactions, mutual funds, bank deposits, real estate investments, bonds, gold purchases and other financial products. Though the linkage between Aadhaar and PAN has been made mandatory, need for an integrated database serves as a  $promising \, solution \, to \, simplify \, KYC$ 

Currently, Aadhaar and PAN serve as primary proofs of identity and address. While Aadhaar is managed by UIDAI, the PAN database falls under the purview of the Income Tax Department. But these databases

are maintained separately, leading to KYC procedures for individuals/institutions being called for multiple times.

By consolidating KYC data, information could be accessed more efficiently, alleviating administrative burdens and reducing processing times. Moreover, individuals would no longer endure the inconvenience of repeated KYC verifications for each financial activity, enhancing overall customer experience.

Srinivasan Velamur

#### El Nina and August rains

This refers to 'Emergence of El Nina may bring bountiful rains in August' (May 2). A similar situation was

experienced in August 2018 when the entire quantum of monsoon rain fell in one month and caused widespread landslides in the Western Ghats region, leading to extensive damage to crops and property. Being a natural and inevitable phenomenon, authorities must prepare well to handle the situation

Rajiv Magal Halekere Village, Karnataka

#### **GST** collections

This refers to 'At ₹2.10-lakh cr, GST mop-up in April hits a new record' (May 2). While avoiding the cascading effect of indirect taxation, the GST has largely helped prevent tax theft and led to an expanded tax

base. The digitisation of the entire financial system too has made evasion of tax harder. However, the criticism that half of the GST is paid by the poor ought to lead to a deeper study as to how to lessen their burden. The vast income disparities ought not to be further aggravated by a taxation system which makes no distinction between the wealthy and the poor. It is a challenging task but needs to be addressed nonetheless. N Sadhasiva Reddy

#### **Boosting agri exports**

Apropos 'Agriculture exports need to be stepped up' (May 2), the fact that India's share of global agri-exports is just 2.22 per cent

shows the enormous potential that can be exploited. Though India is the second largest agricultural producer in the world, there are a number of hurdles that impede our agriculture

Now an extra dimension of carbon footprint has joined the list of impediments to exports. While the government needs to focus on strengthening infrastructure, there is an urgent need to propagate good agricultural practices among the farming community that will enhance the quality of agri-produce, through agri-extension departments in partnership with research bodies

and agriculture universities Kosaraju Chandramouli

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#### Work vs leisure debate

Sad leave to cheer up workers

#### Atanu Biswas

¬ he International Workers' Day commemorates the Haymarket affair in Chicago in 1886, where the labour demonstration was actually in favour of the eight-hour workday strike by the workforce.

In contrast, the workweek is currently the subject of a multifaceted tug-of-war. Worldwide. This April, the Chinese supermarket chain Fat Dong Lai announced up to 10 days of "sad leave" annually for its workers. The idea of "sad leave" undoubtedly recognises the necessity for emotional health in humans and the fact that everyone goes through sad times occasionally.

In a different April event, co-founder of Wakefit, a Bengaluru-based start-up, Chaitanya Ramalingegowda, reignited the 70-hour workweek debate when he suggested that for maximum productivity, workers should sleep for at least 70 hours a

While the 70-hour workweek is a topic of ongoing debate, most people may have missed NR Narayana Murthy's statement in 2020, during the pandemic: "We should take a pledge that we will work ten hours a day, six days a week-as against 40 hours a week.' That's 60 hours a week! In 2023, three years later, he will have barely raised the productivity threshold for young Indians.

By the way, an ILO survey indicates that Indians work 47.7 hours a week on average. The controversial "996," or 12-hour-per-day (9am to 9pm), six-day-per-week work culture in China, which suggests a 72-hour workweek, was backed by Chinese tycoon Jack Ma.

Elon Musk also issued a warning to Twitter employees in November 2022, telling them to brace for 80-hour workweeks. In 2021, the Wall Street investment banking culture even sparked a public discussion on the 100-hour workweek. And in what has come to be known as the "Saturday rule," Goldman Sachs then mandated that its bankers take Saturdays off.

Why should the average person have to work so hard in this age of technical advancement? Technology is supposed to lessen human labour, right? Remarkably, in his 1930 essay Economic Possibilities for Óur Grandchildren, legendary English economist John Maynard Keynes made a number of intriguing and audacious forecasts concerning social life

May 3, 2004

promoter of the Iridium project.

thehindu businessline.

Low liquidity spurs fall in GDR holding

domestic shares and sold them in the local market.

Suzuki Alto drives Maruti's exports to new high

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

Motorola plea on Iridium to be heard this week

Motorola Inc's plea for a stay on an interim Bombay High Court order last

2002 when Indian investors in the failed Iridium satellite phone project of

Despite increased FII interest in the Indian equity market, there has been a

significant shrinkage in the global depository receipt (GDRs) base of Indian

The diminutive, and till recently not so popular (in the domestic market),

Suzuki Alto has spearheaded Maruti Udyog's (MUL) export performance

during 2003-04. Maruti clocked record exports of over 50,000 vehicles in the financial year, of which the Alto alone constituted about 36,444 units.

companies. Investors have converted GDRs of several Indian companies into

Iridium had sought damages from Motorola, whose group was the lead

week, ordering it to deposit more than \$120 million in the Iridium India case against it, will be heard later this week by the court. The case goes back to



fewer hours in future? /ISTOCKPHOTO

and economic situations 100 years ahead.

In fact, he foresaw an era of extraordinary leisure due to the greater level of living, during which people would work "three hour shifts or a fifteen hour week," which is "quite enough to satisfy the old Adam in most of us!"

He also expected a large rise in earnings over the next century. What will the world look like a century after the forecast, as 2030 draws closer?

As a matter of fact, Henry Ford modified the regular six-day workweek to a five-day one in 1926. However, it took more than 50 years thereafter, for a 4-day workweek to be envisaged. And it took almost another 50 years for this idea to gain traction worldwide. However, it hasn't yet shown up as a general practice in the real world. Did Keynes overestimate or misunderstand the planet's technological progress entirely?

Given the recent advancements in AI technology, is it possible to conclude that AI will finally cause the seismic shift in workplace culture that Keynes foresaw? Perhaps. Perhaps not.

Unexpectedly, in August 2019, Jack Ma spoke differently on stage with Elon Musk at the World Artificial Intelligence Conference in Shanghai, just a few months after voicing in favour of China's infamous "996" work culture.

With the aid of technological advancements and educational system reform, people may work as little as three days a week, four hours a day, in the next 10-20 years, according to the Alibaba co-founder. He said, "...because of artificial intelligence, people will have more time enjoying being human beings." What's really interesting is that it agrees with Keynes' predictions! In this turmoil, society really needs to strike a balance somewhere. If not, 10 sad days off would not seem adequate.

The writer is Professor of Statistics, Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata

#### Issues in curative jurisdiction

JUDICIAL TWIST. SC's recent ruling in the DMRC-DAMEPL case may undermine India's image regarding dispute resolution



SRIVIDHYA RAGAVAN

ndia has taken strides globally with a remarkable understanding of the trade nuances to become an impactful global player. Nevertheless, a decision rendered by the Supreme Court on April 10, 2024 using the curative jurisdiction has undermined expectations for timely dispute resolution.

This remarkable decision involved the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC), a government company, and implicates the Airport Express Metro-Line, a premier infrastructure project commissioned in New Delhi.

In setting-aside a 2017 arbitral award that repeatedly withstood scrutiny at different levels of appeal (except at the Delhi High Court Division Bench) including by the (same) Supreme Court, the court showed scant regard for timely dispute resolution, effect on investments and principles of due

DMRC's request for a curative hearing on the Metro-Line dispute was the culmination of a string of appeals challenging the execution of an arbitral award issued in 2017 and favouring DAMEPL, the other party to the litigation. The arbitration process started in 2012! For global legal experts, the Court lost an opportunity to showcase an ability to address nuances of abuse of rights when using the right to appeal.

#### ENDLESS APPEALS

In indulging the DMRC, this judgment leaves every arbitral award open for endless appeals - an unwise move from a court already bogged down with backlogs. Thus, the judgment deals a blow to India's goals to be a world-class

Instead, the court's propensity to indulge in arbitral-awards endlessly forces Indian companies to arbitrate abroad to resolve disputes in a timely manner. The judgment simply validates the lack of public trust over the judiciary owing to delays.

DMRC's request for a curative hearing lacked the type of scintillating legal questions usually reserved for the Supreme Court's consideration. That the Court seized curative jurisdiction an extraordinary option — over an arbitral award that had attained finality,

#### The judicial journey

Process/ standard	Inconsistency
The agreement requires Airport-Metro Line to run at 120 kms/hr	Safety regulators cited safety reasons, from 2013 till 2023 multiple times preventing operation at scheduled peak operating speed. The permission for 120 kms/hr was granted in January 2024 - about 13 years after commencement of commercial operations.

The interest rate DMRC would have paid under the agreement on the awarded amount The principal sum due is approximately ₹2,945 crores, the sum due as on date of judgment was approximately one and a half times the (principal plus interest) is ₹7,780 crores!

interest rate for debt raised by DAMEPL The arbitral panel was unilaterally

established by DMRC DMRC was aware of the interest component

Arbitration is the globally preferred fastest The curative petition [filed by DMRC] did not cite the precedential grounds for reopening a judgment of the Supreme Court, namely the likelihood of bias and/or denial of natural justice

The Supreme Court already heard the exact same matter once under Article 136 DMRC has appealed multiple times DAMEPL handed over the metro-trains to DMRC after issuing termination notice

has attained finality

DAMEPL has won every time in multiple jurisdictions except at the Division Bench at Delhi

DMRC has never averred any issues with the arbitral tribunal, which agreed with DAMEPL about

Interest was calculated as per the terms of the agreement. Having voluntarily signed the contracts,

DMRC's assertion that DAMEPL deserve a lower contractual rate without justification lacks proper basis

The judicial system took over seven years for (partial) execution of the award given by qualified

engineers! And, the curative opinion requires a fresh arbitration panel to be constituted

the defects in the civil works were uncured within the cure period

The petition cited miscarriage of justice, a ground not listed in the Supreme Court Rules for

entertaining a curative. It lacks a basis for the court to engage in the tribunal award under the

prevalent law. The DMRC curative petition sought for re-of the train safety regulator's conclusions

DMRC have been using it to profit from the line

First confirmed under Section 34, and next, appealed under Section 37 of the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, which appeal decision was later set-aside after being heard by the (same) Supreme The arbitral award of 2017 favoring DAMEPL Court under Article 136 of the Constitution, beyond which a petition for review under Order 47 of the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908 was rejected for lack of error on the face of the record. Thus, award had

is surprising. Further, the court did not acknowledge the consequences of the extraordinary delay to execute a 2017 arbitral award.

By the time the court rendered the judgment in 2024, the interest component was nearly twice principal amount, totalling to ₹7,800 crore! Early execution could have averted interest accumulation. The Court seemed unconcerned that, DMRC, a government party, should know or ought to have known that the interest will be paid using tax-payers money.

#### THE INCONSISTENCIES

The judgment portrays the Indian judiciary as mired with inconsistencies. That is, one of the justices who has signed-on to the curative judgement

This judgment leaves every arbitral award open for endless appeals and deals a **blow** to India's ambition to be a world-class arbitral hub

which states that the arbitral award is patently illegal had: (i) earlier signed on to a Special Leave Opinion (SLP) from the same court directing the Delhi High Court to expeditiously hear the execution matter; penned an opinion refusing to rehear the same dispute in May, 2022 when DMRC sought a petition against the Delhi High Court's order to execute the arbitral award; (ii) penned an opinion in September 2022 unequivocally noting that the arbitral award had attained finality.

The government constituted an expert committee to institute a more sophisticated world-class arbitral system in 2023. It is sad that the expert committee did not submit an amicus to the Supreme Court on the matter.

The judgment goes against sound judicial discipline requiring courts to provide clear justifications to overstep stare decisis, which the Court has not convincingly done. It also ignores the clear mandate in the arbitration statute explicitly restraining judicial instincts to (re)appreciate matters of fact on appeal.

#### INTERNATIONAL WORRIES This curative judgment has should rightfully concern international trade

disservice to India's trade posture. One of the principal tenets of the trade regime of the World Trade Organization, to which India is a signatory, emphasises establishment of sophisticated and timely mechanisms for dispute resolution. The judgement portrays the country as incapable of managing projects with public-private partnership, and signals to the global community that India's sophistication as a trade partner ends when a dispute begins!

experts and the US Trade

Representative. The decision does

Infrastructural deficit characterizes India's constraint. Encouraging arguable abuse of process tactics does a disservice to the country. A recent article by Nobel laureate

Michael Spencer with Mohamed-A.EL-Erian, notes India needs to overcome reputational challenges. Access to international markets

entails sophisticated systems infrastructure, dispute resolution, a reliable judicial process.

The writer is Professor of Law & Director of International Programs, Texas A&M School of Law

#### Farmers take the tech route to prosperity

limate change is real and it is taking a toll on India's farmlands.

According to the Global Climate Risk Index [2021], India is the seventh most vulnerable country at risk. Its impact is being felt in the form of floods, droughts and unseasonal temperature swings, which are hitting crop yields.

#### THE CHALLENGES

The monsoon is the lifeblood of Indian agriculture. Rainfed agriculture constitutes around 52 per cent of the net sown area in India, contributing 46 per cent of foodgrain output and supporting livelihood for nearly 40 per cent of our population.

Monsoon data over the last 15 years examined by M&M shows that while there has been an increase in pre-monsoon and post-monsoon rainfall, rain during the traditional monsoon period has actually declined.

This has disrupted the kharif se crucial for rice cultivation, as well as the rabi season, key for wheat.

Heatwave conditions also hurt horticultural crops, livestock, fisheries and the poultry sector as there is an increased demand for water. Nearly 80 per cent of our freshwater

is used for agriculture putting significant pressure on our groundwater supplies. India, however, is striving to adapt.

Our farmers are building resilience by deploying innovative, new-age technology.
They have, for instance, turned to

high-yielding climate-adapting cultivars.

As a result, the country's overall productivity of foodgrains has increased from 522 kg/hectare in

1950-51 to 2,386 kg/hectare in 2020-21. At the same time research into farming technologies, genomics, and soil health management is addressing challenges posed by climate change.



It is enabling precision farming which is helping farmers improve yield and profitability, regardless of the size of their landholding. Advanced digital solutions are paving the way for a new approach to farming involving smart fertilising to smart harvesting, drone spraying and soil mapping.

Agriculture's share of Gross Value Added (GVA) stood at 18.3 per cent of the economy in 2022-23.

Thus, it is imperative that all efforts

are made to ensure growth and development of the sector. Businesses must increasingly

collaborate with farmers and the government to energise Indian

Advanced tractors, farm machinery, better quality seeds, precision farming, satellite technology along with farmer education, will go a long way in paving

the road for farm prosperity. M&M Farm Sector's Krish-e initiative is providing multiple advisory services to farmers, helping them increase yields and income while

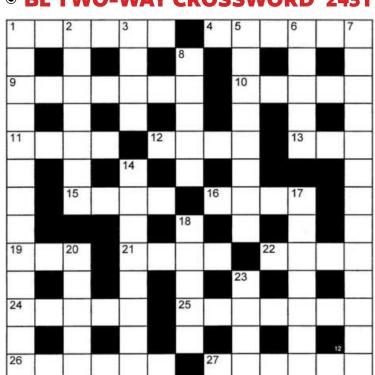
reducing cultivation costs. At this critical juncture for Indian agriculture, we would do well to

remember Mahatma Gandhi's words. "The farmers are the real heroes and

saviours of our society," he said. "They deserve our utmost respect and support."

The writer is President – Farm Equipment Sector, Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd

#### **BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2431**



#### **EASY**

**ACROSS DOWN** 01. Sole right to proceeds of invention (6) 01. Was a 04. Quits (6) pathfinder (7,3,3) 09. Bugs (7) 02. Trying flavour (7) 10. Writing material (5) 03. Head support (4) 11. Neat (4) 05. Widened (8) 12. Refuse of grain (4) 06. Snake (5) 13. Duration of play (3) 07. Weighing 15. 'Food' (4) device (6,7) 16. Bound (4) 08. Extortionate 19. Embrace (3) money-lending (5) 21. Not keen (4) 14. No longer 22. Make well (4) fashionable (8) 24. Grain (5) 17. Get ready (7) 25. Think unworthy (7) 18. Cutting edge (5) 26. Cedes (6) 20. Large birds (5) 23. Second-hand (4) 27. Stick to (6)

#### **ACROSS**

**NOT SO EASY** 

01. It's quite obvious it's for the inventor's protection (6)

04. Doesn't remain: many don't do so, in Autumn! (6)

09. Small creatures at home with religious schools (7) 10. Literary writing: does it go to the wall? (5)

11. Neat way to decorate with ribbons, lace etc (4)

12. Wave such inner husks of corn on the dish (4) 13. Manage to move fast (3)

15. Something like a caterpillar for food? (4)

16. It's bound to occur quadriennially (4)

19. Close embrace or, being left out, it could be rough (3)

21. Slow to learn it's overcast (4) 22. Get better end of scene held by Prince Henry (4)

24. What, if enheartened by the Orient, is a flour-supplier? (5)

25. Haughtiness aids distribution in a racket (7)

26. Gives up lid? Yes, like this! (6)

27. Anno Domini is present, so stick to it (6)

01. What fingerpost did was act as pathfinder (7,3,3)

02. Having the flavour, thanks to wound received from 9 (7)

03. To indulge in embraces may take a bit of bottle (4) 05. Former Greek god died without one having grown (8)

06. After six, for each snake that's poisonous (5)

07. In May, bank statement shows it to indicate

heaviness (6,7)

08. In which overmuch interest is taken for borrower's

14. Dismissed, having arranged to meet girl (that's

old-fashioned!) (8) 17. Are following quietly a commercial traveller to

get ready (7)

18. A dashing fellow, or a bit of a grass? (5)

20. Birds for example, being given up, see the difference (5)

23. At one time did form a part of previous edition (4)

#### **SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2430**

ACROSS 1. Degraded 7. Crime 8. Meaning 9. Lumbers 10. Ride 12. Stetson 14. Denotes 17. Were 18. Fulcrum 21. Pillows 22. Elves 23. Endanger DOWN 1. Demure 2. Guardian 3. Aria 4. Eagles 5. Rise 6. Person 7. Comment 11. Retorts 13. Sidelong 14. Differ 15. Sampan 16. Teaser 19. Love 20. Flea

#### NEW DELHI | FRIDAY, 3 MAY 2024

Silver investors must take note of its industrial use

Diversifying portfolio

"nvestor interest in silver is rising significantly in 2024, with assets under management in silver exchange-traded funds crossing ₹5,000 crore. The white metal has gained around 16 per cent since January. Silver is often clubbed with gold when it comes to asset allocation but the two precious metals have significantly different profiles while retaining some similarities. Like gold, silver is considered a hedge against inflation and economic uncertainty to a certain extent. Like gold, it is also easily traded and can be liquidated quickly for cash but there are more transparent corporatised mechanisms for selling gold or taking loans against it. Such mechanisms are not available for silver. As with gold, India imports large quantities of silver and is one of the world's largest silver consumers. Most silver imports come via West Asia, with a duty of 12-15 per cent, depending on the exact route for import. Like gold, silver too has an inverse relationship with the dollar since international prices are dollar-denominated. A strong dollar often leads to a weaker price trend in silver.

However, unlike gold, silver has a serious industrial profile. Gold has few, limited industrial and scientific applications outside of its decorative qualities, and less than 15 per cent of gold is used for such purposes. In contrast, more than half of annual silver consumption is driven by industrial uses, and this demand is slated to rise a fair amount due to its use in health care, and in "green" industries. Silver's industrial applications exploit the metal's high conductivity (which is the highest for any element in both electricity and heat) as well as its sensitivity to light and its antibacterial qualities. Silver is a raw material in solder and in welding and brazing alloys. It is also used as raw material in batteries, and in dentistry. It has increasing demand due to being used in medicine, solar energy, radio-frequency identification chips, semiconductors, cellphone touch screens, and water-purification systems, among others.

Demand triggered by the solar energy/photovoltaic industry alone is growing at an annual rate of 12 per cent, while chip-related silver consumption is also growing fast, as is demand from water-purification systems and other anti-bacterial applications. Many of these applications are in industries that have strong, secular growth profiles. Investors in silver need to take into account its industrial profile and the promise of demand growth due to industrial utility when considering exposure and asset allocation. Arguably, silver could be considered an industrial metal in the same way as the more exotic platinum, which also finds many industrial applications. While gold is linked to economic cycles due to its ability to ride out inflation, silver has a more complex relationship with the macroeconomy due to the many industrial uses. The supply of gold is also more limited.

Financial advisors often suggest that there be a small asset allocation to gold - 5-10 per cent in individual portfolios — to provide diversification. Silver could be recommended because although it is a less powerful hedge against inflation, it too has an industrial profile. However, silver prices will likely weaken in the short term because of an expected delay in interest rate cut by the Federal Reserve. But a recovery in global economic activities, particularly in the high-tech areas mentioned above, is likely to keep savvy investors interested.

#### **Combating pollution**

Lowering plastic production will be the key

wo years after representatives from 175 countries gathered in Nairobi and agreed to develop the first legally mandated treaty on plastic pollution, there is little hope that the world can reach a consensus and successfully forge a treaty to combat the ecological harm posed by plastics anytime soon. The Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Plastic Pollution was convened for the fourth time in Ottawa this week. However, it was no surprise that even after holding talks well past midnight, no common ground could be found regarding the imposition of limits on plastic production. While most countries agreed on the need to tackle plastic pollution across its lifecycle, from the initial extraction of fossil fuels for plastic production to the end-of-life disposal of plastic waste, some argued that imposing production limits may not be feasible. Petrochemical-rich countries and several industry groups lobbied against the proposal. Instead, they want the treaty to focus on plastic recycling and waste management.

It is well known that focusing on waste management and recycling will not be enough to address the plastic crisis. The world generates about 400 million tonnes of plastic waste each year. Of the 7 billion tonnes of plastic waste produced globally thus far, less than 10 per cent has been recycled. In fact, much of the plastic waste ends up in oceans and landfills. Plastics are synthetic polymers, which makes them non-biodegradable. The problem does not end here. The production process is also greenhouse gas-intensive. Additional emission emanates from the process of polymerisation. Estimates from the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory in the US suggest that plastic creation generated 2.24 gigatonnes of planet-heating pollution in 2019 — as much as 600 coal-fired power plants. Under a 4 per cent annual production growth scenario, plastic production would emit 5.13 gigatonnes of pollution in 2050, even if the world can successfully decarbonise the power grid by then.

In this context, the inability to come up with a global treaty urgently shows business and economic interests are superseding potential ecological gains. Notably, the top seven plastic-producing companies are fossil-fuel companies. In the past few decades, a fresh worry regarding plastics has crept up — their toll on human health. Traces of micro and nano-plastics have found their way into human blood and even human placenta. Developing proper disposal systems and waste-collection techniques are not enough to prevent the climate impact of plastics, or prevent them from entering the human body, the vast amount of which happens before plastic becomes waste. Slashing production is, therefore, key to mitigating the problem in the long run.

In 2022, India implemented the Plastic Waste Management (Amendment) Rules, 2021, which banned 19 categories of single-use plastic, although they account for only 11 per cent of single-use plastic in the country. But their use is still rampant, with sales continuing across several outlets. Unfortunately, the task of resolving the plastic problem is not attracting sufficient private or public funding, leading to inadequate availability of cost-effective alternatives. Methods such as photo-oxidation or breeding plastic-eating microbes like natriegens bacteria have not been able to scale up either. For now, the road to Busan seems uncertain — the place where the fifth meeting of the negotiating committee is scheduled to be held later this year.

#### Filling the submarine gap

Addressing this deficiency should be a top priority for the new govt, given India's role as the gatekeeper to the Indian Ocean



**BROADSWORD** 

AJAI SHUKLA

ne of India's most critically delayed military acquisitions is the "30-Year Submarine Building Plan," which the Cabinet cleared in 1999 to create a fleet of 24 conventionally-powered submarines. Operating in concert with the navy's long-range maritime patrol aircraft, these would deny hostile submarines the freedom to range unchallenged in the Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal, and the northern Indian Ocean.

The 30-year plan envisioned building six conventional boats (the traditional naval appellation for submarines) in India to a western design — presumably French, German or Swedish. Another six

would follow, based on an eastern design — most likely Russian, South Korean or Japanese. Having accumulated expertise from both the west and the east, Indian shipyards would design and build the next 12 submarines indigenously.

Separately, in another top-secret initiative, navy and Defence Research and Development Organisation designers would build a small fleet of nuclear-powered attack submarines (SSNs) as well as nuclear-powered submarines armed with nuclear-tipped ballistic missiles (SSBNs). The SSNs, with their ability to remain submerged for weeks, even

months, would be capable of conventional missions at long ranges and the Indian Navy has twice leased SSNs from Russia in order to develop the capability to operate them. The nuclear-armed and propelled SSBN fleet would not go into battle against enemy submarines and warships. They would constitute the underwater leg of the nuclear triad — India's nuclear deterrent.

A quarter of a century has elapsed since this shiny new submarine plan was finalised, but not even Project 75 — construction of the first six submarines has been completed. And with Project 75-India (abbreviation: Project-75I) still to be tendered, building 18 submarines in the remaining five years is beyond the realm of possibility.

Complicating India's decision-making in submarine acquisitions are the peculiar hydrological conditions that prevail in the waters around our shorelines. We have a coastline of 5,600 kms, another 1,800 kms of island territories, and 2.37 million square kms of exclusive economic zone (EEZ). Two-thirds of the world's trade passes through these waters, including oil and gas from the Strait of Hormuz, and commodities and hydrocarbons transiting through the Suez Canal. Passage between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific must pass through the straits of Malacca, Sunda, Lombok and Ombai Wetar, providing opportunities for a blockade of this shipping.

If peninsular India was flanked on both sides by shallow waters, our navy could have made do with

conventional submarines. The Arabian Sea gradient is so gentle that, 40 knots offshore from Karachi, the seabed is just 40 metres deep, offering little manoeuvre space for large submarines. Nuclear-powered, 4,000-tonne SSNs and the larger conventional boats cannot operate close to the Karachi coastline, where the seabed slopes down very gently into the Arabian Sea, India's eastern coastline, in contrast, slopes down sharply into the Bay of Bengal, making it suit able for operations by large, conventional boats as well as nuclear-pow-

ered SSNs that require only a short transit to the Malacca Strait, where they can lie in ambush for extended periods. This is a job for nuclear-powered submarines, which are constrained only by human endurance and by food supplies. A nuclear-propelled SSN is also better equipped to form part of an aircraft carrier battle group (CBG), providing a protective screen against enemy submarines. Given India's hydrological constraints, as well as its blue water ambitions to operate two CBGs independently, there would be a need for at least 3-4 SSNs in India's fleet.

Most major naval powers, such as France, Russia, the UK and the US, prefer an all-nuclear fleet since that provides global reach; and running multiple submarine types is prohibitively expensive. The US refuses to part with submarine technology, regarding it as a key component of its naval superiority. For this reason, France

and Russia build conventional submarines only for export, while their own navies are equipped with nuclear-propelled boats. For buyers who demand better technology than diesel-electric submarines, OEMs are now offering air-independent propulsion (AIP) - a nonnuclear propulsion system that allows submarines to operate underwater for longer durations, without surfacing to charge their batteries.

The navy began the acquisition of six submarines under Project-75I in July 2021 under the strategic partners (SPs) model. Described in the Defence Acquisition Proposition of 2020, four armament categories have been identified for acquisition under the SP route: Fighter aircraft, helicopters, submarines, and armoured fighting vehicles or main battle tanks.

Since Project-75I is a shipbuilding project, the first step has been the selection of two Indian firms as SPs - Mazagon Dock Limited (MDL) and Larsen & Toubro (L&T). These shortlisted SPs have been issued a request for proposal (RFP) and are required to submit proposals for collaborating with any of a list of foreign OEMs. The five chosen OEMs are Naval Group from France, Thyssenkrupp Marine Systems (TKMS) from Germany, Rosoboronexport (ROE) from Russia, Daewoo Shipbuilding and Marine Engineering (DSME) from South Korea, and Navantia from Spain. The OEMs will have to meet stringent indigenisation conditions: 45 per cent for the first boat, incrementally stepping up to 60 per cent for the sixth and last. The project cost is estimated to be over ₹40,000 crore.

Notwithstanding the selection of five foreign OEMs to partner the chosen two SPs, there are effectively only two vendors competing for the tender — TKMS and DSME — since the other three OEMs do not meet the tender condition of having a working, sea-proven AIP. If TKMS decides against participating in the bidding (it has already expressed reservations on the conditions in the RFP) the navy would either have to go in for a single vendor procurement, or modify the tender.

TKMS of Germany is currently regarded as the leader in this pack. Company executives point out that it has earlier built four Type 209/1500 submarines for the Indian Navy in the 1980s and 1990s, in MDL, Mumbai and India submariners regard those submarines highly This makes MDL the only yard in India with full-submarine integration experience. In addition, the two lead submarines — INS Shishumar and INS Shankush have already undergone medium refit and life certification in India by MDL and TKMS.

Furthermore, the Type 209 HDW submarines that the Indian Navy operates has been developed into the HDW Type 214, which is in service with several world navies, including Italy, Korea and Turkey. Finally, the design that TKMS plans to offer is a highly flexible submarine configuration with two types of AIP: Fuel cell AIP, which is suited to long-range endurance at lower speeds; and Lithium-ion batteries that are optimised for higher-speed endurance.

Given India's role as the gatekeeper to the Indian Ocean, making up the submarine deficiency should be a top priority for the new government.

#### Needed: An underwater PM Gati Shakti

The oceans harbour vast untapped economic potential worth trillions of dollars, yet much of it remains undiscovered. Not only does 94 per cent life exist underwater, oceans play a critical role in managing greenhouse gases. Earth's longest chain of mountains, the mid-ocean ridge, which spans 65,000 kms, is underwater, as are 3 million shipwrecks, each holding a treasure trove of stories. Surprisingly, oceans remain less explored than the surfaces of the Moon or Mars.

India's maritime domain, covering nearly the same area as its land territory, holds 80 per cent of her

resources but contributes only 4 per cent to gross domestic product. As India marches to become the world's third-largest economy, the blue economy provides a shimmering opportunity. India can generate millions of jobs and trillions in revenue from fisheries, aquaculture, tourism, shipping, offshore energy, and minerals. Moreover, the high seas and deep seas have tremendous strategic implications as well. China has the world's biggest fleet engaged in highseas fishing, and India needs to catch up. Deep-sea minerals, including polymetallic nodules and rare earths,

hold boundless value, with advancing technology making their sustainable extraction feasible in the near future. The nation quickest to harness the opportunities in open maritime territories may control the resources

and territory in the long run. The initiation of a blue economy strategy hinges on developing good underwater domain awareness (UDA), a subject largely overlooked. UDA first gained importance during the Cold War, with systems like SOSUS, a seabed hydrophone network set up in the Atlantic by the US Navy to track Russian submarines. However, with technological advancement, UDA is of great economic significance as well. Underwater information is now captured using underwater and spacebased sensors. Space-based sensors are used to guide fishing-vessels to fish-rich areas and identify specific high-value fish.

India must prioritise indigenous development of

underwater sensor technology because these technologies are closely guarded, and, if shared, are prohibitively expensive, rendering their economic use unviable. Additionally, the equipment developed during the Coldwar era works well in the cold temperate conditions of the Pacific or the Atlantic, but its performance degrades rapidly in the tropical waters of the Indian Ocean, with data inaccuracies of up to 60 per cent. India made a promising beginning with the unveiling of 75 iDEX challenges under the Navy's SPRINT programme in August 2022, resulting in the country's first indigenous underwater technology prototypes. To strengthen UDA,

domestic chip development capabilities are essential. A design-led incentive scheme could prioritise UDA sensors for funding, fostering chip-level expertise in this domain. The Ministry of Electronics and IT could consider iDEXtype challenges with assured procurement by the government.

The UDA involves collection and analysis of vast datasets involving thousands of attributes. These datasets cover a wide range of information, including geographic features like sea-mounds. ridges, trenches, as well as underwater events, observations entities such as vessels, objects and their behaviours,

Additionally, data on activities like navigation, communications, environmental factors like temperature. salinity, density, water-quality and chemical composition, ocean-currents and acoustic-signals, seismic activity and the Earth's magnetic field are included. Central Ministries, organisations, coastal states collect separate data, resulting in isolated datasets.

An open-API framework akin to India-stack applications such as in UPI and Aadhaar, could facilitate sharing of data. This could foster development of applications by startups and organisations and promote the use of artificial intelligence in this domain. Furthermore, a PM Gati Shakti for economic UDA, akin to the PM Gati Shakti for terrestrial economic development could be established. The initiative would provide a comprehensive picture of available data, identify strengths and gaps, and guide future data collection efforts. Furthermore, it could serve as a centralised

Highway

Chugani

**Pages: 176** 

**Price:** ₹250

coordination platform for multiple agencies, reducing duplication and wasteful expenditure.

The PM Gati Shakti for economic UDA would be characterised by a GIS-based platform. This will have four-dimensional data points — latitude, longitude, depth and time. Since the changes in UDA attributes like temperature, salinity, density, and acoustics are ever-changing, the time dimension of this GIS-based platform would be very important.

Diverse underwater domains in the Sunderbans and Sir Creek demand context-specific maritime planning. The PM Gati Shakti for economic UDA could enable India to spearhead the development of "Smart Maritime Zones", similar to "Smart Cities", which would facilitate technology-driven maritime spatial planning based on location-specific character ensuring optimal and sustainable exploitation of marine resources and addressing challenges like safe navigation, search and recovery operations, protection of economic assets and prevention of underwater pollution. This would take the vision of Sagar — security and growth for all in the region — to a higher level and would enable India to be a leader in this domain in the Indian Ocean region.

A Gati Shakti plan for economic UDA would guide human resources planning. There is a need to enhance awareness amongst policymakers, military and the police. The Marine Research Centre (MRC) has emerged as a resource centre in this domain. Expanding the MRC's role, a national programme could be envisioned with the MRC evolving into a regional capacity-building centre for foreign littoral nations. The MRC could also work towards developing into an innovation-hub, nurturing UDA

While UDA has been viewed as a security issue, it holds potential as a key economic catalyst. Similar to past initiatives like the electronic, space and atomic energy commissions, a Gati Shakti plan for economic UDA could position India as a frontrunner in leveraging this domain. UDA has the capacity to revive India's maritime legacy, offering significant opportunities for economic growth and global leadership.

The writer is a distinguished visiting professor at IIT Kanpur, and a former defence secretary

#### The art of constructive negotiation



**BOOK REVIEW** 

CHINTAN GIRISH MODI

re you jealous of people who are excellent at bargaining and always manage to get the best deals? Do you struggle with asking for a raise even when you know that you deserve one? Would you like to learn how to articulate what you want without feeling guilty or ashamed?

Read Prakash Chugani's book Negotiate or Stagnate: Have it Your Way Without Showing the Highway to learn the basics of negotiation. A consultant with senior-level executives in India, West Asia and Africa, he teaches the

negotiation and conflict resolution course at SP Jain School of Global Management and runs a podcast called Negotiations Paraphernalia.

The book is anchored in the conviction that negotiation skills can be polished with practice. It will help you let go of the belief that some people are born to be successful negotiators and others are doomed to fail miserably. It is divided into 16 short chapters that are a breeze to read because of the conversational writing style, minimal use of technical jargon and abundance of examples. The ease with which Mr

your confidence and help you take small and meaningful steps that will add up over time. "I was earlier under the impression that negotiations are battles of wits that involve aggressive behaviour, generating fear and intensifying the atmosphere

with tough tactics. Due to this notion, I

Chugani explains his points will boost

would avoid negotiations, which has had several repercussions," he writes.

He points out that, even before we "enhance our negotiation capabilities", we have to prepare the ground by discarding preconceived ideas about negotiations that we have internalised. If we have grown up seeing people get what they want only by using "anger, shame, threat and other manipulative techniques", it might be harder for us to appreciate how negotiations can open up new possibilities and lead to favourable outcomes for both parties.

This book covers how to negotiate in work contexts that include selling. purchasing, recruitment, policy change, asking for a promotion, and building teams. The author's tips would be useful, especially if you feel that you often get short-changed because you lack the finesse to spell out what you want in a given situation clearly. He mentions, for instance, the importance of

doing your homework before getting to the negotiating table. If you intend to buy a second-hand vehicle or rent a home, you need to stay updated about the market rates. When you go in with this knowledge, you will not shell out a ridiculously exorbitant price.

legotiate

OFF THE GRID

AJAY KUMAR

It is important to know the walk-away price, or "the bare minimum we are willing to accept as a seller and...the maximum we are willing to part with as a buyer". Seasoned negotiators are able to anticipatethewalkaway price of the party

they are negotiating with. They do not throw random numbers. Their industryspecific research, and conversations with people in their network, come in handy. They pose open-ended questions, and also look for non-verbal cues when the other party avoids replying. Mr Chugani gives the example of a land deal. If the seller asks, "What do you plan to do with

this property?" and the buyer is noncommittal, the seller can directly ask if the plot would be used for a commercial or residential purpose.

This book will teach you how to work with a "non-response", which is all too common when people are trying not to lie

but are also reluctant NEGOTIATE OR to give away the STAGNATE: Have it whole truth. It is a bit like playing a game, Showing the and people who are not used to it can get Author: Prakash frustrated. That does not help. In fact, Mr **Publisher:** Penguin Chugani has some excellent advice on managing emotions.

Hewrites, "When

they make a ridiculous opening offer, we simply deflect it in good jest." Losing your temper or throwing tantrums is not productive. Lightening the atmosphere communicates that you are in control.

This book lists a number of ways to increase one's power in a negotiation. Punctuality is a great quality to nurture because it gives you time to familiarise

yourself with the surroundings, break the ice, and also get some time to breathe before the formal conversation.

deception. A lot of people incur losses

till midnight. Sometimes, they jump

excitedly at an offer without realising

because an offer is apparently valid only

Mr Chugani also offers some

cautionary words on tackling

when they make hasty decisions

that it is too good to be true. One of the most interesting chapters focuses on cultivating cross-cultural sensitivity. Some cultures place value on "accomplishments, skills and reliability" whereas others value "empathy, friendliness and emotional closeness" in business relationships. These insights would certainly help individuals strengthen their "negotiation muscle" but the book does not address the crucial topic of how collective bargaining can help improve

The reviewer is an independent journalist and educator based in Mumbai. He is @chintanwriting on Instagram and X

working conditions.



{ OUR TAKE }

#### **GST's new peak** should spur tweak

Crossing ₹2 lakh crore in collections is a milestone for Goods and Services Tax, the tax regime remains work in progress

hen the Goods and Services Tax (GST) was launched in July 2017, a monthly collection of ₹1 lakh crore was the aspirational target. GST collections for the month of April 2024 have crossed ₹2 lakh crore for the first time. This makes it an important milestone in GST's journey. What are the key takeaways from the monthly GST collection crossing this threshold?

First, the obvious caveat: Any economy which has positive inflation and growth is bound to see a rise in GDP and tax numbers. This makes it necessary to go beyond the nominal tax numbers. On that front, the trends are anything but insignificant. The share of GST collections in India's GDP was 6.9% in 2023-24. This is the highest this number has ever been since 2018-19, the first full fiscal year of GST roll-out. 2023-24 is also the third consecutive year when the share of GST in nominal GDP has increased. This shows that a significant part of the increase in GST collections has been driven by better compliance, perhaps even formalisation of the Indian economy.

As far as the monthly collection numbers are concerned, one can argue with some degree of certainty that they do reflect a healthy momentum in the economy. This conclusion is supported by other high frequency indicators about the economy such as Purchasing Managers' Indices, which continue to be in the expansion zone. To be sure, April GST numbers are always higher because of the year-end factor and one will have to see whether the ₹2 lakh crore level becomes a norm next month onwards.

The first and second point, when read together, raise a more interesting and important question. If GST collections and architecture have indeed stabilised at a level where the government does not have to worry about GST's contribution to the fiscal kitty, isn't it time for a more holistic appraisal of India's biggest indirect

Many independent and credible voices have long argued that an ideal GST regime should have fewer tax rates and ideally even a lower peak rate. A move towards these goals could generate possible tailwinds for both ease of doing business and consumer demand. In India's case, there is also an added complication of production heavy states losing out in the GST regime because it is a consumption-based tax. None of these questions can or should be decided in a hurry. Ideally, the GST Council and the 16th Finance Commission should discuss them thoroughly once a new government takes office.

#### Restive campuses hold a mirror to Washington

s it back to the sixties on American campuses? US universities have been roiled by protests against ■ Israeli action in Gaza, and Washington's overt support for it, since October. Protests among students have triggered administrative action, suggesting a pushback by the State authorities and pro-Israel lobbies. In December, University of Pennsylvania president Liz Magil was forced to resign for her views on Palestine, which were deemed by donors and others as anti-Jew. On Tuesday, authorities at Columbia University called in police to remove encampments, an action described by the protestors as violent and against free speech. Close to 1,500 students have been arrested across the US after protests spread across campuses including Harvard, Berkeley, Yale, and UCLA.

Restive campuses may not necessarily be barometers of the political conversation outside, but they influence public policy in the long run. The 1960s and 1980s saw massive mobilisations in the US — and elsewhere, including India — over the Vietnam War and the antiapartheid struggle in South Africa. These did not force the establishment to rethink policies immediately, but they surely contributed to the US withdrawal from Vietnam and the freeing of Nelson Mandela. Student unrest peaked in Europe in 1968, but its impact was visible in the peace, environmental movements while mainstream politics fortified itself against radical currents. Conscription contributed to the 1968 unrest in the US whereas support for Gaza is also a reflection of a changing student population. Multi-ethnic, multi-faith campuses are not just politically conscious but more militant in calling out the excesses of nation-states. However, in the absence of broader solidarities, campus protests are unlikely to transform the political ground. That said, the protests mark an important moment, of a conscientious young America holding the moral compass to a tired establishment defending a war that has turned indefensible.

{ BEYOND THE BYTE } Rajdeep Sardesai



### Low polling carries message for parties

The mismatch between political rhetoric and the humdrum existence of daily life has left many voters feeling unsettled and indifferent to the election process

wo rounds done, five to go, here is the big question blowing in the excruciatingly hot summer wind this general election season. Despite the incessant drumbeat in TV studios and outside. why is the "festival" of democracy seeing a below par turnout across the country? Heat, harvest, long weekend holidays can only partly explain the turnout drop. Truth is, there is a democracy deficit in many parts of the country, leaving the average voter increasingly unenthused by the choices before her.

In the pre-election period, the buzz was centred around the Bharatiya Janata Party's triumphal slogan, "Abki Baar Char Sau Paar", almost as if the election itself was a "done deal" and the only thing that remained to be settled was whether Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi would break Rajiy Gandhi's 1984 record of 414 Lok Sabha seats. Now, as the election campaign has unfolded, both sides are suddenly faced with ground realities of a seem-

ingly "wave-less" state-by-state election fight.

Which might explain why just a day after the first round witnessed a three per cent average fall in voter turnout, the PM took the lead in ratcheting up the communal rhetoric. Having entered the campaign with the promise of a "Viksit Bharat" by 2047, the gears were quickly shifted from the politics of hope to that of fear. Fear and hope are unusual companions: Fear can be harmful and destructive while hope can be positive and creative. If the 2024 general elections started with a sense of hope, it has rapidly descended into a climate of fear, one where half-truths and falsehoods are

spread with impunity. When in a rabble-rousing speech in Rajasthan, the PM likened the Congress manifesto to that of the Muslim League's, warned of redistribution of wealth to "ghuspetiyas" or infiltrators, even raised the spectre of mangalsutras being snatched away, the political calculation was obvious: Provoke the party's core Hindutya constituency to join the battle against a familiar "enemv". The Indian Muslim has always been central to the BJP's rise as an electable force: in the 1990s, they were derisively referred to as "Babar K Aulad", now "ghuspetiyas" is the latest dog-whistle. The pious platitudes of "Sabka Saath. Sabka Vikas" are seemingly meant only for global acceptabil-

If the BJP has revived its long-stand-

ing communal tropes, the Congress too is preying on imaginary fears. Waving a copy of the Constitution at his rallies, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has warned that if the BJP comes to power, it will amend the Constitution to do away with reservations for Dalits, Adivasis and OBCs. If the BJP wants to stir communal passions with incendiary rhetoric, the Congress seeks to connect with the Mandalite "social justice" constituency that is primarily responsible for its decline in north India over the last three decades

And yet, the average voter, besieged with basic livelihood issues, remains unimpressed. Travel across the country and the disconnect between the leaders and citizenry is apparent. The last five years have been tough on many Indians — the Covid pandemic, extended lockdowns, price rise, job losses and falling incomes have hardly created the conditions to whip voters into a feel-good frenzy. A "rising" India is a talking point in five-star soirees but in the heat and dust of rural India, a water tanker that comes only once in eight days is a grim reality in many parts. The mismatch between rousing political rhetoric and the humdrum existence of life has left many voters feeling unsettled, if not indifferent to the poll process.

Maharashtra is a case in point. No state has seen the kind of political unheaval as the west coast powerhouse in the last five years. Three chief ministers in five years, shifting allian-



Travel across the country and the disconnect between the leaders and citizenry is apparent.

ces and backroom deal-making have left a mark on its polity. Even political cadres across parties no longer seem as engaged with an electoral system that is seen to be driven by an amoral. ideologically bankrupt machine. Why should loyal party workers toil away when their leaders are constantly making unscrupulous compromises only to hang onto power at all costs? Yesterdav's fierce rivals are today's key allies. Rampant opportunism has bred cynicism over brazen cash-and-carry politics amongst old-style political karyak-

While politicians have enriched themselves, agrarian distress accentuated by below-average rainfall, has created a shockingly unequal modern dystopia: Mumbai's super-rich will hold their mangoes and cream poolside brunches even as in rural Maharashtra, the tanker mafia sells water at Rs 200 a large bucket. Not surprisingly, the dominant voter mood in rural pockets across the state is one of disillusionment with unkept promises. Even "Modi Ki Guarantee" posters splashed across every corner of the country aren't quite enough to offset creeping local anti-incumbency, one reason why the BJP has changed more than a hundred sitting MPs.

This leaves open the other big question: Who benefits or loses out elector ally from a fatigued voter mindset? The BJP is justifiably confident that their superior election "sanghatan (organisation) machine led by a leader who is still far more trusted than his competitors will ensure a hat-trick of wins. The Congress is clinging onto fading hope that voter apathy will give them at least a fighting chance in closely contested seats. And yet, the crisis of Indian democracy goes well beyond the BJP versus Opposition binary. The belief that voters are losing out irrespective of who wins an election is growing. Perhaps those who are not voting are also sending out a firm message: Don't take our votes for

granted. Post-script: In a recent tweet, a viewer perceptively remarked how every time a politician is interviewed on television in their homes, the opulent living spaces stand out. By contrast, when common citizens are on camera, their struggles, be it in an overcrowded bus or tilling on arid land, are just as obvious. Who will bridge the divide?

Raideep Sardesai is senior journalist and author. The views expressed are personal

#### Individual preferences versus community law

Tahir

Mahmood

n undesirable aspect of the family law system in India, long overdue for reform, has at last reached the Supreme Court for redress. A Muslim woman from Kerala has approached the Court seeking relief that she should have the legal freedom to opt out of her personal law and be governed by the country's secular

The family law currently in force in the country is a hotchpotch of religious and secular laws. All religion-based personal laws except those of Muslims are c law has so far been subjected only to sporadic reforms. By availing the provisions of the Special Marriage Act 1954 the parties intending to get married can abandon their personal law on the subject, but those who are not married — or do not want to get married (a group that is fast growing) — have no choice but to be governed by the personal law of the community into which they were born. This

is a loophole in the system of the country that needs to be plugged. As regards the Special Marriage

Act, we have had a law bearing this name since 1872 offering the option of a civil marriage. But to avail of its provisions, both parties had to formally abandon their religion. The Hindu Code Bill, moved in the central legislature in 1946, contained a

chapter on civil marriages as an alternative to religious marriages. It was later felt that the facility to opt for a civil marriage should be available to all communities. The chapter was then taken out of the Bill, redrafted, and enacted as the new Special Marriage Act of 1954. It is an enabling law and does not compulsorily apply to any person. The general impression that it is meant only to facilitate inter-religious marriage is not correct. The Act is available both for intra-religious and interfaith marriages. In no case are the parties required to abandon religion, nor for one party to convert to the other's faith if they belong to different communities. A couple already married under their personal law can also change its nature to a civil marriage by

registering it under the Act. The old Special Marriage Act 1872 laid down that all those married under it would in matters of inheritance and wills be governed by the Indian Succession Act 1865 (later merged into the new consolidating Indian Succession Act of 1925). This provision was retained in the new Special Marriage Act 1954 until 1976. By an amendment made in that year it was laid down that if the parties to a civil marriage are Hindu, Buddhist, Jain or Sikh, they would be governed by the Hindu Succession Act 1956. For all others, the law remained unchanged

IN THE MATTER OF WILLS, **MUSLIM LAW IMPOSES MULTIPLE RESTRICTIONS** ON PROPERTY OWNERS. UNDER THE SCHOOLS OF MUSLIM LAW, NO ONE CAN MAKE A WILL OF MORE THAN A THIRD OF HIS OR HER HERITABLE PROPERTY

The civil court laws of India enacted in the 19th century directed the courts to prefer local custom over personal laws. As this legal proposition deprived Muslim women of their inheritance rights, the community demanded a law mandating the application of their personal law in all family matters. Hence, the Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act was enacted in 1937 directing the courts to apply Muslim law to Muslim parties "notwithstanding any custom to the contrarv". Strangely, it provided for compulsory application of the Muslim law of inheritar cases but in the matter of wills to only those who filed a declaration that they so wanted Even with such a declaration, due to the non obstante clause cited above, they would be governed by custom, if any, and not by the Indian Succession Act 1925. The said Act has an elaborate chapter on wills (Part VI) but declares at the outset that it will not apply to Muslims (Section 58)

In the matter of wills, Muslim law imposes multiple restrictions on all property owners. Under the various schools of Muslim law, no one can make a will of more than a third of his or her heritable property. A will contravening this rule would be void to the extent of excess over one-third. unless the testator's legal heirs approve it after his or her death.

Under all Sunni schools, a person cannot also bequeath any property (not even one-third) to a would-be heir (one who will get a share in the testator's property after his or her death). So, a will in favour of the wife or a daughter will be void and ineffective (unless the other heirs agree to it). However, this restriction is not mandated under the Shia law.

Neither of these limitations on making a will is mentioned in the Quran. Whatever might have been the considerations for imposing such restrictions when Muslim lawmakers of the time had done so over a millennium ago, these are clearly unreasonable in this day and age. All property owners should have unrestricted freedom to bequeath their property, or part thereof, to whoever they like. Any reform of the law to this effect in India will not go against any tenet of the Quran -

the basic source of Muslim religion and law. In a report written for the 18th Law Commission of India as its member, I had recommended, inter alia, two legal reforms relevant to the matter under comment. The first of these was that the amendment of the Special Marriage Act 1954 made in this respect in 1976, referred to here, be undone and all per sons availing its provisions be governed in matters of inheritance and wills by the Indian Succession Act of 1925. My second recommendation was that a provision should be made in the said Act of 1925 for a voluntary declaration to be made by all persons, married or unmarried, that they want to be governed by this Act and not by their personal law in all matters of

inheritance and wills. The relief sought by the Kerala woman from the Supreme Court is genuine and fair. I hope the court, while deciding her case, will facilitate this much-needed reform, which will be very much in keeping with the times.

> Tahir Mahmood is professor of law and former member, Law Commission of India The views expressed are personal

EMMANUEL MACRON FRENCH PRESIDENT

I say to Europeans: Wake up. Wake up! They are hidden Brexiteers. All European nationalists are hidden

**Brexiteers** 



#### Climate finance needs overhaul, funds influx

limate finance is the focus of the spring meetings of central bankers, experts and ministers of finance as they seek to set the tone for this year's Conference of Parties (COP). Low-income countries have long complained of the failed climate-finance promises, with the developed world not meeting the \$100-billion annual target until recently. This year presents an opportunity to be more ambitious while setting the new collective quantified goal (NCQG). As negotiators set their eyes on the revised commitment, it is also time to reflect and learn from past experience.

The foremost concern for negotiators and experts is that the term climate finance remains ill-defined. This is particularly important since climate finance flows are largely composed of debt, and barely 15% of it is concessional. Nearly

half of these flows are from the private sector. There is also significant overlap between development and climate finance flows. The line between the two remains blurry, and it is essential to identify new and additional resources. Also, the contributions to climate adaptation that require public finance have been less than satisfactory

Given these shortcomings, it is important to turn attention to the sources of the \$3-6 trillion required to reach the net zero goal. While there is sufficient attention on international public finance flows, there is a need for clear prioritisation — what kind of capital will be available for adaptation and what will be available for mitigation. Evidence bears that private capital can be channelled to commercial mitigation projects, but public finance will remain critical for adaptation. This means the ease of access to funds from the multilateral bodies will be important. The independent expert group of the Indian G20 presidency explored ways through which multilateral development banks (MDBs) can optimise their balance sheet by accounting for callable capital, removing lending limits, and preferred creditor treatment. These changes are possible with the shift in shareholder expectations. More importantly, the approach to credit ratings, which treat comparable low-income country projects

as low quality, needs to be reassessed. Another critical aspect is the determination of the manner of contribution and distribution of international capital. There are formulaic possibilities of basing contribution on per capita income and level of development, along with historical contributions to emissions. In terms of distribution, capital may be provided as per the share in mitigation and adaptation costs

read along with income levels. The setting of NCQG on an economic basis that can be revised over time is a seminal issue. For example, India, in its submission to the NCQG ad hoc group, recommended a 2% of Gross Domestic Product contribution for developed countries.

Conscious of the demands of developing countries, international capital will indeed play a role. There are, however, barriers to the scaling up of such capital. First, exchange rate shocks from a massive inflow can be significant. Second, if the flow continues to be in the form of debt, heavily indebted countries stare at a dire fiscal future. Therefore, developed countries must be urged to be more consider ate towards the macroeconomic constraints of the developing countries, which would include providing an option of moratorium, if not a

write-off on the debt

Suranjali

Tandon

Domestic resource mobilisation will also contribute to climate finance. Domestic taxes can be an instrument, but the task force on international tax expects that this would be met through a carbon levy on maritime transport, financial transaction tax (FTT), global minimum tax, and carbon taxes. But are these revenue streams sustainable in the long term?

For example, studies estimate that the global minimum tax will generate \$150 billion annually, across the globe. Carbon taxes need to be capped to be less distortionary. Similarly, FTT rates cannot be implemented without global coordination among large financial markets. The distribution of global levies also needs to be thought through. On top of this, the use of taxes for support needs deeper domestic reforms. Such reforms would, in turn, depend on economic structures

As NCQG takes shape, developing countries need to assess the extent to which international capital will be sustainable and necessary. The propositions concerning national contributions need to be based on economic rationale and revised periodically. Lastly, while levies are an attractive proposition, they should not be implemented without consider ing the growth and investment concerns of developing economies. A more fundamental shift is to think of a package of reforms consisting of domestic resource mobilisation and a shift in the way international financial institutions assess developing country risks.

> Suranjali Tandon is associate professor at the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy. The views expressed are personal

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WORDLY WISE

FOOD IS NOT RATIONAL. FOOD IS CULTURE, HABIT, CRAVING, AND IDENTITY.

— JONATHAN SAFRAN FOER

### The Indian EXPRESS

∽ FOUNDED BY ∽ RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

#### LAST MILE HITCH

US Fed keeps interest rates steady as disinflation hits a hurdle. But, other central banks may not follow suit

S WAS EXPECTED, on Wednesday, the US Federal Reserve voted to keep interest rates steady as inflation remains elevated, and uncertainty persists over the trajectory of inflation. The federal funds rate remains at 5.25-5.5 per cent. "Inflation is still too high", acknowledged Fed chair Jerome Powell. Data released by the US Labour Department had previously shown that inflation, as measured by the consumer price index, rose to 3.5 per cent in March, up from 3.2 per cent the month before, exceeding expectations. This indicates that the last mile of disinflation is proving to be difficult. As the Fed also notes, "in recent months, there has been a lack of further progress towards the committee's 2 per cent inflation objective." Inflation data for April will be released on May 15.

In the beginning of this year, there were expectations of multiple rate cuts by the Fed this year. In fact, the Fed dot plot had pointed towards the possibility of three rate cuts. However, with uncertainty over inflation, not only has the timing of the rate cuts been pushed back, but there has also been a scaling down of the magnitude of the rate cuts. Cuts are only likely to materialise when there is "greater confidence" on the trajectory of inflation. The strong growth momentum in the US economy — as per the Fed, "economic activity has continued to expand at a solid pace", "job gains have remained strong", and the "unemployment rate has remained low" - provides room to the Fed to keep rates higher for longer. However, while actions of the US Fed do tend to reverberate across the world, not all central banks are likely to delay cutting interest rates. In fact, the dynamics across major economies may be diverging. Christine Lagarde, President of the European Central Bank, has strongly asserted that the bank is "data dependent, not Fed dependent". There are indications of the Euro zone central bank likely to begin cutting rates in June. There are also expectations of the Bank of England cutting rates before the Fed. Inflation in the UK moderated to 3.2 per cent in March, down from 3.4 per cent in February.

In its last meeting, the monetary policy committee of the Reserve Bank of India had voted to keep interest rates unchanged. The MPC also faces a conundrum. Food inflation is elevated, while core inflation remains subdued. And with the RBI projecting inflation at 4.5 per cent in 2024-25, real interest rates are at 2 per cent which might be considered excessive. While there are expectations of monsoon being above normal this year, clarity will emerge in the coming months. Greater certainty over the monsoons, and the trajectory of food prices could provide space to the MPC to pivot.

#### STAND BY THE PRINCIPAL

Pressure on Mumbai school principal to resign is disturbing. Her response and the support for her is heartening

IKING A POST on social media that valorises a Hamas fighter after what happened on October 7 is not expected from a school principal, especially one who has a stellar record leading an institution. But if the management of the Somaiya School in Mumbai presses its demand for Parveen Shaikh's resignation, it will hurt the school. It will also send a chilling message to its students, and future citizens: That the price for expressing a political opinion, even if it is unpopular, is too high. If the principal can be fired for this, why should students debate at all? The school seems to be another in a line of institutions, great and small, that are willing to sacrifice their autonomy and "cancel" employees for expressing an opinion. However, the Somaiya School saga, as it has unfolded so far, also offers a ray of hope.

According to her own account, Shaikh did not even know of the consternation caused by her posts till the school management began pressuring her to resign. Her words were picked up by an online portal, and the article was cited by the management when it asked her to leave. Shaikh has been with the school for 12 years, and has officiated as its principal for the last seven of them. According to reports, she has done well at her job and has thus far enjoyed a good relationship with the school authorities. "The management has always been supportive and positive," she told this newspaper and claimed that she was told that the decision to ask her to resign was a "tough" one. Unfortunately, principals and school administrators being in the dock is not a one-off. In July 2023, a video of the principal of a convent school in Pune being beaten up, allegedly by VHP and Bajrang Dal activists, went viral. Among the reasons for the assault was the recitation of a Christian prayer at the school, and not of other faiths. Such incidents betray an unfortunate regression in institutions that should have been spaces for engagement with multiple points of view. Sites of education, and now even the views of educators on social media, seem to be under the scanner for the wrong reasons.

The silver lining in the entire episode is that Shaikh, rather than bending, has asserted her constitutional rights and sense of professional duty. "I live in democratic India; I hold the principle of freedom of speech in high regard as it is a cornerstone of democracy... I will not resign because I have given hundred per cent to the organisation," she said. A significant number of parents too have reached out to the Trust that manages the school to express their support for Shaikh. The Somaiya School should stand by its principal and serve as an example for education leaders across the country. And, as a professional who leads an institution of learning, Shaikh should realise that her "liking" a social media post may be personal but its import will be public.

#### LET THEM EAT BREAD

Demonisation of white bread overlooks fact that a truly healthy diet relies on diversity of food

GROUP OF scientists in the UK wants to have its bread and eat it too. White bread, that is. Using wheat that retains some of its bran and germ, along with other grains like quinoa, teff, sorghum and millet, the research project is in the process of developing loaves that look and taste like white bread, but are as nutritious as wholemeal bread. Tasty and wholesome — perhaps not a combination as popular as white-bread-and-butter, but certainly a goal well worth pursuing in the larger interests of a healthy society.

Yet, like so many other kinds of food, white bread has been unfairly demonised. For example, the once-trendy "no-white" diet specifically prohibits the consumption of white bread, along with other foods, like white rice, sugar, and white potatoes. The rationale offered is that, devoid of nutrients like essential vitamins and fibre, all that such foods offer is "pure carbs", an oversimplification that fails to account for the fact that a truly healthy diet relies on a diversity of nutritional sources, rather than abjuration of a whole class of foods. Such an approach also flattens the complex social and economic history of food.

Take white bread, for example: Long reserved for the elites of bread-eating societies because of the labour-intensive process of separating the grain's endosperm from the bran and germ — the Industrial Revolution and mechanisation of agriculture made it one of the cheapest, most accessible — and easily digestible — sources of nutrition. And, again, no small matter: The appearance of packaged white bread in grocery store aisles helped liberate women from the daily chore of baking bread. No doubt today's whole wheat bread is delicious, with its deep, earthy flavours, but before the invention of modern leavening agents and reliable electric ovens, the coarse bread eaten by most was just that — coarse. Whether the slice one enjoys at breakfast is white or brown, the key to a healthy diet is not romanticisation of the past but moderation.

### The Vishwa Bandhu



As India emerges as a leading power, multi-pronged diplomacy can maximise partners, minimise problems

S Jaishankar

THE PATHWAY TO reaching the goal of Viksit Bharat in the next 25 years will have many requirements. To begin with, it needs a vision for the nation and equally, the ability to deliver it on the ground. We can develop confidence in that through sustaining a track record. Steady advancement and continuing reform are also possible only in a climate of political stability. That alone would enable policy prescriptions of a long-term nature to be conceptualised and implemented. Much of this will be determined by the cumulative political choice of the Indian people in the coming weeks. But one crucial facet will be the international environment and its ability to throw up both opportunities and challenges for Viksit Bharat. Ideally, countries formulate their foreign

policy as best leveraging the world with a view to promote their national development. The targets are often increasing access to resources, markets, technologies and best practices. Those who have posted impressive growth performance in the last many decades are the ones who have clarity in this regard. In our case, that focus has been sharp since 2014, but for ideological reasons, was more diffused in the first four decades of our Independence. Swayed by imported prescriptions, we sometimes subordinated our own goals to the benefit of others. The big change now is a strong sense of "Bharat First", where we have both the confidence to think through the pathway and using our national interest as the primary metric of judgement. This has encouraged us to pursue a multi-vector diplomacy that would maximise our partners and minimise our problems. Where we have to take a stand, we do not hesitate or come under pressure. At the same time, there is a constant assertion of our relevance. This is Vishwa Bandhu Bharat.

If India is to emerge as a leading power, it must develop deep national strengths. Much

If India is to emerge as a leading power, it must develop deep national strengths. Much of that will emanate from expanding manufacturing as that serves as the foundation for technology. To overcome the neglect of the past, it is essential that we plan to leapfrog, especially in regard to critical and emerging technologies. This is best achieved through strong international collaboration built on trust and comfort.

In a polarised and suspicious

world, those doors can

only be opened by

effective diplomacy.

of that will emanate from expanding manufacturing as that serves as the foundation for technology. To overcome the neglect of the past, it is essential that we plan to leapfrog, especially in regard to critical and emerging technologies. This is best achieved through strong international collaboration built on trust and comfort. In a polarised and suspicious world, those doors can only be opened by effective diplomacy. The international economy is right now in the midst of rebuilding its supply chains and ensuring more reliable manufacturing. This is most starkly evident in competitive domains like semiconductors, electric mobility and green technologies. It is only a Vishwa Bandhu that can ensure that India is fully embedded in these networks.

In the post-Covid world, all significant nations are in the quest for strategic autonomy. Even the most developed are concerned about the hollowing out of their capabilities and dependence on over-concentration elsewhere. In a world where everything is being weaponised, India too has to ensure that its basic needs and critical infrastructure are nationally developed. That is why 'Make in India' is so vital, not just for our economy but even for national security. As we are already seeing in challenging domains like defence, it can open up possibilities of exports as well. India is also today increasingly positioned to emerge as one of the global hubs of research, design and innovation. It is only by a more intensive engagement with international partners that we can hasten our journey towards Viksit Bharat.

The growing realisation of the value of Indian skills and talent is also one of the welcome realities of our times. It is enhanced by the premium put on trust and transparency in the digital domain. Drastic demographic changes in the world are also creating new demands in various professions. Taking advan-

tage of such prospects requires massively expanding our own education and training capacities. But they can be best harnessed only when our partners fully appreciate their compatibility with Indian values and practices. And when we can credibly assure our own citizens of their security, wherever they may be Ensuring these today is a major goal for India's foreign policy. We have already seen the conclusion, recently, of mobility agreements with European nations, Australia, Japan and others. The creation of a global workplace for Indians will not only widen personal opportunities but contribute to broader national capacities.

The era of conflict and climate change that we have entered has powerful implications for connectivity. Just as supply chains are seeking to become more resilient and redundant so too are logistics. We have witnessed the consequences of tension in the Red Sea or the blocking of the Suez Canal. De-risking is only possible when enough countries come together for their shared enterprise to become serious. Interestingly, many of the recent endeavours are focused on India. The IMEC corridor connects us to Europe and the Atlantic through the Arabian Peninsula. The INSTC one traverses Iran and Russia with the same objective. To our East, the Trilateral Highway can take us all the way to the Pacific.

The same logic applies to ensuring security and political balances in a changing world as well. Whether it is Quad or BRICS, I2U2, SCO or East Asia Summit, India's interests have been at the core of its calculations. These initiatives involve a range of partners, often at odds with each other. It requires a Vishwa Bandhu to carry them all. That is why this is such an important element of Modi Ki Guarantee.

> The writer is External Affairs Minister, Government of India



### IN STEP WITH HER

Unlike BJP, Congress has always been the party for women

SHAMA MOHAMED

PICK ANY ELECTION rally of the BJP, and you will see the party's star campaigners talking about the Congress's manifesto. So impactful has been the Congress's promise to the voters that BJP has forgotten all about its "400 paar" jumla and is struggling to counter the Congress manifesto at every step.

Historically, the Congress Party has been the biggest proponent of women's empowerment in this country — with India's first woman PM Indira Gandhi, first woman President Pratibha Patil, and first woman speaker Meira Kumar. This is a legacy that Congress has tried to expand, through our 2024 manifesto.

The Constitution (106th) Amendment Act marks the BJP's great betrayal of women. Its provisions dictate that the reservation of seats in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies will only come into operation beyond 2029. This is in stark contrast to the intention of the Congress in first introducing the women's reservation bill a decade ago.

The Congress will not allow this duplicitous legislation to stand. It will bring the Amendment Act into force immediately. The one-third reservation for women will be applied to state assemblies that will be elected in the next round of assembly elections in 2025. The one-third reservation for women will also be applied to the Lok Sabha that will be elected in 2029.

Another figure of concern is the labour force participation of women in India, which is a dismal 25 per cent. The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2023 puts India at 127 among 146 countries. In 2022, India was lower than Saudi Arabia. This needs to change.

Representation of women mustn't be restricted only to the legislature. The Congress will ensure that more women are appointed

Lately, we have seen how the harassment of women in the workplace has not just been ignored, it has been enabled by the callous attitude of the BJP toward women's safety. We have seen the BJP government stand strongly behind serial sexual abuser Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, while women wrestlers were harassed, abused, and even manhandled by the Delhi Police. We have seen how despite knowing about the deviant sexual proclivities of Prajwal Revanna, the BJP still allied with JD(S) and PM Modi also campaigned for him.

to high positions such as judges, high-ranking police officers, law officers and directors on the boards of listed companies. Equal representation also calls for equal pay and the Congress will enforce the principle of "same work, same wages".

In the last 10 years, we have seen how inflation and escalating unemployment have consistently chipped away at the savings of the common man. It is the moral duty of the government to ensure that every Indian family is taken care of. This is why Congress has resolved to launch a Mahalakshmi scheme to provide Rs 1 lakh per year to every poor Indian family as an unconditional cash transfer. The poor will be identified as those families that are at the bottom of the income pyramid, and the amount will be directly transferred to the bank account of the oldest woman of the household. This serves the dual purpose of a financial net as well as empowering the women of the family.

I have worked in Kerala alongside hundreds of ASHA workers who were struggling due to meagre pay and delayed payments from the government. This is why I am proud that the Congress manifesto promises that the contribution of the central government to the pay of frontline health workers (such as ASHA, Anganwadi, mid-day meal cooks,

etc.) will be doubled. Lately, we have seen how the harassment of women in the workplace has not just been ignored, it has been enabled by the callous attitude of the BJP toward women's safety. We have seen the BJP government stand strongly behind serial sexual abuser Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, while women wrestlers were harassed, abused, and even manhandled by the Delhi Police. We have seen how despite knowing about the deviant sexual proclivities of Prajwal Revanna, the BJP still allied with JD(S) and PM Modi also campaigned for him. These actions lead to women losing faith in institutional mechanisms supposed to be in

place to protect them. When Congress comes to power, we will ensure that laws intended to prevent offences against women such as the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act 2013 and the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 are strictly enforced.

Whenever heinous attacks occur on women, Rahul Gandhi raises his voice. Our Prime Minister, on the other hand, pretends that women don't exist. In the case of the Manipur violence, Rahul Gandhi was the first leader to go and meet the women of the troubled state. Our PM hasn't been able to display this basic humanity as yet. Rahul Gandhi and the Congress have demonstrated how seriously we take the issue of women's safety and empowerment.

Don't just go by my words. You can see how the Congress governments in Karnataka and Telangana have worked for women. This is not a recent trend. It was Rajiv Gandhi who introduced 33 per cent women's reservation in Panchayati Raj. It was under PM Manmohan Singh, with Sonia Gandhi at the forefront in 2010, that the women's reservation bill was introduced. It passed in the Rajya Sabha, but it couldn't pass through Lok Sabha because we didn't have the numbers then.

Since Independence, the Congress has been the party for women. In the 2024 Lok Sabha Elections, the women of India have a choice to make, between a party that has always fought for them, and a party that has reduced them into just an election jumla. Choose wisely!

> The writer is national spokesperson, **Indian National Congress**

# INDIAN EXPRESS

#### May 3, 1984, Forty Years Ago

#### CONGRESSMAN SHOT

TERRORISTS SHOT AT and seriously injured Congress (I) legislator Lakha Singh, his gunman, a Nirankari leader and two others and set fire to a railway bridge, the record room and dispensary of a government school and three shops in Punjab in the last 24 hours. Lakha Singh and two others were injured when four terrorists fired upon them in his fields near Verowal village in Amritsar district.

POTENTIAL ARMS DEAL BRITAIN IS ATTEMPTING to sell to India a massive quantity of sophisticated defence items that include 155 mm guns, combat engineering tractors and advanced engines for the Vijayanta tanks. The two governments also discuss the possibility of Britain supplying as many as 11 more Sea Harriers for the Indian Navy. The two governments are also likely to sign a long-term memorandum of understanding on British defence supplies to India.

#### BLAST IN DHAKA RALLY

AT LEAST ONE person was killed and 15 others injured when three consecutive explosions rocked a rally of the rightwing Democratic League in Dhaka. The rally was organised to protest against the "aggression and firings by Indian border guards" which resulted in the death of one soldier of the Bangladesh Rifles recently.

#### EPIDEMIC DEATHS

**HEALTH MINISTER B Shankaranand pro**vided some disquieting information in the Lok Sabha on the outbreak of certain epidemics in the country when he said that while 911 persons had died of diarrhoeal diseases in West Bengal, viral hepatitis had claimed 314 lives so far in Gujarat. The dreaded monkey fever claimed 139 lives in Karnataka while 44 persons died of gastroenteritis in Tripura.

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### THE IDEAS PAGE

#### WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Iranians know that they are facing ruthless and intransigent rulers. Though the cries on the streets of 'woman, life, freedom' have been stifled, their echoes will continue to be heard."

- THE GUARDIAN



### The divided state

A year after Manipur was wrecked by ethnic violence, there seems scarcely any attempt to bring warring communities to the negotiating table



Patricia Mukhim

ON MAY 3 last year, violence erupted in Manipur. Churches and homes of the Kuki-Zo people in Imphal were targeted. In the weeks that followed, people had to flee, leaving behind cherished memories and losing a part of themselves — as well as papers that are proof of their identity. Neighbours and colleagues began to see each other as enemies. What had gone so wrong that people who had lived and worked together for years were now up in arms against each other?

As the Japanese novelist Shusaku Endo has written, "Atrocity doesn't just come out of evil. It emerges from self-interest, timidity and the desire for status". His novel, Silence, written during the period when Christians were persecuted in Japan is a heart-wrenching account of people deluding themselves into committing atrocities. Social factors strain relations between people. But Endo also tries to find elements of humanity in the perpetrators of violence. He seeks it in their confusion, self-justification and the willingness to lie to themselves.

The communities in Manipur — the Meiteis, Kuki-Zos and Nagas — are Tibeto-Burmans, believed to have migrated from the northwestern frontiers of China. They first settled in present-day Myanmar before migrating to what is today Manipur. This history is, however, contested — the Meiteis claim to be indigenous to Manipur and regard the Kuki-Zos as interlopers. The Nagas of Manipur claim to be indigenous to the state's hill regions. Landholding patterns, much of which are a product of colonial rule, add to the state's complexity — the tribal communities are spread over the hill areas, while the Meteis are concentrated in

Imphal Valley. Political discourse in the state often skims the surface of deep faultlines. It takes the form of an "them versus us" binary with the Meiteis blaming the Kuki-Zos of being illegal migrants and poppy growers, responsible for the drug abuse amongst a large section of Manipur's youth. The hill tribes accuse successive state governments of forcing them to the margins of development. For instance, healthcare and education facilities are scarce in Kangpokpi, a hill district scarred by recurring violence in recent times. Churachandpur, with a 90 per cent tribal population, fares no better. The scale of violence has come down in

the past eight months. But regular incidents of brutality underline that much more needs to be done. More than 200 people have lost their lives, heinous crimes have been committed against women, more than 250 churches have been burnt and a large number of Kuki-Zo families are living in relief camps. Meiteis in the hill districts have also lost their homes and many people of the community are in refugee camps in Imphal. Rapprochement seems difficult because both parties feel wronged. The Meiteis feel they have a right to ST status. The Kuki-Zo feel that would reduce their employment opportunities. In February, a bench of the Manipur High Court modified its last year's instruction to the state government to consider the inclusion of Meiteis in the list of Scheduled Tribes.

The state's poor economic status adds to people's anxieties — after UP and Bihar, Manipur has the third lowest per capita income in the country. Urban poverty is the highest in the state. Economic anxieties often manifest in animosity between communities. A section of the Meiteis feel that the Biren Singh government must do more to prevent illegal migrants.

Manipur needs a calming hand. It needs a leadership that can bring Meiteis and the Kuki-Zos to the talking table. But a year has passed and there are no visible signs of peace-building. The warring communities have not met, even at common platforms outside Manipur. Even the best-known human rights activists from Imphal seem to have gone incommunicado. Chief Minister

Biren Singh, a Meitei, has rarely given the assurance that he is above the state's identity politics. He has continued to stoke anxieties by playing up divisions in the state and referring to the drug problem as a creation of outsiders. In a post on the microblogging site X on April 29, he spoke of the "unnatural" growth of 996 villages due to illegal migration and described it as "a threat to indigenous people and national security". Are these figures backed by research?

Meanwhile, the Kuki-Zo people are confronted by serious existential questions: Is it safe for them to return to their workplaces in Imphal — Manipur University, Regional Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMs) and other state government establishments? Can they use the Imphal airport to travel outside the state? It seems many have to take a circuitous route through Nagaland or Mizoram making the journey arduous and expensive.

The missing weapons, seized from armouries in the first weeks of the conflict, continue to be a problem. In February, the police recovered a huge cache of arms and explosives at two villages in Churachandpur district. On Tuesday, the army's attempt to take away arms and ammunition was thwarted by protestors in Bishnupur district. The resistance from people is a sign of the limitations of a top-down security-centred approach.

The Kuki-Zos have lived with the hope of a healing touch from the Centre. They have lived with the false hope that the BJP leadership will nudge Biren Singh to action. But they now seem to have resigned themselves to the fact that the Centre will not upset his applecart. Polls in several parts of the state have been marred by violence. Would the Centre have kept silent had an Opposition-ruled state seen so much turmoil?

There are even more important questions: Can the people of Manipur, especially the hill tribes, be left to fight their own battle? Will the young generations of Kuki Zos and Meiteis grow up embittered? Today, there's a mix of shock, pain, anger and fear. Above all, there is the reality of being abandoned.

The writer is editor, Shillong Times

### A system that heals

Government health expenditure is increasing and out-of-pocket spending is declining consistently



VINOD K PAUL

THE NATIONAL HEALTH Policy (NHP) 2017 envisions universal access to quality and affordable healthcare. The nation's commitment to increasing public expenditure on health in recent years is evident from the National Health Accounts (NHA) data, including the provisional estimates for 2020-21 and 2021-22.

These show that government health expenditure (GHE) as a proportion of GDP increased by an unprecedented 63 per cent between 2014-15 and 2021-22. It rose from 1.13 per cent of GDP in 2014-15 to 1.35 per cent in 2019-20. This further increased to 1.60 per cent in 2020-21 and to 1.84 per cent in 2021-22.

In per capita terms, GHE increased from Rs 1,108 to Rs 2,014 between 2014-15 and 2019-20. This trend has continued with per capita government expenditure reaching Rs 2,322 in 2020-21 and Rs 3,156 in 2021-22 — almost three times the level of 2014-15 as per the provisional estimates.

In another important trend, the expenditure on government-financed insurance has increased 4.4 fold from Rs 4,757 crore in 2013-14 to Rs 20,771 crore in 2021-22. This reflects rising investments in the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB PMJAY) and state health assurance/insurance schemes. The share of social security expenditure on health (which includes government-funded health insurance, medical reimbursement to government employees, and social health insurance programmes) has increased from 5.7 per cent in 2014-15 to 9.3 per cent in 2019-20 of the total health expenditure.

There has been a consistent decline in Out-of-Pocket Expenditure (OOPE) as a share of the total health expenditure — it dropped from 62.6 per cent to 47.1 per cent between 2014-15 and 2019-20. This trend has continued with the share of this expenditure dipping to 44.4 per cent in 2020-21 and to 39.4 per cent in 2021-22 as per provisional NHA estimates. This has given much relief to people. The resilience of the health system was evident when the OOPE continued to decline in the face of the raging virus during the Covid-19 pandemic (2020-21 and 2021-22).

The declining OOPE is a product of several enablers. AB-PMJAY beneficiaries today do not have to borrow or sell assets to access surgical and medical treatment for serious conditions, including cancer.

The utilisation of government facilities, especially for inpatient care and institutional deliveries, has gone up as per the National Sample Survey (2017-18). Free ambulance services, strengthened government secondary and tertiary services and the Pradhan Mantri National Dialysis Programme (under which over 2.59 crore free dialysis sessions have been held since 2016) are important contributors to averting OOPE.

Drugs and diagnostics are a major driver of out-of-pocket spending. Free drugs and diagnostics services in facilities, including

those at over 1,69,000 Ayushman Arogya Mandirs (AAMs, Health and Wellness Centres) have led to major financial savings for families. The subcentre AAMs provide 105 medicines and 14 diagnostic tests free. The primary health centre AAMs are mandated to provide as many as 172 medicines and 63 diagnostic tests free. Early screening and free treatment of non-communicable diseases, as mandated at AAMs, will prolong healthy life and avert catastrophic expenditure on treatment of their future serious life-threatening complications.

Today, through more than 10,000 Jan Aushadhi Kendras, over 1,900 quality generic medicines and nearly 300 surgical items are being sold at a low cost in practically all the districts. Estimates show that since 2014, a saving of Rs 28,000 crore has accrued to the consumers by this scheme. Likewise, price regulation of coronary stents, orthopaedic knee implants, cancer drugs and other essential medicines has resulted in a saving of Rs 27,000 cr per annum to the people.

Economic surveys have also reported an increasing trend in health-related expenditure by the government. As a share of GDP, it was 1.6 per cent in FY 2020-21 and 2.2 per cent in FY 2021-22 (revised estimate). Apart from expenditure on health services and goods, the estimates of economic surveys also incorporate spending on important social determinants of health especially water supply and sanitation.

Safe drinking water and sanitation have remarkable positive health effects. At the time of the launch of the Jal Jeevan Mission in 2019, only 17 per cent of rural households had access to tap water. As of now, about 76 per cent have a functional household tap connection. As per a WHO report, once tap water is made available in every rural household, it would save four lakh lives over five years. Likewise, the WHO has estimated that the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) Grameen, which has resulted in rural India being open defecation free (ODF). would have averted more than 3,00,000 deaths (due to diarrhoea and protein-energy malnutrition) between 2014 and October 2019.

The rising trends in public health expenditure and a steady decrease in OOPE alongside increasing shares of GHE and social security schemes on healthcare, indicate a move towards a more progressive health system. Funds for infrastructural support under various schemes such as Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (aimed at creating medical colleges and new AIIMSs), Pradhan Mantri Ayushman Bharat Infrastructure Mission and **Emergency Response and Health System** Preparedness Package (aimed at developing pediatric and adult ICUs) are strengthening the country's health infrastructure. Further, the health grants to local bodies under the 15th Finance Commission award (amounting to Rs 70,000 crore) are being injected into the primary health system.

India's health system is on the reformperform-transform path to make Universal Health Coverage a reality in the near future. In this endeavour, recent trends of increasing government financing for health and declining stress of OOPE are in the right direction.

The writer is member (health), NITI Aayog. Views are personal

### What it means to be Viksit

in recent times.

fares no better.

Political discourse in the

state often skims the surface

of deep faultlines. It takes the

form of an "them versus us"

binary with the Meiteis

blaming the Kuki-Zos of

being illegal migrants and

large section of Manipur's

of forcing them to the

instance, healthcare and

youth. The hill tribes accuse

successive state governments

margins of development. For

education facilities are scarce

in Kangpokpi, a hill district

Churachandpur, with a 90

per cent tribal population,

scarred by recurring violence

poppy growers, responsible

for the drug abuse amongst a

India must draw a blueprint for development on its own terms

Radha Goenka

ANOTHER ELECTION YEAR, another ambitious plan for Viksit Bharat 2047. While the idea of transforming India into a developed entity by 2047, the 100th year of Independence, sounds exciting, we must dream cautiously.

Let's start by answering the question: What does it mean to be developed? For most of us, it's a vision of a country like the US or Great Britain. High levels of infrastructure connecting us efficiently. Availability of advanced urban amenities. Access to highquality goods and services. The Industrial Revolution, of which Europe and America emerged as leaders, birthed this idea of a developed nation. Mass production of goods led to easier access and a better quality of life.

What about before the Industrial Revolution? Were there models in society where we organised ourselves differently and were happier? India is home to the Harappan Civilisation, one of the first organised societies of mankind. India was historically also the richest country — in terms of wealth and wisdom. Are there models in Indian history and abroad that we should be looking at, which could be different or contrary to the accepted notion of a "developed" nation that we are striving towards?

There are a lot of factors that lead to the development of a country. Let's zoom into one: Urban planning. India is known to have built one of the first planned cities in 3000 BC with the Indus Valley Civilisation where we had a covered sewage system in the centre of our towns. Ironically, many of our towns today still lack that. Historically, we were the richest nation for a long time. It is believed that during the rule of the Mughal emperor Akbar, we were the richest country in the world. We lived in houses that were built on the principles of "vaastu", a traditional Indian science based on the flow of energy through natural elements like light and wind. It was developed before electricity was discovered. Beds faced east to give you energy and light in the morning from the rising sun. Kitchens were placed where the least wind flowed, to prevent a kitchen fire from spreading into the house. A *haveli* or wada always had a courtyard that provided physical and psychological benefits. Physically, it was built using precise scientific calculations of surface area versus builtup area to create wind pockets that served as independent microclimates — cool in the summer and warm in winter. Psychologically, they created a space where all the members of the house could safely interact with each other. Our houses were built with mud, again a material that is cooling in summer and warming in winter. There was clearly a lot of wisdom in traditional urban planning in India. We were rich not only materially but also with knowledge. Today, as we transform our cities to look

like urban cities of the West, with tall glassand-steel structures to meet the demands of our growing population, are we carrying any of this traditional wisdom? Mumbai houses Asia's largest slum in Dharavi, slated to undergo redevelopment, like many other slum redevelopment projects in the city. The slum dwellers who live in small huts close to each other are offered larger spaces in high-rise buildings. If they were offered access to amenities, like running water and electricity, and the security of permanent housing, would they be interested in moving for more space? They would lose proximity to their community and easier and more direct access to nature. Living in isolation and away from nature is directly linked to an increased number of mental and physical diseases like depression, anxiety and blood pressure. Could there be a solution to our growing population in our traditional urban planning systems that didn't need high-rise buildings?

Following similar notions of development, Saudi Arabia in the recent past announced ambitious plans of a futuristic city called NEOM to be built in the middle of the desert. NEOM is meant to be a futuristic architectural marvel where the entire city, including parks, would be built along a line. A city like that would cost billions of dollars to construct. Saudi Arabia has a relatively small population of 34.2 million people, most of whom already have one, if not two, homes.

Who would NEOM be catering to? Locals or tourists? When it comes to access to highquality goods and services and traditional notions of development, their citizens already seem to have that. Would their citizens prefer an infrastructural marvel like NEOM or a thriving free society? What would they consider to be true development for their country? Maybe it is these questions which led to the recent announcement by the Saudi government of a scale-back on its NEOM plans. Bhutan, on the other hand, measures its progress as a country not on its material growth or GDP, but on its GNH, Gross National Happiness. Bhutan and Saudi, are cases in point of two countries looking at development in very different ways.

As we think about Viksit Bharat, we need to first think about what it means to be "viksit". We are racing towards the goal of becoming developed but are we putting enough thought into what it means for us? As we debate about what it means to be developed, we need to look at not only our glorious past but also at other countries as case studies. With the goal of building a happy, thriving society, we should build our very own version of Viksit Bharat that is a role model for the rest of the world.

> The writer is director at RPG Foundation and founder of Pehlay Akshar, The Heritage Project

#### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### FOR BETTER CONDUCT

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Mind the gap' (IE, April 30). While a model code of conduct has been a noble and just idea, its execution has been abysmal. This enables an environment where these violations are par for the course in the absence of accountability. Any attempt at violation of the MCC tarnishes the image of the ECI as an independent constitutional institution. It is high time that the MCC is formalised and made legally enforceable so as to wipe off any doubts surrounding the credibility and integrity of the Election Commission and the electoral process of the Republic of India.

**Sagar Borade**, Mumbai

#### MATTER OF EQUALITY

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'A tax on aspiration' (IE, May 2). Creating an inheritance tax can prove useful. Such a policy will enhance the equality of opportunity and social mobility amongst different sections of society; increase horizontal equality in the fiscal sphere; help increase vertical equity in taxation; reduce the misallocation of capital and via the "Carnegie effect", it may incentivise large wealth holders to

donate more to charities during their lifetime. While the inheritance tax applies only to high-value inheritances of the top 1 per cent of the population, such condemnable interpretations by the PM and the BJP have caused enormous harm not just to the cause of socioeconomic equality but also the welfare of the poor and downtrodden.

SS Paul, Nadia

#### LISTEN TO THE KIDS

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Don't write off US campuses' (IE, May 1). Most leading US universities are private, majorly run by whopping donations. The top 20 institutions get nearly half of the total funds which are invested in large companies. Pro-Palestine protests are demanding transparency about their universities' portfolios and asking them to divest from businesses aiding injustice in Israel. The traditional commitment at campuses to free speech is missing as arrests, suspensions and recruitment boycotts have been initiated against the students protesting the ruthless assault in Gaza. This is a cry for the conscience of the US. Sooner or later, the government will have to respond instead of just clamping down on anyone who dissents. Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

epaper.indianexpress.com

If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to explained@indianexpress.com

### Prajwal's flight: How diplomatic passports, visa regimes work

**POLICY** 

**DIVYA A** NEW DELHI, MAY 2

AFTER allegations of sexual abuse by Janata Dal (Secular) MP Prajwal Revanna came to light, the politician fled to Germany on a diplomatic passport. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on Thursday said that no visa note was issued to Revanna — but to travel to Germany, he did not need one. Here is why.

What is a diplomatic passport? Who can get one?

Unlike normal passports, which have dark blue covers and are valid for 10 years (for adults), diplomatic passports have maroon covers, and are valid for five years or less. Holders of such passports are entitled to certain privileges and immunities as per the international law, including immunity

from arrest, detention, and certain legal proceedings in the host country.

The MEA's Consular, Passport & Visa Division issues diplomatic passports ('Type D' passports) to people falling in broadly five categories: those with diplomatic status; government-appointed individuals travelling abroad for official business; officers working under the branches A and B of the Indian Foreign Service (IFS), normally at the rank of Joint Secretary and above; and relatives and immediate family of officers employed in IFS and MEA.

Lastly, diplomatic passports are also issued to "select individuals who are authorized to undertake official travel on behalf of the government". This includes union ministers and MPs who often travel abroad representing the government. The validity of these passports is concurrent with the term of the MP. For instance, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi surrendered his diplomatic

passport after he was disqualified as an MP last March.

Why did Prajwal not need a visa to travel to Germany?

Typically, the MEA issues visa notes to government officials going abroad for an official assignment or visit. But in Prajwal's case, no such note was issued.

"No political clearance was either sought from or issued by MEA in respect of the travel of the said MP to Germany. Obviously, no visa note was issued either," MEA spokesperson Randhir

Jaiswal said on Thursday. This is because Germany is among the 34

countries with whom India has operational visa exemption agreements for holders of diplomatic passports. According to a reciprocal deal signed in 2011, holders of Indian

diplomatic passports do not require a visa to visit Germany, provided their stay does not exceed 90 days.

India has similar agreements with countries such as France, Austria, Afghanistan, Czech Republic, Italy, Greece, Iran, and Switzerland. India also has agreements with 99 other countries wherein apart from diplo-

those holding service and offi-**EXPLAINED** cial passports can avail operational visa exemption for stays upto 90 days. Countries in this list include Bahrain,

matic passport holders, even

Brazil, Egypt, Hong Kong, Oman, Singapore, and the United Arab Emirates.

Nonetheless, Prajwal should still have applied for a prior political clearance for a private visit. According to the latest bulletin issued by the Rajya Sabha Secretariat, "Members, when using a diplomatic passport, are required to apply for prior political clearance directly to MEA by using the link www.epolclearance.gov.in and ensure that before proceeding abroad the requisite political clearance has been obtained. Requests may kindly be made at least three weeks in advance".

Who can revoke a diplomatic passport?

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, who has set up a Special Investigation Team to look into Prajwal's sex abuse case, has requested Prime Minister Narendra Modi to cancel his diplomatic passport, and to take "such other steps using diplomatic and police channels of the government of India as well as International Police agencies to ensure the swift return of the absconding Member of Parliament to face the full force of law."

However, in this case, the government can revoke Prajwal's diplomatic passport only after a court order to that effect. "As regards the possible revocation of the passport of any individual, I would refer you to the relevant provisions of the Passport Act 1967. We are not in receipt of any directions from any court in this regard," the MEA spokesperson said.

As per the Act, the passport authority may impound or revoke a passport if the holder is in wrongful possession, or if it was obtained by the suppression of material information; or if the passport authority deems it necessary so to do in the interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India, or friendly relations of India with any foreign country.

It can also be revoked if the holder has, after the issue of the passport, been convicted by a court in India, and sentenced to imprisonment for not less than two years. Finally, a diplomatic passport can be revoked upon orders from a court during proceedings with respect to an offence allegedly carried out by the passport holder before a criminal court.

#### THIS WORD MEANS

#### **MPOX**

A new form of Mpox — a viral disease which was formerly known as monkeypox — that spreads more easily has triggered Congo's largest outbreak yet

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS KINSHASA, MAY 2

THE DEMOCRATIC Republic of the Congo (DRC) is struggling to contain its biggest Mpox outbreak. Scientists say a new form of the disease detected in a mining town

Since January, the DRC (also known as Congo) has reported more than 4,500 suspected Mpox cases and nearly 300 deaths, numbers that have roughly tripled from the same period last year, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

might more easily spread among people.

Congo recently declared the outbreak across the country a health emergency. Cases have been reported in neighbouring Republic of Congo as well.

A new phase of Mpox

An analysis of patients hospitalised between October and January in Kamituga, eastern Congo, suggests recent genetic mutations in Mpox are the result of its continued transmission in humans; it's happening in a town where people have little contact with the wild animals thought to naturally carry the dis-

"We're in a new phase of Mpox," said Dr Placide Mbala-Kingebeni, who heads a lab at Congo's National Institute of Biomedical Research, which studies the genetics of diseases. The lesions reported by most patients are milder and on the genitals, Dr Mbala-Kingebeni said, making the disease trickier to diagnose. In previous outbreaks in Africa, lesions were

He also said that the new form seems to have a lower death rate. Most people were infected via sex, with about a third of Mpox cases found in sex workers. It was not until the 2022 global emergency of Mpox that scientists established the disease was spread via sex, with most cases in

mostly seen on the chest, hands and feet.

gay or bisexual men. In November, WHO confirmed sexual transmission of Mpox in Congo for the first time.

tion this week, the WHO said the new version of the disease might require a new testing strategy to pick up the mutations. "The risk is that unless patients themselves come forward, we will have a silent transmission of the disease and nobody will know," Dr Mbala-Kingebeni said.

There are two kinds, or clades, of is endemic to Central and West Africa.

to 10% of people infected. Clade 2 triggered the 2022 outbreak: more than 99%

Dr Mbala-Kingebeni and

colleagues said they have deaths three

fectious diseases expert at Emory University, said the new mutations "suggest the virus is adapting to spread efficiently in humans and could cause some

Barely any Mpox vaccines and treatments have been available in Congo. The country's minister of health has authorized the use of vaccines in high-risk provinces, and officials are in talks with donor countries like Japan to help buy the shots, said Cris Kacita Osako, coordinator of Congo's Monkeypox Response Committee.

WHO's emergencies chief, Dr Michael Ryan, said last week that despite the ongoing spread of Mpox in Africa and elsewhere, "there has not been a single donor dollar invested".

The looming danger In a report on the global Mpox situa-

Mpox, which is related to smallpox and Clade 1 is more severe, and can kill up

of people infected survived.

identified a new form of Clade 1 that may be responsible for more than 240 cases and at least Kamituga, a region with a significant transient population travelling elsewhere in Africa and beyond. Dr Boghuma Titanji, an in-

pretty consequential outbreaks".



#### **EXPLAINED FOREIGN POLICY & STRATEGY**

### The global spy game

In 4 countries on 3 continents, India has been accused of running espionage ops. India has denied the allegations. It is a general principle that nations spy on one another, put national interest above all else



**SHUBHAJIT ROY** 

ON TUESDAY, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) reported that "Indian spies" had been "kicked out of Australia after being caught trying to steal secrets about sensitive defence projects and airport security, as well as classified information on Australia's trade relationships". The Australian and The Sydney Morning Herald said two Indian "spies" were asked to leave.

A day earlier, a report in *The Washington* Post had named a purported R&AW official who allegedly ordered the assassination of Khalistani separatist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun in the United States last summer. The alleged plot was foiled by US agents.

Earlier in April, the UK-based The Guardian alleged that New Delhi had ordered the killing of 20 individuals involved in terrorist activities in India, in Pakistan — and that India is influenced by agencies like the KGB (former USSR) and Mossad (Israel).

And media in Canada have been reporting on the killing of another Khalistani separatist, Hardeep Singh Nijjar, in June 2023, in which, according to Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, India may have had a hand.

#### **India's differing responses**

India has denied all allegations — but its responses have been qualitatively different in each case, and can be seen as reflecting broad policy positions and current strategic imperatives.

It has rejected Trudeau's allegations as "absurd" and "politically motivated", and accused Canada's government of sheltering terrorists.

After British media reported on the alleged killing of 20 people with terror links in Pakistan, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh declared India would enter Pakistan to kill any terrorist who is hiding there. Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself said at an election rally that his "strong" government enters the homes of terrorists to kill them ("aatankwaadiyon ko ghar mein ghus ke maara jaata hai").

New Delhi has described the reports in the Australian media as "speculative". The government of Australia has not confirmed the claims published in the media.

On the report in *The Washington Post*,





(Left) Prime Minister Narendra Modi with President Joe Biden of the United States and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau of **Canada.** The New York Times (Right) The Prime Minister with his Australian counterpart Anthony Albanese. Anil Sharma/Archive

son Randhir Jaiswal said it makes "unwarranted and unsubstantiated imputations" on a "serious matter", and pointed to an "ongoing probe" into the security concerns shared by the US government on networks of organised criminals, terrorists, and others.

#### 'Pushback' by Five Eyes

All the four countries, on three separate continents, where the allegations have been reported, are part of the Five Eyes intelligencesharing network — along with New Zealand. Together, the Five Eyes are a formidable intelligence force and a valuable partner.

India has deep strategic ties with the US and Australia, its partners — along with Japan — in the Quad grouping. India has invested heavily in the relationship with the US, and has benefited from the end of the technology denial regime. The US has reciprocated enthusiastically, the occasional irritants in the relationship notwithstanding.

But with the Pannun assassination plot, the Americans appear to have drawn a line, and conveyed to India to not take them for granted. Indeed, strategic circles in New Delhi have been taken aback by what would appear to be coordinated moves to blow the cover of Indian covert operations abroad, a seemingly "concerted pushback" by the Five Eyes partners.

#### **Arthashastra diplomacy**

In the muscular foreign policy doctrine

onage and overseas operations in the interest of national security are not taboo. Intelligence mandarins swear by the Arthashastra, the ancient Indian manual of statecraft, which recommends espionage and covert ops. The British historian Christopher Andrew,

author of The Secret World: A History of Intelligence (2018), noted that "The Arthashastra was the first book anywhere in the world to call for the establishment of a professional intelligence service", and one that "envisaged the world's first fully organised surveillance state". In his book The Unending Game: A Former

R&AW Chief's Insights into Espionage (2018), India's former top spy Vikram Sood wrote that "intelligence is that secret activity conducted at the behest of the government that provides it with advance knowledge to take suitable decisions relating to the security of a nation and national interests".

According to Sood, "any nation wishing to project its power beyond its borders or that is facing external threats must be able to see beyond the obvious, foresee events and be prepared for them, and prevent attacks on its territory or citizens". Such a nation "must be equipped to avoid surprises by being able to anticipate them or else walk into situations blind or crippled or both".

Most Indian intelligence officials would agree with this formulation.

#### Supreme national interest It is well known in diplomatic and strate-

gic circles that almost every country spies on other countries, and posts intelligence officers in embassies abroad. In the current context of media in foreign countries seemingly outing Indian operatives, a former Indian official said: "All states spy, but all states are also expected to show annoyance when spied upon." It would seem that the Five Eyes countries, despite having developed strategic ties with India including intelligencesharing and defence, and viewing India a strategic counterweight to China, do not appreciate New Delhi trying to run covert ops in their countries.

"In the American lexicon, strategic partnerships and alliances mean securing US interests first, and the convergence of interests usually means that the other partner must acquiesce to US interests," Sood wrote. "India-US relations may be at their best in decades but the US defines its self-interest far too strongly. It will push its own agenda and look the other way when we are in trouble. It is not in US interests to support an Indian cause."

His prescription is for clear eyes and cold logic: "Our intelligence objectives will remain unchanged regardless of the level of diplomacy and the state of bilateral political and economic relations. The past tendency to scale down intelligence activity when relations show signs of improvement is a dangerous mistake and must never be an option."

### How to decide domestic violence damages: injury or ability to pay?

**EXPLAINED** 

LAW

epaper.indianexpress.com

#### **KHADIJA KHAN**

NEW DELHI, MAY 2

SHOULD THE quantum of compensation in a case of domestic violence be determined by the degree of violence suffered by the victim or the ability of the perpetrator to pay? This is the question before the Supreme Court, which issued notice in the case last week.

The petitioner has moved the top court against orders passed by the Bombay High Court and the trial court directing him to pay Rs 3 crore to his wife under Section 22 of The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 (DV Act), On April 26, a Bench of Justices Hrishikesh Roy and Prashant Kumar Mishra noted "the fundamental guestion" raised by counsel for petitioner "is whether the compensation awarded should co-relate to the degree of domestic violence suffered by the victim or is it to be linked to the financial status of the guilty party".

#### Domestic violence

The DV Act is intended to "provide for

more effective protection of the rights of women guaranteed under the Constitution who are victims of violence of any kind occurring within the family and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto".

Under Section 3 of the Act, "any act, omission, commission or conduct of the respondent" that "harms or injures or endangers the health, safety, life, limb or well-being, whether mental or physical, of the aggrieved person or tends to do so and includes causing physical abuse, sexual abuse, verbal and emotional abuse and economic abuse", constitutes domestic violence.

"Harass[ing], harm[ing], injur[ing] or endanger[ing] the aggrieved person...to coerce her or any other person related to her to meet any unlawful demand for any dowry or other property or valuable security" also amounts to domestic violence.

The law defines an "aggrieved person" as "any woman who is, or has been, in a domestic relationship with the respondent and who alleges to have been subjected to any act of domestic violence by the respondent".

#### Compensation, relief Under Section 22 ("Compensation or-

ders"), "in addition to other reliefs", a "Magistrate may...pass an order directing the respondent to pay compensation and damages for the injuries, including mental torture and emotional distress, caused by the acts of domestic violence committed by that respondent".

Section 12 allows an aggrieved person or anyone on their behalf to apply to a Magistrate for one or more reliefs under the Act. including "a relief for issuance of an

order for payment of compensation or damages without prejudice to the right...to institute a suit for compensation or damages for the injuries caused by the acts of domestic violence committed by the respondent".

#### Petitioner's argument

Senior advocate Madhavi Divan, representing the husband, raised a question regarding the quantum of compensation (Rs 3 crore) awarded to the wife under Section

22 of the DV Act.

According to the order, counsel submitted that the compensation "should be relatable to the damages, injuries including mental torture and emotional distress caused by the act of the spouse, and...cannot relate to the standard of living of the parties".

Divan argued that while the standard of living criteria can perhaps be made applicable in cases of maintenance

under Section 20 of the Act, in this case, the compensation awarded under Section 22 has been "based on the petitioner's annual income.

who is a US citizen, for the year 2008-2009". Section 20 of the DV Act ("Monetary reliefs") allows the magistrate, while disposing of an application for relief under Section 12, to "direct the respondent to pay monetary relief to meet the expenses incurred and losses suffered by the aggrieved person and any child of the aggrieved person" where the monetary relief is "adequate, fair and reasonable and consistent with the

standard of living to which the aggrieved

person is accustomed". The magistrate can either "order an appropriate lump sum payment or monthly payments of maintenance, as the nature and circumstances of the case may require".

#### **Deciding compensation**

In 2008, the Delhi High Court in Chaturbhuj vs. Sita Bai held that the object of maintenance proceedings is not to punish a person for his past neglect but to prevent the destitution of a deserted wife by providing her food, clothing, and shelter through a speedy remedy.

In 2017, in Kalyan Dey Chowdhury vs. Rita Dev Chowdhury Nee Nandy, the Supreme Court ruled that the "amount of permanent alimony awarded to the wife must be befitting the status of the parties and the capacity of the spouse to pay maintenance". The court also relied on its 1970 ruling in *Dr.* Kulbhushan Kumar vs. Raj Kumari, where it held that 25% of the husband's net salary would be just and proper to be awarded as maintenance to the respondent-wife.

Advocate Saumay Kapoor told *The* 

*Indian Express* that while Section 20 provides for compensation for all the losses of the aggrieved person, Section 22 exists to compensate only for the exact injury. "The payment under Section 22 is punitive in nature. However, the objective of paying compensation is not to put the offender in penury but to set an example and act as a deterrent," Kapoor said.

According to Kapoor, since maintenance and compensation are governed by different sections of the Act, "there exists a big gap of legal knowledge in the computation of damages". Due to the absence of clear precedents, "propositions of law from maintenance cases" are often borrowed and applied to DV cases, he said.

Advocate Dharmender Arya, who takes up family law cases, said damages are usually computed on the basis of both injuries suffered by the victim, as well as the financial status of the parties. "The court has the discretionary power to decide this value. Often, it goes case by case, taking into account the victim and the husband's status. and the kind of violence inflicted," Arva said.

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— Ramnath Goenka

#### **EC NEEDS TO PUBLICLY SHARE DATA TO ENHANCE** TRUST IN POLL PROCESS

HE delay by the Election Commission of India (ECI) in putting out the final figures of polling in the first and second phases of the Lok Sabha election has generated a completely avoidable controversy. The ECI decision not to put out constituency-wise registered voter numbers is seen as a deviation from the established practice of making this data available immediately after the end of polling. Concerns have been raised about the non-availability of constituency-wise polling percentages and the total number of registered voters in each constituency. These two figures would have helped political parties to cross-check the percentages in constituencies where polling has concluded.

The ECI's argument that the figures relating to station-wise votes polled are recorded in Form 17 and available with all the candidates has failed to pacify those raising questions over the motive behind withholding the information from the public. Booth-level turnout data is recorded in absolute numbers in Form 17 at the end of voting in the presence of the candidates' polling agents. This booth-level data is consolidated at the constituency level to calculate the polling percentage. Form 17, therefore, ensures transparency and integrity of the polling data. It serves as the primary record, because the figures recorded in it cannot be altered or tampered with. The ECI has a robust system for recording and counting votes. But the delay in publishing the final polling percentage and the absence of data on constituency-wise registered voters and polling percentages has led to some avoidable questions.

The ECI's deviation has raised concerns about transparency and accountability. The commission would do well to stick to established protocols and avoid creating unnecessary doubts in the minds of the people about the integrity of data it puts out. As an autonomous constitutional body, the ECI is duty-bound to make sure that while conducting free and fair elections it maintains transparency in its operations to ensure public trust in the electoral process. The commission should forthwith place the data on registered voters in each constituency and the constituency-wise voting percentage on its website. This would remove doubts over differences between the provisional and final polling figures that have been released. The political parties, meanwhile, need to tone down their criticism of the commission in the interest of maintaining public trust in the electoral process and our democracy.

#### **AWARENESS KEY IN FIGHT** AGAINST UNUSUAL HEAT

ERALA is grappling with an unprecedented heat wave these days. It is for the first time in the state's history that the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued an orange alert for Palakkad and yellow alerts for Thrissur and Kollam districts, with daytime temperature consistently soaring above 41°C. There have been three heat-related deaths confirmed so far—again, an unusual occurrence in the state. Though the state has had its tryst with heavy rains and floods, it is for the first time that it is dealing with heat wave conditions of this severity.

Following the alerts, the state government has asked all schools and colleges to stay shut till May 6. It has requested the public to avoid direct exposure to the sun between 11 am and 3 pm. It has also asked educational institutions not to conduct vacation classes for students between those hours. Construction and agricultural workers, street vendors, fishermen, and others involved in outdoor work have been requested to adjust their work hours, too. The police and fire brigades have been asked to avoid daytime drills. District collectors have directed their medical officers to ensure an adequate number of fans in the district and taluk hospital wards housing pregnant women, children and those requiring special care. ASHA workers would be deployed to create awareness about pro-

viding assistance to people who need special care. Naturally, the common man on the street is yet to understand the enormity of the issue he is dealing with. All the three deaths have happened to those working in the sun. This is despite the fact that the state government and district authorities have been issuing regular warnings. It only shows that the heat wave as a dangerous climatic condition is yet to get registered in the minds of people, as many are still looking at the current situation as a normal summer condition. In truth, the state is witnessing an unprecedented climatic crisis that must be handled with utmost seriousness. There needs to be a coordinated effort involving all arms of the government to prepare the common man for adapting to this challenge. That is the only way forward, as extreme climate-related hazards are here to stay.

#### QUICK TAKE

#### **INCREDIBLE INDIA AGAIN**

XPERTS at a recent tourism expo agreed that foreign tour-– ist arrivals in 2024 are likely to cross the pre-pandemic level \_ of 10.93 million registered in 2019; the number was at 9.23 million in 2023. Kerala, a state with four international airports, made up for a dip in the number of domestic tourists with more foreign arrivals. This is all welcome news, but the overall number is still far too low for a country as attractive as India. Tourism is one of the biggest job creators. And in 2003 alone, it earned the country \$28 billion. It's time to revive the Incredible India campaign through our foreign missions.

ECENTLY, a two-judge bench of the Supreme Court consisting of Justices Surya Kant and K V Viswanathan referred a suit filed by the state of Kerala against the Union of India to a Constitution bench for an authoritative pronouncement on the issue. It is an unprecedented litigation of great le-

EDITORIAL.

gal and constitutional importance. The genesis of the case is also curious. The suit challenges an amendment made to the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act, 2003. This is a parliamentary legislation. The amendment was made in 2018. As per the amendment, the Union of India gets the power to ensure the aggregate debt of the Union and state governments does not exceed 60 percent of the gross domestic product. That is to say, the Union government must fix the borrowing limit of the states as well, invoking the parliamentary enactment. The government at the Centre also issued letters to Kerala imposing a 'net borrowing ceiling' on the state.

Separation of powers is not merely a political or administrative concept. It is also an economic idea, as designed by the Constitution. Fiscal federalism is a facet of India's democracy. Article 292 of the Constitution talks of borrowing by the Government of India (GoI) while Article 293 talks of borrowing by the states. In Article 293, there is a provision for making loans to any state by the Centre. It bars the state from raising a loan without the consent of the GoI, if any amount of loan the Centre gave the state is still outstanding.

Two things follow from this scheme of the Constitution: One, borrowings by the GoI and states are governed by two distinct provisions. This aspect is further fortified by the fact that public debt by the Union and the states are listed separately under the 7th schedule of the Constitution. Two, the requirement for the Union's consent for borrowing by the state is limited to borrowing from the Centre only when the state has outstanding dues to the Centre.

Thus, there is constitutionally guaranteed financial autonomy for states. Financial discipline and stability are requirements for the Union as well as states. The Union, with this object, promulgated the FRBM Act. Several states also promulgated similar enactments. Kerala in 2003 enacted its Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act. This scenario is perfectly in tune with the constitutional scheme that rejects invasions and interferences.

But the 2018 amendment to the central Act tried for the Centre's intrusion on the states' borrowing power. Thus by way of

There is constitutionally guaranteed financial autonomy for states. But by a 2018 amendment to the law on fiscal responsibility, the Centre tried to step into the states' terrain

#### WHY A STATE IS SUING THE UNION





Lawver, Supreme Court of India



statutory amendment, the Centre paved the way to regulate the borrowing of states. This has an aggrandising effect. Since fiscal federalism is to be treated as part of the the amendment and actions based on it are country's Constitution, this amendment is clearly vulnerable to challenge.

The 2018 amendment was done without the concurrence of the concerned states. Evidently, the amendments to the FRBM Act were made by way of Finance Acts based on money bills. A money bill need not be passed by the Rajya Sabha. According to Article 109 of the Constitution, it is enough if the Lok Sabha passes it. The socalled consultative role of the Rajya Sabha, which is supposed to represent the interest of the states, is minimal or ornamental in this regard. Thus, unilateral assertion of the Union that it can control the state's borrowing has antagonised the states, especially those ruled by opposition parties. The Kerala government has argued that vitiated by manifest arbitrariness.

There could be several instances where the states act in conflict with the Centre in financial matters. The limits to the borrowing capacity could be very well an area where the public at large may have concerns. Charges of financial profligacy are raised against the Union as well as the states. Therefore, in many of the conflicts, the GoI and some of the states are contesting parties. In such situations, the Centre cannot act as the judge of its own cause. Such disputes must be necessarily decided by an independent agency.

Though the Supreme Court has indicated

the role of the Reserve Bank of India as the public debt manager of the states, the role of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) in such situations requires to be emphasised. The office of the CAG, as a referee institution, could perhaps give a constitutional resolution for the problems arising out of the Centre-state conflict in the matter of borrowing and their limitations.

The CAG is established by Article 148 of the Constitution. Article 149 talks of its duties and powers. Those are "in relation to the accounts of the Union and of the states, and of any other authority or body" based on a parliamentary law. In the Kerala case, borrowing made by a state-owned authority called Kerala Infrastructure Investment Fund Board, a statutory body established in 1999, engages in many financial dealings required for the developmental projects of the state. The CAG can, if necessary, investigate such dealings as well, based on a parliamentary law.

But instead of invoking the constitutional provisions in the right way, the Union has resorted to an amendment, which on the face of it does violence to fiscal federalism and the separation of powers as envisaged by the Constitution. Its aggressive assertions do not augur well to safeguard the people's interest. Restrictions on borrowing that result in postponement of beneficiary schemes including pensions and assistance to the disadvantaged tell a sad commentary on the whole episode. Extra budgetary borrowing is an integral and indispensable part of financial administration. An unconstitutional intrusion into such transactions can create enormous hurdles in the process of governance. Again, expanding the notion of the Union's consent for states' borrowing from third parties, too, goes against the scheme of the Constitution. As we have seen, Article 293 talks of the requirement for consent only as against the borrowing of the states from the Centre and not from others. It is meant to safeguard the interest of the Union as the creditor.

The decision of the Constitution bench is therefore vital in the realm of financial administration. In the ongoing elections, already there are federalist concerns raised from different corners. There is also a need for a national debate on the issue of fiscal decentralisation. Though the Constitution bench of the top court will decide the issues, it is also important to have a political discourse on the subject. At the end of the day, it is a matter not merely for the Union or the states, but for the people at large to brood over.

> (Views are personal) (kaleeswaramraj@gmail.com)

#### LIFTING THE BURDEN KEEPING INDIAN WOMEN FROM WORK



OMEN'S work participation across the world has been low and its recovery from the postpandemic period has been slow. The International Labour Organization's World Employment and Social Outlook Report for

2023 reflects on this persistent gender gap and pegs women's participation in the labour market at 47.4 percent, as compared to men's at 72.3 percent.

Apart from ILO's highlight of global gender differentials, the World Bank's Gender Data portal reveals substantial regional differences too—particularly in South Asia, North Africa and the Middle East, where participation of women in the labour force is even lower than in other regions. In India, the 2022-23 Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) shows that women's work participation (WPR) is 35.9 percent much lower than the global average.

Although there has been a small worldwide rebound in gender parity in the labour market participation rate since 2022, with more women entering the market than men, the inequalities continue to persist. According to a report by the World Economic Forum in 2023, the informal economy has significantly contributed to this recovery for women, with four out of every five new jobs created in the informal sector. Temporary and part-time work arrangements often make it easier for women to balance care-giving and paid work, one of the reasons women are drawn to the informal sector. However, within the informal sector, women are generally engaged in low-paid employment with extremely limited access to social security and better employment conditions. The growing trend towards greater reliance on technology and digitalisation also requires special attention, especially in the context of women workers in the informal sector.

The PLFS data on employment from 2017-18 to 2022-23 paints an optimistic picture of women's participation. There has been an increase in WPR for women aged 15 years or more from 22 percent in 2017-18 to 35.9 percent in 2022-23. Urban and rural employment have shown similar trends, with women's participation increasing from 23.7 percent to 40.7 percent in rural areas and 18.2 percent to 23.5 percent in urban areas over the same time period.

Though women's employment has increased in India, the quality of employment has remained a challenge. The rise in WPR is mostly attributed to an increase







in self-employment from 51.87 percent in 2017-18 to 65.3 percent in 2022-23. The concern here is, how far does self-employment remain protected and covered under social security provisions? Also, whether selfemployment—that is, mostly informal employment—is an informed choice, or they are pushed to it due to constraints. One of the significant challenges for women to continue in employment is their en-

National Labour Institute, Noida

A 2019 study revealed that 93 percent women workers in India do

unpaid household work, while only 31 percent men do it. Addressing this unfair burden would require men to step up and women to be trained for entrepreneurship

gagement in unpaid and care work. The first all-India time use survey in 2019 revealed 92.8 percent women workers aged 15 and above devote their work time in unpaid domestic services for household members, while only 31 percent men spend time on the same activity. Women spend on an average 5.6 hours in unpaid work a day, that is, in domestic and care-giving activities. Women's time spent in unpaid work is closely linked to their status in employment, as unequal time burdens compel them to opt for part-time, non-regular and vulnerable kinds of employment.

The survey revealed self-employed women spend more time in unpaid domestic work—4.35 hours—as compared to regular workers who spend 3.3 hours on the same activity. One of the targets of the UN's sus-

tainable development goals emphasised the need to recognise and value unpaid work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies to improve gender equality.

So addressing unpaid work becomes important while envisioning a future work scenario for women. In January this year, the Union ministry of labour and employment released an advisory for employers to promote women's workforce participation. Among other things, it provides guidelines to promote a supportive environment for women workers. It highlighted the need to ensure a balance between employment and care-giving responsibilities for both men and women, including implementing family-friendly measures such as paternity, parental and emergency leaves, and flexible work arrangements.

The government has implemented various programmes, the most promising being the Skill India Mission to contribute towards improving employability. Promotion of self-employment is a priority, with initiatives like Stand Up India that provides loans to women including those from marginalised communities. Around 9 crore women are connected with self-help groups under the National Rural Livelihood Mission with provisions for collateral-free loans.

Despite these efforts, the rapidly changing world of work and the emergence of new forms of employment require targeted policy intervention for women both in the formal and informal sectors. ILO's Future of Work Report for 2019 rightly highlighted investing in human capacities and promoting sustainable employment for women from emerging sectors, while emphasising their education, skill trainings and technology to unlock new possibilities.

Promoting greater investments in the care economy will contribute to addressing women's unpaid work. Therefore, there is a need to invest in capacity-building initiatives, along with financial and digital literacy, for promoting innovation-led entrepreneurship. That would be a more equitable way to the future.

(Views are personal)

#### MAILBAG

WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

#### Sensitivity, compassion

Ref: Manipur's lost year shows no sign of ending (May 2). Violence against security forces has been one of the recurring features of the Manipur conflict, highlighting that force alone cannot quell the situation. It requires sensitivity and compassion in equal measure. The present government would be failing its mandate if it did not recognise this imperative even after a year of strife.

P Victor Selvaraj, Palayamkottai

#### **Understanding tradition**

Ref: No Saptapati? No Hindu marriage (May 2). This is a good move by the Supreme Court. The *saptapati* are regarded as the most important rites in a wedding. Every phera taken holds a specific meaning. This move will not only help the people of India but also people of other nations understand our tradition and culture.

#### Aditya Kamble, Kalaburagi **Varying practices**

This ruling presupposes that priests who administer Hindu marriages should be well versed in the mantras of a marriage ceremony. I think it is a tall order. Moreover, it is not easy to execute logistically, as marriage practices vary from place to place in the country. Needless to say, a wedding is purely a union of the minds and saptapati cannot guarantee happy marriages.

#### S Ramakrishnasayee, Chennai **Boosting economy**

Ref: Record ₹2.10 lakh crore GST collection in April (May 2). Kudos to the government for effective measures to increase the GST turnover, including ensuring tax compliance by businesses. Never before has any government taken so much effort to strengthen financial resources. This can in turn be used to create more infrastructure and boost the economy. K V Rajasekhar, Neyveli

#### No defections

Manifestos of political parties mostly contain welfare measures and freebies. They must also explain from where the funds will be generated for these benefits. With so many guarantees, a contestant must also give a guarantee that he will not defect to another party in the next five years if he wins the election. Chandrashekhar Seshadri. Secunderabad

#### Surviving heat

Kerala is getting hotter day by day. So far this year, several deaths have been reported due to the unbearable heat. Therefore it is the responsibility of the government to ensure care for the water reservoirs and fresh water sources to survive the heat in rural and urban areas. Abid Randathani, email

#### THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

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### Stage Set for More Reforms, Growth

Robust GST collection allays imposition doubts

GST collections for 2023-24 underpin the economic momentum and create the groundwork for streamlining a vital piece of fiscal reform. GST is a work in progress with scope for rate rationalisation and extension of coverage. Progress on either front will yield non-linear growth in indirect tax collection. It will also feed into GDP growth through increased productivity. Principally, the revenue growth has been broad-based across producing and consuming states, which should help dilute resistance to further reforms. Parallelly, improvements in tax administration continue to shore up collections. Tribunals are on course to unclog the judicial system of mounting tax litigation. An efficient GST within a decade of its introduction is no mean achievement for any country. Stable and rising GST collection lays to rest any residual misgivings about its hasty imposition.



India has overcome its teething troubles with GST, and that should aid the process of bringing down the blended tax rate to the level initially proposed but not achieved. At the very least, it should arrest the trend of the effective rate diverging further. States have, by and large, put the issue of compensati-

on behind them because of revenue lost due to the switch to the new tax. They should now be more receptive to the idea of collapsing multiple rates with a positive outcome on revenue. On its part, the Centre will have to restrain its tendency to impose cesses. States may also be more inclined to ease their grip on taxing fuel. Bringing fuel into the GST's ambit is necessary to lower the tax incidence and introduce an explicit carbon tax. Jet fuel could be part of the early harvest.

The GST architecture allows for introducing further layers of devolution, for instance, to municipal bodies. This could create new corridors for financing urban and rural development, particularly with India's underdeveloped market for credit to local bodies.

### OTC Policy Can Boost Drug Access, Market

In a step that could address a gap in India's drug regulatory regime, a government-appointed three-member panel is mulling the idea of making commonly used cough and cold medicines, antacids, and fever-reducing drugs available 'over the counter' (OTC) at general stores. Many countries, such as Britain, the US and Australia, have well-defined guidelines for their sale and regulation.

In 2022, India allowed the sale of certain drugs without a prescription as part of a new OTC drug policy. Though the Drugs Technical Advisory Board, the top advisory board on drugs, approved the policy, it never saw the light of the day. Neither the Drugs and Cosmetics Act of 1940 nor the Drugs and



Cosmetics Rules of 1945 define OTC medicines. Minus any rule, a drug in India is considered OTC unless it is specifically stated as a prescription-only drug. Since these medicines have not been classified as OTC, only chemist shops and pharmacies can sell them.

Convenience aside, making these commonly used medicines available at local shops has several benefits: first, it could improve access to common drugs in rural areas where chemist shops and doctors are not easily accessible. Second, it could limit the overuse of antibiotics and other prescription drugs, which are often 'suggested' by chemists to consumers. Third, a clear classification of drugs as OTC will allow pharmaceutical companies to expand their range of OTC products and market them effectively. Fourth, the classification will provide clear guidelines on what can be sold as OTC. Lastly, the new approach to non-prescription drugs should lead to better enforcement and compliance with requirements to limit the sale of Schedule H drugs 'on doctor's prescription only'. It's truly an idea whose time has come.



### Are You Making More Excuses Not to Vote?

To participate in any Indian election, be it panchayat or general elections, candidates need to have their pockets stuffed with cash, as in seriously stuffed. The poll game gets real when stakes are high, such as Lok Sabha elections. But wait. Candidates also need something more than cash, too. They need guts, like superhero-level abs that can win them a bravery medal. One of the contenders for the bravery medal of the ongoing general elections is a spunky 25-year-old art grad, Pramila Pujari, who is fighting from Odisha's Koraput seat. Her poll affidavit reads like a minimalist's dream: zero cash and a bank balance of ₹20,625. Pujari, a daily labourer, however, is not bothered. She is relying on her community's support to energise her campaign. In her playbook, there will be no extravagant rallies filled with paid attendees. Rather, Pujari plans to knock on the doors of her supporters and host gatherings across village clusters. Whether she emerges victorious or loses, is beside the point. Because the lady has made a point.

Let's raise a glass to courageous and resourceful candidates like Pujari, who fearlessly enter the political arena armed with nothing but determination and hope. With each step, they embody resilience and perseverance, a beacon of hope and inspiration in a world often filled with citizens who make silly excuses not to vote.

Prioritise data-driven analysis, not polemics, to guide discussions on income and wealth inequality

### Take Those Blinkers Off



Somnath Mukherjee

ncome and wealth inequality is an old issue but has gained fresh currency. There is associated litigation on the level of taxation, especially taxation on the rich (via inheritance taxes, for example). The latter is an old chestnut, given near-axiomatic status on all sides of the political-intellectual divide. The running narrative is that India's tax/GDP is 'low'.

National debates are a bit like the witnesses in Akira Kurosawa's Rashomon-partisans tend to view the issue from their own perspective.

Let's explore data underpinning both hypotheses:

Is India's tax/GDP 'low'? ▶ The number bandied around is 10-12%. But this represents only central taxes. In FY24, e.g., aggregate state gov tax collection was budgeted around ₹21 lakh crore, just shy of aggregate central tax revenues

of ₹23 lakh crore for same period. Against which comparative is this number, whether 10% or something else, low? Generally, comparisons are made with the West and East Asian countries. But what's the point of com-

While truth might be several bridges too far in this debate. it's time to at least look at all data and perspectives and be guided paring Indby that, instead of polemics ia's tax/GDP

with that of the US' \$70,000? India's tax/GDP (see chart) is well above countries at similar levels of per-capita income, but also comparable to countries that are richer. The ratio has remained flat for several

years, but there has been progress.

ChatGPT

SH**AI**RI

OF THE DAY

In cricket's grand

IPL ground,

Matches seem to go

on and on.

It's longer than long,

With each boundary song,

Even elections finish

with more aplomb!



First show us the data

While IMF data is till 2019, we know from domestic data that tax buoyancy has jumped since 2019. Post-Covid, growth in tax revenues have outstripped nominal GDP growth, a trend confirmed again in the Union Budget for 2024-25.

If India isn't a low-tax country, what explains the popular hypothesis of inequality? This is a more complex question to analyse,

not least because India doesn't collect income data via official surveys. What is collected is consumption data by NSO. Wealth data is even more amorphous, with only one survey All India Debt and Investment Survey (AIDIS) — done by

NSO every five years. There are private wealth surveys by Forbes that enumerate wealth of the with a per-capita income of \$2,500 top few categories. As a result, all inequality studies need to fuse disparate data sources and series and make

**Assessing Scientific, Tech Know-How** 

China, India and South Korea saw big increases in their technological

diversification over the last two decades, according to a WIPO report.

China in particular had a remarkable increase in tech capabilities due

to its boom in patenting - jumping from being specialised in only 16%

to 94% of all technological capabilities. South Korea also saw a large

the 2001-04 period to 68% and 21%, respectively, during 2017-20...

Number of specialised capabilities by dimension,

select countries, 2001-20 (share of capabilities, in %)

increase in both scientific and technological diversification. India saw

its scientific and technological capabilities rise from 42% and 9% during

**SOUTH KOREA** 

Note: 626 innovation capabilities based on scientific fields, IPC subclasses and

product classification in scientific publications, international patent applications

significant assumptions to arrive at any legible trend conclusions. Yet again, it might be more useful to look at some global comparisons and trends.

**TAX TO GDP** 

	Total Revenue as % of GDP	Per capita Income (\$)
Bangladesh	9.66	2,154
China	28.05	10,170
India	19.66	2,050
Indonesia	14.15	4,192
Kenya	16.79	2,107
South Korea	22.92	31,902
Malaysia	21.28	11,228
Philippines	20.01	3,512
US	30.08	65,504
	Source:	IMF (2019)

India's wealth concentration has increased. So has China's, and at a rate faster than India's. Brazil is higher than both. One linkage that can be inferred is the stage of development lower- and middle-income countries have higher structural inequalities than rich countries. Perhaps it's the price to pay for growth? Even accounting for the same, India's wealth concentration is high by

Wealth data is even more amorphous, with only one survey – All India Debt and Investment Survey (AIDIS) - done by NSO every five years

INDIA

Asian standards. Could the reason lie in India's financial markets?

India's financial markets are an outlier, in terms of efficiency, sophistication and global interest. Brazil and China don't have market architecture on par with India. That has two repercussions.

▶ It enables India's entrepreneurs to monetise their assets efficiently. India's growth profile prices Indian assets at a significant premium to

most other emerging markets. As per Forbes, Mukesh Ambani had a wealth of \$116 bn as of March 8. On the same day, the market cap of RIL was ₹19.5 lakh crore, or \$232 bn. Ambani and his family own 50% of RIL. His stake in the company is worth what Forbes assesses his wealth to be. The same would be seen for most in the Forbes list of billionaires. Is the paper wealth of promoters a function of structural wealth inequality or merely a function of premium pricing of Indian assets? Will the largest companies in Bangladesh get valuations in line with India? On current evidence, even Chinese companies don't.

As a purely illustrative experiment, HUL has a market cap of \$65 bn, trading at a P/E multiple of 50. London-listed Unilever PLC, which owns 62% of HUL, has a market cap of \$130 bn, trading at a P/E multiple of 18. Multiples afforded by financial markets are different for India — it's a function of India's higher growth promise and potential being priced in by a very efficient market.

Kurosawa's Rashomon was about different witnesses judging a crime from their partisan standpoint. Satvajit Ray's sleuth Feluda, on the other hand, had the tougher job of distilling all partisans to arrive at the truth. While truth might be several bridges too far in this debate,

it's time to at least look at all data and perspectives and be guided by that, instead of polemics. From Rashomon to Feluda is a journey, but it must be ventured into.

> The writer is chief investment officer, ASK Private Wealth. Views are personal

R Prasad

**Bell Curves** 

## THE SPEAKING TREE

### Deepfakes:

It's All Maya

#### **RAM KRISHNA SINHA**

Maya conceals Brahmn, the absolute Reality, from us as it has the power of entangling consciousness and concealing things; it projects the unreal as real and vice versa. It can also create bondage to the empirical world. Deceptive in character, may a is called avidya, false knowledge.

Adi Shankara stated that Brahmn alone is real, and the unreal, illusory world resides in Brahmn like the illusion of a snake in the rope. What is Satyam, real, is eternal and unchanging, and what is unreal is ephemeral, transient and changing - mithya. Brahmn satyam, jagat mithya, propounded the great seer.

Even as we elevate ourselves spiritually to act upon the cautionary note of Shankara, we are confronted with a new maya - deepfakes. They have taken the world by storm. They are faking images, audio and video. The video images, pieces of art and writings are all dodging our perception. Driven by generative artificial intelligence, or GenAI, deepfakes erode our trust in our perception.

The new maya, the deepfakes, manipulates us by upending our sensory perceptions through which we comprehend the empirical world. This seems like a subset of an illusion of false knowledge within the cosmic illusion. A maya within maya!

Here, neti neti—not this, not that—an Upanishadic sutra advocated by Shankara to find spiritual truth, may also help cultivate an inquiring and analytical mind and unveil the truth in the perceived world.

#### **Chat Room**

#### No Artificial Intervention

Apropos "Vive La AIvolution!" in the Air' by TK Arun (May 1), the current education system involves passing exams with better scores without tangible skills, which adds the burden of additional investment in upskilling that strains the country' valuable resources. Nearly six lakh villages practice the traditional system of farming, with a majority of the villages depending on micro employment for their survival. AI interventions in multiple fields could displace millions from their daily earnings. AI may be utilised for better societal security and equity, especially for the vulnerable classes through public distribution and taking the welfare schemes to untouched segments of society.

**GIRIYAPPA KOLLANNAVAR** Tumakuru, Karnataka

**Poor Solution** 

### More Power to Regulators ALGO OF BLISSTECH

■ Source: World Intellectual Property Report 2024, AFP



Kiran Somvanshi

Be it spices or protein powders, ayurvedic medicines or cough syrups, air travel or buying insurance, the consumer of Indian goods has been disserviced by all quarters - the organised or unorganised, the Indian or multinational, the modern or traditional.

The way the pot can't call the kettle

black, hardly any product seller or service provider can take the 'holier than thou' stance against others. The Supreme Court's rebuke to the Indian Medical Association (IMA) during the Patanjali misleading advertising case hearing, asking it to also put its house in order, given the complaints of unethical conduct by allopathic doctors, is an instance in point here.

Lack of effective regulations and their poor implementation is one of the major reasons for consumers' disempowerment over the years. Regular instances of product contamination, deficiency in services and involuntary product recalls or bans ordered by other countries point to the lack of regulatory deterrence among Indian

India is among the last of the semiregulated countries, figuring among the top 10 economies in the world. And as it becomes prosperous, it will be compelled to overhaul its regulatory setup across different sectors.

While RBI and Sebi can be counted among proactive regulators, there are a slew of regulators across the critical areas of food, drugs, insurance and aviation, like FSSAI, FDA, CDSCO, Irda and DGCA that need to come up the curve with their regulatory scrutiny and clamp down.

A critical sector like healthcare, whi-

ch has global investors, still needs a regulator. GoI is mulling setting up a regulator to address patient grievances, such as overcharging medical bills and deficiency in healthcare services, and to facilitate affordable health insurance coverage for citizens.

Science Production Technology

CHINA

and exports data

Even the existing regulators must improve their governance and scrutiny to function without fear or favour, and for the industry to take them seriously. Established regulators must bring consistency in their actions and predictability in their punitive orders for businesses to function effectively under a high regulatory regime. Stock market investors and companies do not want unpleasant shocks brought about by a sudden regulatory clampdown. Regulators should aim for the smo-

oth and effective functioning of industry players and markets. To this end, they can: Adopt globally accepted SOPs.

Shorten the redressal cycles.

Observe the due process of law. Provide the right to be heard. To achieve these objectives, regulators must be adequately manned. For instance, CCI had been inquorate for

intermittent periods before appoint-

ments of new members. A high-

Desist from arbitrary clampdowns.

profile global merger of a Dutch health company with a Swiss flavour maker was reportedly held up in India in 2023 due to the competition watchdog not having the minimum number of three members to decide on deals. The body is understaffed to strictly enforce the amended competition law of 2023, which has widened the scope

for regulation. To be sure, some regulators are using tech to improve their governance and surveillance functions. They are beefing up their systems and processes. For instance, Sebi has incorporated AI into its investigative processes.

Companies across sectors need to follow suit. They must prepare for more regulations and beef up their compliance standards. As a natural corollary, the cost of compliance is bound to go up. For instance, the minimum cost of compliance for the fintech sector has doubled over the past couple of years. Similarly, companies will incur costs to release business responsibility and sustainability reporting.

It's not just companies and regulators having to pull up their socks. The clean-up will also touch professionals: doctors, CAs, lawyers and consultants. Professional bodies like ICAI and IMA are set for their own clean-up act.

In a globalised environment, India cannot assert its position as the world's leading economy with a broken regulatory system, characterised by archaic regulations, understaffed regulators, weak professional bodies, poor enforcement of laws, ill-governed businesses and ill-served consumers. Its regulators must align with their

global counterparts - either proactively or under compulsion. If 'Made in India' is to emerge as a credible and respected form of product certification, the regulatory regime will have to be empowered first to act against shoddy quality, malpractices and compromised safety.

kiran.somvanshi@timesgroup.com

#### Lazing in Bed

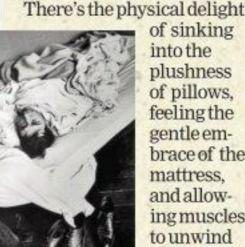
Give a man a fish, and

he'll eat for a day; teach

a man to fish, and you'll

lose a customer forever.

Lazing in bed offers a sanctuary of comfort, a haven where time slows down, and the world outside fades into insignificance. In this cocoon of soft sheets, one indulges in the simple luxury of relaxation. The pleasures are multifaceted, transcending mere physical comfort to encompass a profound sense of emotional well-being.



into the plushness of pillows, feeling the gentle embrace of the mattress, and allowing muscles to unwind under the

of sinking

false wind of the AC. It's a retreat from the demands of a hectic world, a chance to release tension and surrender to tranquillity.

There's the mental liberation that comes with bed-lazing. It's a time for introspection, for letting thoughts meander without the pressure of deadlines or obligations. Ideas flow freely, and solutions to life's quandaries seem to reveal themselves effortlessly.

Whether it's savouring the aroma of freshly brewed coffee, relishing the warmth of sunlight filtering through the curtains or listening to the soothing rhythm of raindrops — if it does rain — outside, every moment spent lazing in bed becomes a celebration of the senses.

#### To Poverty This refers to 'No, Not UBIquitous Yet' by Atanu Biswas (May 2).

The politics of redistribution has brought various versions of universal basic income (UBI) into focus. While people in deprivation clearly need relief, UBI alone can't be relied upon to make poverty history. What people need foremost is political ag-



ency, a basic sense of citizenship with attendant rights, and its entitlement to dignity. This generates demand for good education, health-

care and skill acquisition, raising what people earn and helping them emerge from poverty. Regular cash disbursals could offer the poor instant relief, but UBI is likely to fail as a longterm solution to their poverty.

PRADEEP KUMAR Surat

#### US vs Us: Verily, Might is Right

Apropos 'What's Sauce for America...' by Arnie Guha (May 1), America can get away doing what it likes because of its economic might. What action can be taken against America by any world body, since it controls most of them? It is not good advice to egg on GoI to do what the US government does. Americans are guilty of doublespeak and often do things that are not consistent with respecting the sovereignty of other nations. We may have logic on our side, but do we have the economic or military might?

ANTHONY HENRIQUES Mumbai

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#### CONTRAPUNTO

We are responsible for our own ignorance -ISABEL WILKERSON, CASTE

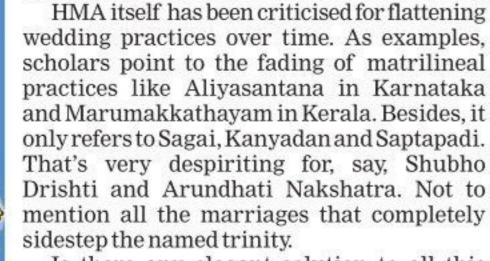
### My Marriage, My Way

Laws make marriage complicated. State's role should only be in registering marriages, not specifying sacraments

ivorce can be the true test of marriage. This was one takeaway from a case SC judged this week. It was hearing a couple that on its path towards divorce, took a singular leap, and asked for its marriage to be declared invalid instead. On the grounds that no "customs, rites and rituals" had been performed. Justices BV Nagarathna and Augustine George Masih granted the required "relief" and also an illuminating tutorial on the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955. In a nutshell, per law, a marriage performed without "appropriate ceremonies" cannot be said to be "solemnised".

Why is this jaw-dropping? Because up and down the country Indians get married in a glorious diversity of ways. And all of these should have equal standing in the eyes of modern law. But between the different laws that pronounce rigidities on the matter, they don't. The judges in this instance declared, "marriage is not an event for 'song and dance' and 'wining and dining'." But why can't it

> be? Or rather, in the countless cases where it already is, surely law shouldn't ruin the party.



Is there any elegant solution to all this confusion and exclusion? Yes! The state should remain the registry for all marriages, but no longer have anything to do with sacraments and ceremonies.

The Special Marriage Act, 1954 does wear the dress of such a solution. But, from its 30-day notice to how it's being undermined by anti-conversion laws, its embodied reality is citizen-unfriendly. Moreover, the vast majority of marriages take place under other, religion-based laws, which, like HMA, have very specific requirements for a "solemnised" marriage. What we need is a dramatically reformed version of SMA, where it becomes the sole interface between the state, law and citizens. Why should the state only recognise marriages that limit themselves to a rigid menu of options? Real India certainly doesn't. Quite happily so. But SC reminded us how vulnerable this happiness is. Better check if your wedding meets the "appropriate ceremonies" criteria.

### Uncertainty's Bankers

Central banks have survived an inflation stress test. But they are not sure if they passed

The US Federal Reserve's monetary policy meeting concluded on Wednesday by retaining status quo on interest rates. A subsequent explanation contained the all-purpose reason given by central banks: uncertainty. Stress tested by the Russia-Ukraine conflict, major central banks coped admirably. But success has only left them on the edge.

21st century onions | In Indian political folklore, a surge in onion prices can topple govts. Today, they can undermine RBI's equanimity. RBI's monetary policy committee has overseen disinflation over the last year. Yet, MPC collectively votes to keep interest rates high even if RBI's analysis suggests acting otherwise.

The April edition of the biannual monetary policy report showed for the last seven quarters it's supply shocks that have mainly driven inflation. As shocks ease, the report concluded that a generalised and durable disinflation is underway. Still, MPC is haunted by the ghost of "overlapping food price shocks". Even central banks can't control the climate.

Whose expectations? | Central bankers are displaying an intriguing approach. They have

been quick to credit monetary policy credibility with anchoring inflation expectations. It's a frequently cited reason for disinflation. That didn't hold back France's central bank governor candidly admitting: "We do not fully understand how households and business form expectations nor how this maps into their actions."

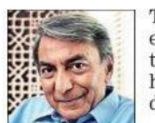
No surge pricing | The Swedish central bank offers a clue: it's about consumers' psychology. They don't like surge pricing but adapt quickly if input costs have gone up because that's in sync with their sense of fairness.

The battle's won but central bankers appear unsure of what worked. It's certainly not 'the end of history' moment for them. Perhaps they should take a cue from the approach of GOI economists. A question about employment elicits a reply on GDP.

### Tree temples

Gulmohurs, amaltas, and other species could become a major tourist attraction – and much more than just that

#### **Jug Suraiya**



The Earth is ablaze with red, and the sky swoops down to encircle the flames with blue. The fire is the vivid flowering of the gulmohur and the blue, the bloom of the jacaranda, both heralding the advent of a north Indian summer in a botanical display of exuberant colour.

They are the precursors of the amaltas, which blossoms in mid-May in cascades of brilliant yellow, sunlight ensnared and transformed by secret alchemy into glowing gold.

The living canvas of colour the trees paint are largely disregarded by us, or worse. We cut down these and other trees, to make way for more and more blocks of concrete and steel.

How different is this from the near-worship accorded to the cherry tree in Japan whose seasonal blossoming is an efflorescence of almost mystical enrapture, drawing visitors from across the country and from far 000 off parts of the world.

Similarly, in America's fall, when the deciduous woods of the north Atlantic coast are alight with the autumnal embers of brilliant reds and browns, visitors from distant lands come to witness the changing of colours on the palette of nature.

Our varied geography, ranging from the high alpine to the lush tropical, hosts amazing arboreal wealth, from the sub-Himalayan conifers to the amaltas and gulmohur of the north, and the flame of the forest, and the majestic raintrees of the Deccan.

If we were to create arboretums, parks devoted to the variety of indigenous trees, like Japan's cherry blossoms and America's fall woodlands, they could well become a travel destination. But much more than that, such parks could not only provide sylvan sanctuaries from urban squalor but also help to make

us realise how interlinked our lives are with the lives of our trees. The word tree is derived from the Old English 'treow', which also means trust or promise. Trees are repositories of faith, living temples made not of

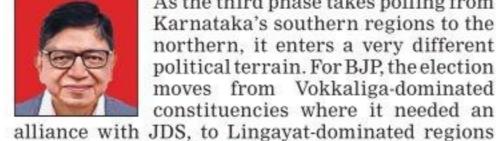
stone and brick, but sap, and root, and leaf, and flower. Trees are worthy of our reverence. The question is are we, transgressors of

a latter-day Eden, worthy of honouring them.

### Where Goes The Lingayat Vote

 North Karnataka is a BJP base
 It's built on the Lingayat vote
 But the bloc's divided over its place in caste hierarchy • Mathas' take on retaining autonomy will be decisive

Narendar Pani



As the third phase takes polling from Karnataka's southern regions to the northern, it enters a very different political terrain. For BJP, the election moves from Vokkaliga-dominated constituencies where it needed an

that had allowed the party to claim a base in south India. Lingayat politics may have been more welcoming to BJP than the politics of the other dominant **Special Series on Elections** caste in the state, but it has also added new fault lines to the party's

relationship with the region.

India. With the

coming of colonia-

lism and its Census,

Lingayats as an

identity group were

officially recognised

Shared politics

brought

as a caste.

Having

Lingayats are, arguably, the most persuasive historical example of the resilience of caste in India. The group emerged out of a strong anti-caste movement of the 12th century. Driven by ideals of saint-poets and oral tradition of the vacchanas, the movement took on positions that would be considered radical in presentday India. The ideas that founded the movement helped develop institutions - the mathas - to put these beliefs into practice. Over the centuries, Lingayats developed an identity of their own, one of the main features of castes in modern

**Even as the movement** under Basavana and later poet-saints had brought in people from different castes, these differences of origin together persons were not always

from a range of forgotten castes basis shared ideals, Lingayats soon became Karnataka's largest caste. Their emphasis on ideas provided a prominent place in their mathas for education. And their historical association with dominant groups enabled economic success. Their numeric, educational, and economic success ensured Lingayats soon gained a position of dominance in the region that's now northern Karnataka.

Lingayats have seamlessly taken this dominance into the political realm through their emphasis on education. Its mathas ensured members from remote regions, and without economic resources, could get the benefits of education. The more forward-looking mathas provided education to non-Lingayats too, thereby increasing the mathas' and the community's political influence.

As mathas weren't averse to taking on a political role, the region's politics became more organised. They identified and supported individual politicians who could present their case in Bengaluru. Their choice of politicians demonstrated a strong streak of pragmatism. Lingayat seniors at the state level have not belonged to the most numerically dominant sect in the community. And back in the 1980s and 1990s they were even willing to put their weight behind a Brahmin politician, Ramakrishna Hegde.

Organisation matters | Hindu-

tva's politics could find common

carried out their politics. Both

strands with the way Lingayats

Hindutva and the mathas placed a premium on organisation. The mathas had also come to focus on seeking a prominent place in the Hindu hierarchy rather than being the force of rebellion that Basavana had envisaged in the 12th century. Lingayats thus had

no objection to the goals of Hindutva, even if the community's more dominant leaders preferred a quieter tone. Lingayat mathas' support played a prominent role in BJP's rise in northern Karnataka, the party's first electorally substantial base in south India.

Freedom from control This support was, however,

not unconditional. Lingayat mathas weren't willing to give up the autonomy they had built over centuries. While the head of the Brahmin matha at Udupi in coastal Karnataka had allowed himself to be absorbed into the heart of the Ram temple movement, Lingayat mathas were more circumspect. They would support Hindutva but not give themselves up to RSS's control.

BJP has had to walk the tightrope on the issue, with some local seniors recognising the mathas' autonomy, while others seek a more aggressive Hindutva dominance. Choice of candidates in this round of parliamentary elections did suggest a tilt in favour of mathas' autonomy, but the language of BJP's campaign in the region presented a tilt in the direction of hard Hindutva.

**Caste away** | Another set of fault lines emerged from among the Lingayats. Even as the movement under Basavana and later poet-saints had brought in people from different castes, these differences of origin were not always forgotten. As Lingayats carved a niche for themselves among upper caste Hindus, those whose

forefathers were upper castes were seen to have an advantage. Those Lingayats who saw their forefathers as belonging to lower castes, challenged this need to find a place within the Hindu caste hierarchy, leading to a demand for Lingayats as a separate religion.

> maiah government had tended to support the cause. Congress's loss in that election is taken as a Lingayat rejection of the idea of a separate religion. That demand isn't a part of the current campaign, but beneath the surface it hasn't completely disappeared. Congress's support for the cause in 2018 has some appeal for this

The demand for a separate religion

came to a boil in the 2018 assembly

elections when the then Siddara-

Issue-based vote | Polling on Tuesday will determine whether BJP will retain northern Karnataka as its largest source of MPs in south India. At a time when the party has made an aggressive effort to grow in the south, it can ill afford to see an erosion of its support in a

section of Lingayats.

region that has emerged as its base here. The course of the support it receives from Lingayats, though, is not entirely in its

hands. Much will also depend on how Lingayat mathas feel about their autonomy from Hindutva, and what happens to the belief of a section of Lingayats that Basavana wanted them to be a separate religion.

The writer is JRD Tata Chair Visiting Professor, National

Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru

Karnataka votes on May 7 (14 seats) in the second of its two-phase election

### Equality Of Wealth Is A Bad Idea

A GOI bureaucrat and a history professor argue that taxing the rich at prohibitive rates is detrimental to the common good and punishes self-made wealth creators

Meeta and Rajivlochan





To imagine wealth can only be created through unfair means and therefore it's fair to expropriate it, is unfair to anyone who

adds value to their enterprise. Only a handful inherit their wealth in India. The bulk of wealth creators are self-made. In 2021-22, per income tax data, there were 887

people with annual incomes of ₹25cr plus or monthly incomes of ₹2cr-plus; they had a share in total reported individual incomes of 1.5%. Only 0.2% of income came from interest, and only 0.66% came from house property income. Of 1,319 individuals with wealth over ₹1,000cr on the Hurun India Rich List of 2023, 64% were self-made.

Bogus inequality claim | Human effort to improve skills and material conditions results in gain of wealth. To define how much gain is appropriate is an exercise designed to kill all entrepreneurship and initiative. In 2021, a private member's bill was tabled in Parliament to remove the word 'socialist' from the Preamble, and replace it with the word 'equitable'. Those two words sum up years of debate on what social goals make societies both happy and prosperous.

The modern world is a better place because it's striven to provide equality of opportunity. Equality of wealth and equality of opportunity are different social goals. The bogus cry of inequality of wealth in India raises a fundamental question: is equality of wealth even desirable? That's a moral choice for society to make, and not a question about strategies for economic growth.

Wealth equality not a social goal | Except for brief periods in history, no society has chosen to pursue equality of wealth as a social goal. Those experiments have only caused greater disaster. Inequality in some

form or the other exists in every society, either because of institutional constraints or individual aspirations.

On April 23, a nine-judge bench of Supreme Court initiated proceedings to interpret Article 39 (b) of the Constitution. Does this directive principle of state policy empower the state to manage and redistribute privately managed properties? Article 39 of the Constitution tasks the state to ensure that "operation of the economic system does not result in the concentration of wealth and means of production to the common



detriment" and "that the ownership and control of the material resources of the community are so distributed as best to subserve the common good".

**High tax bar** | Can taxing the rich at prohibitive rates lead to common good? India is no stranger to such policies. Till 1974-75, the highest marginal tax rate for individuals was 97.75%. The story of taxation since then has been to successively reduce that rate – to 75% in 1974-75, 50% in 1985-86, 40% in 1992-93 and to 30% in 1997. The tax kitty has only increased.

The great difference is that in 2005-06, 30% tax was applicable to anyone earning an income above ₹2.5L, which is about ₹20,800 per month. Today, people earning this are not liable to pay any tax at all. The highest tax rate of 30% applies to those who earn at least ₹1.25L per month.

**Gandhi's wisdom** Idea that taxing the rich can lead to an equitable society is a seductive one. The trouble is we've yet to see any society achieving prosperity by applying such principles.

Gandhi's letter to Lord Irwin in 1930 may have been misinterpreted as the Mahatma arguing for equality of wealth. It said, "You are getting over ₹700 per day against India's average income of less than annas 2 per day. The PM gets ₹180 per day against Great Britain's average income of nearly ₹2 per day. Thus, you're getting much over 5,000 times India's average income. The British PM is getting only 90 times Britain's average income."

Gandhi was pointing to the inequality Indians suffered as colonial subjects, about the physical barriers to upward mobility. That's what made inequality fundamentally wrong. To transpose what he said to post-colonial India is serious error.

**Institutional fix** Pre-modern societies, such as caste in India, often had institutional mechanisms to block people from doing what they wanted to do. Post-Independence, affirmative action was taken to destroy such social boundaries. But affirmative action is not enough. To empower individuals to achieve their aspirations, more needs to be done.

Simplifying laws, punishing the corrupt and enforcing equality before law are measures that can help. By helping all access opportunities, acquire appropriate skills and help with funding are other measures. Institutional mechanisms are key to an equitable society. Restoring regressive tax laws cannot create such a society. That is a recipe for graft and disaster. Meeta is Secretary, Youth Affairs, GOI. Rajivlochan is

Professor of History, Panjab University

#### Calvin & Hobbes



IT'S PROBABLY BECAUSE ANIMALS KNOW THEY'RE SUPERIOR AND PEOPLE



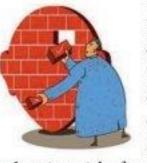
BECAUSE ANIMALS GET IS HOURS OF SLEEP EVERY DAY B

I FIGURED IT WAS

ANIMALS ARE JUST AS CRABBY AS PEOPLE ARE

ACTUALLY, I THINK

#### **Sacred**space



If anyone tells you that a certain person speaks ill of you, do not make excuses about

what is said of you but answer, 'He was ignorant of my other faults, else he would not have mentioned these alone.'

**Epictetus** 

### Desireless Performance Can Produce The Best Results

#### Swami Nirviseshananda

Deople often question whether anybody can work sincerely and efficiently without desire. Sincerity becomes natural, and efficiency peaks when actions are no longer motivated by desires. Desire makes the mind cling to future gain or loss instead of the present task. It accompanies expectation, anxiety, and fear and affects attention and performance.

We are born with an insufficiency that makes us look for happiness externally. We are born with the delusion that something from the world will fulfil that lack and make us happy.

Has anybody ever become permanently happy by gaining anything from the world – money, power, companionship,

fame, or appreciation? Even the most overwhelming happiness lasts until the mind picks up some other lack or a fear of losing what we have gained. It is not the fulfilment of our desires that makes us happy. It is the elimination of desires that truly makes us happy.

When a desire is fulfilled, the mind becomes 'desireless' for a while. It remains contented and peaceful until another desire for gaining something or fear of losing something agitates it again. It is the undisturbed state of

THE SPEAKING TREE the mind that makes us happy. It reveals for a while the placid joy that is always there within as a natural characteristic of our inmost identity, the Self. It is like seeing the bottom of the lake clearly

when there are no waves or ripples. That is why we experience unprecedented joy or bliss in meditation, when the whole world is forgotten, and the mind is absorbed in its Source. The day we realise that joy comes

from within, it is a natural property of our Self; we understand that desires make us unhappy because they take us away from the Self. If joy lies within, why should we chase external

If we do not expect happiness from the objective result of our work, what will be the motivation for work? The motivation for work will be just the objective result of

the action, and not gaining happiness

objects that give us pleasure?

and fulfilled. We shall do whatever the circumstances need and what is within our capacity. No more shall we work expecting happiness. We will do whatever is to be done as an expression of joy, and such desireless performance can produce the best objective results.

desire, our mind will be naturally placid

Several activities are constantly going on in the universe. Earth revolves around the Sun, and the Moon revolves around Earth. Rivers flow. Plants grow. Flowers blossom-each with its own colour and beauty. Nowhere is there desire. When desires are diminished, we blossom like flowers in our natural syabhaya, nature, spreading joy.

Swamiji will conduct a retreat from May 3-6at CIRD, Vasundhara, Ghaziabad. from the desired objective result. Without For details, call 9811203815

#### NEW DELHI | FRIDAY, 3 MAY 2024

Silver investors must take note of its industrial use

Diversifying portfolio

"nvestor interest in silver is rising significantly in 2024, with assets under management in silver exchange-traded funds crossing ₹5,000 crore. The white metal has gained around 16 per cent since January. Silver is often clubbed with gold when it comes to asset allocation but the two precious metals have significantly different profiles while retaining some similarities. Like gold, silver is considered a hedge against inflation and economic uncertainty to a certain extent. Like gold, it is also easily traded and can be liquidated quickly for cash but there are more transparent corporatised mechanisms for selling gold or taking loans against it. Such mechanisms are not available for silver. As with gold, India imports large quantities of silver and is one of the world's largest silver consumers. Most silver imports come via West Asia, with a duty of 12-15 per cent, depending on the exact route for import. Like gold, silver too has an inverse relationship with the dollar since international prices are dollar-denominated. A strong dollar often leads to a weaker price trend in silver.

However, unlike gold, silver has a serious industrial profile. Gold has few, limited industrial and scientific applications outside of its decorative qualities, and less than 15 per cent of gold is used for such purposes. In contrast, more than half of annual silver consumption is driven by industrial uses, and this demand is slated to rise a fair amount due to its use in health care, and in "green" industries. Silver's industrial applications exploit the metal's high conductivity (which is the highest for any element in both electricity and heat) as well as its sensitivity to light and its antibacterial qualities. Silver is a raw material in solder and in welding and brazing alloys. It is also used as raw material in batteries, and in dentistry. It has increasing demand due to being used in medicine, solar energy, radio-frequency identification chips, semiconductors, cellphone touch screens, and water-purification systems, among others.

Demand triggered by the solar energy/photovoltaic industry alone is growing at an annual rate of 12 per cent, while chip-related silver consumption is also growing fast, as is demand from water-purification systems and other anti-bacterial applications. Many of these applications are in industries that have strong, secular growth profiles. Investors in silver need to take into account its industrial profile and the promise of demand growth due to industrial utility when considering exposure and asset allocation. Arguably, silver could be considered an industrial metal in the same way as the more exotic platinum, which also finds many industrial applications. While gold is linked to economic cycles due to its ability to ride out inflation, silver has a more complex relationship with the macroeconomy due to the many industrial uses. The supply of gold is also more limited.

Financial advisors often suggest that there be a small asset allocation to gold - 5-10 per cent in individual portfolios — to provide diversification. Silver could be recommended because although it is a less powerful hedge against inflation, it too has an industrial profile. However, silver prices will likely weaken in the short term because of an expected delay in interest rate cut by the Federal Reserve. But a recovery in global economic activities, particularly in the high-tech areas mentioned above, is likely to keep savvy investors interested.

#### **Combating pollution**

Lowering plastic production will be the key

wo years after representatives from 175 countries gathered in Nairobi and agreed to develop the first legally mandated treaty on plastic pollution, there is little hope that the world can reach a consensus and successfully forge a treaty to combat the ecological harm posed by plastics anytime soon. The Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Plastic Pollution was convened for the fourth time in Ottawa this week. However, it was no surprise that even after holding talks well past midnight, no common ground could be found regarding the imposition of limits on plastic production. While most countries agreed on the need to tackle plastic pollution across its lifecycle, from the initial extraction of fossil fuels for plastic production to the end-of-life disposal of plastic waste, some argued that imposing production limits may not be feasible. Petrochemical-rich countries and several industry groups lobbied against the proposal. Instead, they want the treaty to focus on plastic recycling and waste management.

It is well known that focusing on waste management and recycling will not be enough to address the plastic crisis. The world generates about 400 million tonnes of plastic waste each year. Of the 7 billion tonnes of plastic waste produced globally thus far, less than 10 per cent has been recycled. In fact, much of the plastic waste ends up in oceans and landfills. Plastics are synthetic polymers, which makes them non-biodegradable. The problem does not end here. The production process is also greenhouse gas-intensive. Additional emission emanates from the process of polymerisation. Estimates from the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory in the US suggest that plastic creation generated 2.24 gigatonnes of planet-heating pollution in 2019 — as much as 600 coal-fired power plants. Under a 4 per cent annual production growth scenario, plastic production would emit 5.13 gigatonnes of pollution in 2050, even if the world can successfully decarbonise the power grid by then.

In this context, the inability to come up with a global treaty urgently shows business and economic interests are superseding potential ecological gains. Notably, the top seven plastic-producing companies are fossil-fuel companies. In the past few decades, a fresh worry regarding plastics has crept up — their toll on human health. Traces of micro and nano-plastics have found their way into human blood and even human placenta. Developing proper disposal systems and waste-collection techniques are not enough to prevent the climate impact of plastics, or prevent them from entering the human body, the vast amount of which happens before plastic becomes waste. Slashing production is, therefore, key to mitigating the problem in the long run.

In 2022, India implemented the Plastic Waste Management (Amendment) Rules, 2021, which banned 19 categories of single-use plastic, although they account for only 11 per cent of single-use plastic in the country. But their use is still rampant, with sales continuing across several outlets. Unfortunately, the task of resolving the plastic problem is not attracting sufficient private or public funding, leading to inadequate availability of cost-effective alternatives. Methods such as photo-oxidation or breeding plastic-eating microbes like natriegens bacteria have not been able to scale up either. For now, the road to Busan seems uncertain — the place where the fifth meeting of the negotiating committee is scheduled to be held later this year.

#### Filling the submarine gap

Addressing this deficiency should be a top priority for the new govt, given India's role as the gatekeeper to the Indian Ocean



**BROADSWORD** 

AJAI SHUKLA

ne of India's most critically delayed military acquisitions is the "30-Year Submarine Building Plan," which the Cabinet cleared in 1999 to create a fleet of 24 conventionally-powered submarines. Operating in concert with the navy's long-range maritime patrol aircraft, these would deny hostile submarines the freedom to range unchallenged in the Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal, and the northern Indian Ocean.

The 30-year plan envisioned building six conventional boats (the traditional naval appellation for submarines) in India to a western design — presumably French, German or Swedish. Another six

would follow, based on an eastern design — most likely Russian, South Korean or Japanese. Having accumulated expertise from both the west and the east, Indian shipyards would design and build the next 12 submarines indigenously.

Separately, in another top-secret initiative, navy and Defence Research and Development Organisation designers would build a small fleet of nuclear-powered attack submarines (SSNs) as well as nuclear-powered submarines armed with nuclear-tipped ballistic missiles (SSBNs). The SSNs, with their ability to remain submerged for weeks, even

months, would be capable of conventional missions at long ranges and the Indian Navy has twice leased SSNs from Russia in order to develop the capability to operate them. The nuclear-armed and propelled SSBN fleet would not go into battle against enemy submarines and warships. They would constitute the underwater leg of the nuclear triad — India's nuclear deterrent.

A quarter of a century has elapsed since this shiny new submarine plan was finalised, but not even Project 75 — construction of the first six submarines has been completed. And with Project 75-India (abbreviation: Project-75I) still to be tendered, building 18 submarines in the remaining five years is beyond the realm of possibility.

Complicating India's decision-making in submarine acquisitions are the peculiar hydrological conditions that prevail in the waters around our shorelines. We have a coastline of 5,600 kms, another 1,800 kms of island territories, and 2.37 million square kms of exclusive economic zone (EEZ). Two-thirds of the world's trade passes through these waters, including oil and gas from the Strait of Hormuz, and commodities and hydrocarbons transiting through the Suez Canal. Passage between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific must pass through the straits of Malacca, Sunda, Lombok and Ombai Wetar, providing opportunities for a blockade of this shipping.

If peninsular India was flanked on both sides by shallow waters, our navy could have made do with

conventional submarines. The Arabian Sea gradient is so gentle that, 40 knots offshore from Karachi, the seabed is just 40 metres deep, offering little manoeuvre space for large submarines. Nuclear-powered, 4,000-tonne SSNs and the larger conventional boats cannot operate close to the Karachi coastline, where the seabed slopes down very gently into the Arabian Sea, India's eastern coastline, in contrast, slopes down sharply into the Bay of Bengal, making it suit able for operations by large, conventional boats as well as nuclear-pow-

ered SSNs that require only a short transit to the Malacca Strait, where they can lie in ambush for extended periods. This is a job for nuclear-powered submarines, which are constrained only by human endurance and by food supplies. A nuclear-propelled SSN is also better equipped to form part of an aircraft carrier battle group (CBG), providing a protective screen against enemy submarines. Given India's hydrological constraints, as well as its blue water ambitions to operate two CBGs independently, there would be a need for at least 3-4 SSNs in India's fleet.

Most major naval powers, such as France, Russia, the UK and the US, prefer an all-nuclear fleet since that provides global reach; and running multiple submarine types is prohibitively expensive. The US refuses to part with submarine technology, regarding it as a key component of its naval superiority. For this reason, France

and Russia build conventional submarines only for export, while their own navies are equipped with nuclear-propelled boats. For buyers who demand better technology than diesel-electric submarines, OEMs are now offering air-independent propulsion (AIP) — a nonnuclear propulsion system that allows submarines to operate underwater for longer durations, without surfacing to charge their batteries.

The navy began the acquisition of six submarines under Project-75I in July 2021 under the strategic partners (SPs) model. Described in the Defence Acquisition Proposition of 2020, four armament categories have been identified for acquisition under the SP route: Fighter aircraft, helicopters, submarines, and armoured fighting vehicles or main battle tanks.

Since Project-75I is a shipbuilding project, the first step has been the selection of two Indian firms as SPs - Mazagon Dock Limited (MDL) and Larsen & Toubro (L&T). These shortlisted SPs have been issued a request for proposal (RFP) and are required to submit proposals for collaborating with any of a list of foreign OEMs. The five chosen OEMs are Naval Group from France, Thyssenkrupp Marine Systems (TKMS) from Germany, Rosoboronexport (ROE) from Russia, Daewoo Shipbuilding and Marine Engineering (DSME) from South Korea, and Navantia from Spain. The OEMs will have to meet stringent indigenisation conditions: 45 per cent for the first boat, incrementally stepping up to 60 per cent for the sixth and last. The project cost is estimated to be over ₹40,000 crore.

Notwithstanding the selection of five foreign OEMs to partner the chosen two SPs, there are effectively only two vendors competing for the tender — TKMS and DSME — since the other three OEMs do not meet the tender condition of having a working, sea-proven AIP. If TKMS decides against participating in the bidding (it has already expressed reservations on the conditions in the RFP) the navy would either have to go in for a single vendor procurement, or modify the tender.

TKMS of Germany is currently regarded as the leader in this pack. Company executives point out that it has earlier built four Type 209/1500 submarines for the Indian Navy in the 1980s and 1990s, in MDL, Mumbai and India submariners regard those submarines highly This makes MDL the only yard in India with full-submarine integration experience. In addition, the two lead submarines — INS Shishumar and INS Shankush have already undergone medium refit and life certification in India by MDL and TKMS.

Furthermore, the Type 209 HDW submarines that the Indian Navy operates has been developed into the HDW Type 214, which is in service with several world navies, including Italy, Korea and Turkey. Finally, the design that TKMS plans to offer is a highly flexible submarine configuration with two types of AIP: Fuel cell AIP, which is suited to long-range endurance at lower speeds; and Lithium-ion batteries that are optimised for higher-speed endurance.

Given India's role as the gatekeeper to the Indian Ocean, making up the submarine deficiency should be a top priority for the new government.

#### Needed: An underwater PM Gati Shakti

The oceans harbour vast untapped economic potential worth trillions of dollars, yet much of it remains undiscovered. Not only does 94 per cent life exist underwater, oceans play a critical role in managing greenhouse gases. Earth's longest chain of mountains, the mid-ocean ridge, which spans 65,000 kms, is underwater, as are 3 million shipwrecks, each holding a treasure trove of stories. Surprisingly, oceans remain less explored than the surfaces of the Moon or Mars.

India's maritime domain, covering nearly the same area as its land territory, holds 80 per cent of her

resources but contributes only 4 per cent to gross domestic product. As India marches to become the world's third-largest economy, the blue economy provides a shimmering opportunity. India can generate millions of jobs and trillions in revenue from fisheries, aquaculture, tourism, shipping, offshore energy, and minerals. Moreover, the high seas and deep seas have tremendous strategic implications as well. China has the world's biggest fleet engaged in highseas fishing, and India needs to catch up. Deep-sea minerals, including polymetallic nodules and rare earths,

hold boundless value, with advancing technology making their sustainable extraction feasible in the near future. The nation quickest to harness the opportunities in open maritime territories may control the resources

and territory in the long run. The initiation of a blue economy strategy hinges on developing good underwater domain awareness (UDA), a subject largely overlooked. UDA first gained importance during the Cold War, with systems like SOSUS, a seabed hydrophone network set up in the Atlantic by the US Navy to track Russian submarines. However, with technological advancement, UDA is of great economic significance as well. Underwater information is now captured using underwater and spacebased sensors. Space-based sensors are used to guide fishing-vessels to fish-rich areas and identify specific high-value fish.

India must prioritise indigenous development of

underwater sensor technology because these technologies are closely guarded, and, if shared, are prohibitively expensive, rendering their economic use unviable. Additionally, the equipment developed during the Coldwar era works well in the cold temperate conditions of the Pacific or the Atlantic, but its performance degrades rapidly in the tropical waters of the Indian Ocean, with data inaccuracies of up to 60 per cent. India made a promising beginning with the unveiling of 75 iDEX challenges under the Navy's SPRINT programme in August 2022, resulting in the country's first indigenous underwater technology prototypes. To strengthen UDA,

domestic chip development capabilities are essential. A design-led incentive scheme could prioritise UDA sensors for funding, fostering chip-level expertise in this domain. The Ministry of Electronics and IT could consider iDEXtype challenges with assured procurement by the government.

The UDA involves collection and analysis of vast datasets involving thousands of attributes. These datasets cover a wide range of information, including geographic features like sea-mounds. ridges, trenches, as well as underwater events, observations entities such as vessels, objects and their behaviours,

Additionally, data on activities like navigation, communications, environmental factors like temperature. salinity, density, water-quality and chemical composition, ocean-currents and acoustic-signals, seismic activity and the Earth's magnetic field are included. Central Ministries, organisations, coastal states collect separate data, resulting in isolated datasets.

An open-API framework akin to India-stack applications such as in UPI and Aadhaar, could facilitate sharing of data. This could foster development of applications by startups and organisations and promote the use of artificial intelligence in this domain. Furthermore, a PM Gati Shakti for economic UDA, akin to the PM Gati Shakti for terrestrial economic development could be established. The initiative would provide a comprehensive picture of available data, identify strengths and gaps, and guide future data collection efforts. Furthermore, it could serve as a centralised coordination platform for multiple agencies, reducing duplication and wasteful expenditure.

The PM Gati Shakti for economic UDA would be characterised by a GIS-based platform. This will have four-dimensional data points — latitude, longitude, depth and time. Since the changes in UDA attributes like temperature, salinity, density, and acoustics are ever-changing, the time dimension of this GIS-based platform would be very important.

Diverse underwater domains in the Sunderbans and Sir Creek demand context-specific maritime planning. The PM Gati Shakti for economic UDA could enable India to spearhead the development of "Smart Maritime Zones", similar to "Smart Cities", which would facilitate technology-driven maritime spatial planning based on location-specific character ensuring optimal and sustainable exploitation of marine resources and addressing challenges like safe navigation, search and recovery operations, protection of economic assets and prevention of underwater pollution. This would take the vision of Sagar — security and growth for all in the region — to a higher level and would enable India to be a leader in this domain in the Indian Ocean region.

A Gati Shakti plan for economic UDA would guide human resources planning. There is a need to enhance awareness amongst policymakers, military and the police. The Marine Research Centre (MRC) has emerged as a resource centre in this domain. Expanding the MRC's role, a national programme could be envisioned with the MRC evolving into a regional capacity-building centre for foreign littoral nations. The MRC could also work towards developing into an innovation-hub, nurturing UDA

While UDA has been viewed as a security issue, it holds potential as a key economic catalyst. Similar to past initiatives like the electronic, space and atomic energy commissions, a Gati Shakti plan for economic UDA could position India as a frontrunner in leveraging this domain. UDA has the capacity to revive India's maritime legacy, offering significant opportunities for economic growth and global leadership.

The writer is a distinguished visiting professor at IIT Kanpur, and a former defence secretary

#### The art of constructive negotiation



**BOOK REVIEW** 

CHINTAN GIRISH MODI

re you jealous of people who are excellent at bargaining and always manage to get the best deals? Do you struggle with asking for a raise even when you know that you deserve one? Would you like to learn how to articulate what you want without feeling guilty or ashamed?

Read Prakash Chugani's book Negotiate or Stagnate: Have it Your Way Without Showing the Highway to learn the basics of negotiation. A consultant with senior-level executives in India, West Asia and Africa, he teaches the

negotiation and conflict resolution course at SP Jain School of Global Management and runs a podcast called Negotiations Paraphernalia.

The book is anchored in the conviction that negotiation skills can be polished with practice. It will help you let go of the belief that some people are born to be successful negotiators and others are doomed to fail miserably. It is divided into 16 short chapters that are a breeze to read because of the conversational writing style, minimal use of technical jargon and abundance of examples. The ease with which Mr

your confidence and help you take small and meaningful steps that will add up over time. "I was earlier under the impression that negotiations are battles of wits that involve aggressive behaviour, generating fear and intensifying the atmosphere

with tough tactics. Due to this notion, I

Chugani explains his points will boost

would avoid negotiations, which has had several repercussions," he writes.

He points out that, even before we "enhance our negotiation capabilities", we have to prepare the ground by discarding preconceived ideas about negotiations that we have internalised. If we have grown up seeing people get what they want only by using "anger, shame, threat and other manipulative techniques", it might be harder for us to appreciate how negotiations can open up new possibilities and lead to favourable outcomes for both parties.

This book covers how to negotiate in work contexts that include selling. purchasing, recruitment, policy change, asking for a promotion, and building teams. The author's tips would be useful, especially if you feel that you often get short-changed because you lack the finesse to spell out what you want in a given situation clearly. He mentions, for instance, the importance of

doing your homework before getting to the negotiating table. If you intend to buy a second-hand vehicle or rent a home, you need to stay updated about the market rates. When you go in with this knowledge, you will not shell out a ridiculously exorbitant price.

legotiate

OFF THE GRID

AJAY KUMAR

It is important to know the walk-away price, or "the bare minimum we are willing to accept as a seller and...the maximum we are willing to part with as a buyer". Seasoned negotiators are able to anticipatethewalkaway price of the party

they are negotiating with. They do not throw random numbers. Their industryspecific research, and conversations with people in their network, come in handy. They pose open-ended questions, and also look for non-verbal cues when the other party avoids replying. Mr Chugani gives the example of a land deal. If the seller asks, "What do you plan to do with

this property?" and the buyer is noncommittal, the seller can directly ask if the plot would be used for a commercial or residential purpose.

This book will teach you how to work with a "non-response", which is all too common when people are trying not to lie

but are also reluctant NEGOTIATE OR to give away the STAGNATE: Have it whole truth. It is a bit like playing a game, Showing the and people who are Highway not used to it can get Author: Prakash frustrated. That does Chugani not help. In fact, Mr **Publisher:** Penguin Chugani has some **Pages: 176** excellent advice on **Price:** ₹250 managing emotions.

they make a ridiculous opening offer, we simply deflect it in good jest." Losing your temper or throwing tantrums is not productive. Lightening the atmosphere communicates that you are in control.

Hewrites, "When

This book lists a number of ways to increase one's power in a negotiation. Punctuality is a great quality to nurture because it gives you time to familiarise

yourself with the surroundings, break the ice, and also get some time to breathe before the formal conversation.

Mr Chugani also offers some

deception. A lot of people incur losses

till midnight. Sometimes, they jump

excitedly at an offer without realising

because an offer is apparently valid only

cautionary words on tackling

when they make hasty decisions

that it is too good to be true. One of the most interesting chapters focuses on cultivating cross-cultural sensitivity. Some cultures place value on "accomplishments, skills and reliability" whereas others value "empathy, friendliness and emotional closeness" in business relationships. These insights would certainly help individuals strengthen their "negotiation muscle" but the book does not address the crucial topic of how collective bargaining can help improve

The reviewer is an independent journalist and educator based in Mumbai. He is @chintanwriting on Instagram and X

working conditions.

#### FRIDAY 3 MAY 2024 | DELHI

### No-holds-barred wrangle mars fair poll process

THE 2024 elections are witnessing ▲ a new trend. More than the guarantees of Prime Minister Narendra Modi or the Congress party manifesto, issues like 'mangalsutra, gold' remark by PM and his other allegations against Congress have garnered more attention and even kicked up a massive row. The PM claims that Congress wants to give reservation based on religion, which is against the Constitution, and that it is opposed to SC/ST and OBC castes. He is also reminding people that the then Congress Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had said that Muslims had the first right on country's resources and that the grand old party is trying to snatch the property and distribute it among certain community people. In all his speeches

across the country, Modi has been reiterating that Congress' thinking has always been one of appeasement and vote-bank politics. He referred to the "pilot project" taken up by the Congress in Andhra Pradesh when it came to power during 2004-2010. He said that as many as four times the Congress tried to implement the Muslim quota in AP but they could not do so thanks to the stand taken by the Supreme Court. In 2011, the Congress tried to implement it across the country. "They snatched the rights given to SC/ST and OBC and gave them to others for vote bank politics." In an emotional tone, he even said as long he is alive he will not allow religionbased reservations. To counter this, the Congress has been bringing out

various documents and claiming that the BJP and the RSS want to change the Constitution given to the country by Dr B R Ambedkar. They say that Modi is twisting Congress statements saying that SC, ST and OBCs will lose reservation. The Congress said they would hold discussions with all and will amend the constitution to remove the cap of 50 percent on reservations so that no injustice is caused to anyone. Now a new charge against Modi has been made by former AICC president Rahul Gandhi that protecting "rapists,' is Modi's guarantee. This allegation comes in the wake of JD(S) leader and former PM Deve Gowda's grandson Prajwal's reported sex scandal and his subsequent escape to Germany. Both BJP and Congress are

making these issues as their main poll agenda.

In Telangana, which goes to polls in third phase on May 13, Chief Minister Revanth Reddy is going very aggressive against the BJP. His speeches have in fact more sting than those generally made by D K Shivakumar of Karnataka. Sometimes it leaves one wondering as to who is the AICC president? On one hand, he called PM 'Bade Bhaiya,' but the 'Chote Bhaiya' is leveling all kinds of allegations. He says his 'Bade Bhaiya,' when asked for Bayyaram, gave 'Donkey's Egg,"

In Andhra Pradesh, it is 'Who killed Babai V/s Govinda, Govinda.' The TDP, Janasena and BJP alliance has been moving forward aggressively for past two months. BJP is the lateral entrant along with AP Congress. Certainly this combined attack on the ruling party has unnerved them but a strong fight is still on. Both sides are exuding confidence of winning the polls.

The BJP and the Congress at national level are sparring bitterly, with BJP making Congress appeasement of Muslims with quota a sentimental issue, and Congress dubbing the BJP 'move' to 'dump Constitution' a disquieting possibility. Now one wonders whether all this does not come under the model code of conduct. The Election Commission of India's MCC forbids candidates to "appeal to caste or communal feelings" to secure votes. When will it act proactively, not waiting for complaints, to curb such nefarious practices?

#### Faulty understanding of **Indian traditions**

THE recent SC judgement on the "essential ceremonies" ▲ to declare a marriage valid is disturbing and problematic. In deciding the sanctity of rituals, our courts have taken on the role of past Christian churches in assessing pagan rituals. In the past, both colonials and missionaries debated the "truly religious," "secular," and "idolatrous" (or false) components of pagan practices. It was necessary to condemn and reject the latter. Abrahamic frameworks informed their understanding. In post-colonial India, the judges now talk about the essential and non-essential aspects of Hindu practices, unchanged in their understanding. There is no attempt to involve traditional scholars in correcting any faulty understandings. Although the colonials left long ago, our courts continue to perpetuate theological ideas from the past, and the citizens grant the person of the judge supreme power.

LETTERS

Dr Pingali Gopal, Hanamkonda

THE Supreme court has certainly made a valid obser-▲ vation as regards Hindu Marriages and the several steps/rituals being discarded involved in performing marriages as per the Section 7 of the Hindu Marriage Act. Very unfortunately, certain traditions and culture practices that are time-testedly followed by the Hindu community for decades are being neglected by some who only relied heavily on the 'Registration certificate' as a concluding proof for a marriage. The sacred sanctity of a marriage has been given a go-by even by certain educated class persons which is more shocking for different reasons. Marriages are the basic criterion for development of families and it is high time that in spite of huge technological awareness, the basic traditions of performance of marriages are certainly kept alive by all.

Katuru Durga Prasad Rao, Hyderabad

### Efficiency: New mantra of business

D C PATHAK

FFICIENCY is classically Ldefined as the measure of productivity per unit of time and is therefore traditionally linked to the 'work attitude' of the employee, the quality of management that provides for a strong 'supervision', and the system of 'performance evaluation' that was expected to be free of personal bias or favouritism.

There has been a conceptual advancement in the understanding of these roots of efficiency.

The importance of workplace environment is now recognised in terms of not only the adequacy of physical 'equipment' provided to the employee but also the harmony and peace in the atmosphere that would add to the ease of maintaining a 'work-life' balance for the individual. This combination helped the employee to work with concentration -- aided by freedom from mental distractions -- and thus added to the output against time.

The concept of supervision has also changed from the perception of a senior breathing down one's neck to a boss who nurtured the junior and made himself or herself available for providing guidance if sought by the

latter.

The modern system of business ensures adequate 'training on the job' for the employee on one hand and 'participative encourages management' emerging out of the conviction that the entire hierarchy of the enterprise is wedded to the same organisational goals, on the

'performance evaluation' three things become crucially important. One is rooted in the mandate of the 'age of information' that one has to be a well-informed person to achieve success in any field. This is because only

knowledge-based decisionmaking showed the right path. In judging one's performance, the boss should have complete knowledge of the subordinate -- as an employee with a given work attitude, as a human being with emotional content and as a person who has burdens and responsibilities beyond the workplace.

An arid, output-related evaluation as per prescribed paradigms is to be tempered with the correct knowledge of the circumstances of the employee that might have caused an unexplained shortfall.

Secondly, the senior should have an astute ability to make out the difference between 'brilliance' and 'diligence' and give due importance to both -- some people may look very bright and busy but produce very little at the end of the day. Last but not least, the boss with a reputation of being transparent and fair in evaluating the subordinates, retains his or her image as a leader -- biases and favouritism in making evaluations destroy that image often without the leader even knowing it.

An important task of Human Resource development people in an enterprise today is to work out arrangements for up-skilling those who were not lacking in effort but who had the potential to enhance the output further through special training.

Cost-effectiveness is still not fully built into business operations since a generally prevalent notion is that investment has a direct line to growth and profitability -- this substantially drove expenditure on sales promotion through attractive ad-

a highly competitive world. It is not adequately realised that practising cost-effective-

ness - even when funds were

vertisements to cope up with



A great demand put on the leadership of businesses and organisations is that they themselves had to learn to wield this powerful instrument of growth and at least had to have the ability to assemble a team of top professionals around them to handle the Al applications to their advantage. Today 'efficiency' is the hallmark of any successful business operation involving delivery on a global base and IT and Al make it possible to achieve it to the satisfaction of all stakeholders

available -- is an instrument of profitability since it helps to keep up the given level of productivity with lesser use of resources - man, material or money. If an existing operation can be handled with three persons instead of four deployed at present or if a process is done in seven stages but could as well be completed in five steps, then the resourcesaving option must be chosen.

The conceptual understanding involved here is that cost-effectiveness was in fact increasing the efficiency of the employees which is a fundamental reason why productivity would increase as mentioned in the beginning, in terms of 'time' taken by the employee.

Time in today's competitive environment is now considered the new 'resource' be-

1 - No miltary use

2 - Freedom

of scientific

investigation

sides the traditional assets of manpower, material resources and funds. If in practising cost-effectiveness, the investment-output ratio tilted in favour of the latter because of the lesser use of traditional resources, that was an additional gain. All of this shows that the awareness of 'efficiency' as the key to growth has acquired a new-found importance.

The advent of Information Technology introducing instant online communications and business transactions, has pushed competitiveness to a global level and provided early bird advantage to those who can press data analytics into use for getting a peep into what lay ahead in terms of both 'opportunities' and 'risks'.

Artificial Intelligence is a new frontier of Information Technology that has opened

for all businesses new areas of growth and thrown up a debate on its adverse impact on employment.

It is however, becoming rapidly clear that AI would create new products and services and this would itself become a new industry and that most companies would have to enlarge their Human Resource base putting fears of retrenchment at rest. If there are layoffs in some companies this would be compensated for by the added requirement of skilled hands in many others. AI-aided data analytics is producing immense prospects of growth in the spheres of medical health, education, entertainment, pharmaceuticals and governance and establishing new benchmarks of 'efficiency' in running businesses in terms of productivity per unit of time. Like any technology to which people would have access, AI applications are getting into the hands of potential lawbreakers and producing new kinds of crime -- financial frauds and misuse of 'deep fakes' are already in the news.

World powers including India are fortunately working together to check the perils of AI. This does not, however, detract from the promises that Artificial Intelligence is offering for the betterment of human life. The guiding principle in this is to remember that AI applications like any other computer-based activity, are subject to an inputoutput paradigm and that machine learning should be encouraged within the same thought that it would give the best results when in crucial moments of decision-making it worked in conjunction with human mind.

Artificial Intelligence has in a way pushed the frontiers of the 'knowledge economy'. Data of the past combined with what is known in the

6 - Applies to land

7 - All stations open

8 - National laws

apply to citizens

9 - The treaty may

be modified at any

time, requires

agreement of

treaty nations

unanimous

10 - All treaty nations to

acts against the treaty

the Antarctic Treaty System,

ensure no-one carries out

not to areas

to inspection by

other nations

but not seas

up a huge requirement of skilled manpower, unfolded present was never put to such an advantage for the betterment of the future of humanity earlier because only now has analytics surpassed the human capacity for collation and examination.

ChatGPT and its variants in conjunction with the Large Language Model (LLM) are extremely useful for education, particularly Law studies, work requiring content and design generation and research. All this is subject to the generic advice that any material on the internet should not be presumed to be factually correct and wherever absolute accuracy of facts was to be ensured, it is advisable to get confirmation through other sources.

A great demand put on the leadership of businesses and organisations is that they themselves had to learn to wield this powerful instrument of growth and at least had to have the ability to assemble a team of top professionals around them to handle the AI applications to their advantage. Today 'efficiency' is the hallmark of any successful business operation involving delivery on a global base and IT and AI make it possible to achieve it to the satisfaction of

all stakeholders. Assessment of moves of the rivals, the study of the market conditions including customer demand and drawing up of a fool-proof business plan are all based on analytics involving a billion data and businesses did not have this advantage earlier. The world should take delight in the advancement that a technology combining 'knowledge' and 'efficiency' has brought about and continue to explore the marvels that the human mind aided by machines could produce in this regard.

(The writer is a former Director of the Intelligence Bureau. Views are personal)

#### Impractical doles by AP alliance sans BJP

THERE are three parties in the alliance in AP but ▲ only two parties jointly released the manifesto for the upcoming elections in the state .The BJP overtly kept away from the manifesto release function on Sunday. As usual the media which supports the TDP highlighted the contents of the manifesto which filled with impractical ☐ 15,000 per student as Ammaku vandanam, ☐ 20,000 to each farmer, free ride for women in the RTC buses, three free gas cylinders to each household and 

□ 1,500 per month to each woman in the name of Super Six. Is it possible in AP given its precarious financial position? How these people promised these schemes which require nearly ≥ 2.5 lakh crore? Further the same people criticised the YSRCP government for implementing more or less same schemes by saying the AP would become one more Sri Lanka.

Pratapa Reddy Y, Tiruvuru, NTR dt, AP

#### Developed world dithers on commitments

↑ S the editorial - A historic commitment to zero-carhon energy system- elucidates in detail the recipe for disaster is due to climate change, the Paris Summit resolving that every nation cut down on greenhouse gas emissions in order to limit global warming was a step in the right direction. Even at Cop 26 meet in Scotland during 2020 to 2021, the target for cutting emissions from burning coal, gas and oil to prevent average global temperatures from rising above 1.5 degree Celsius to decide the earth's fate was deliberated upon to solve the climate crisis by fast-tracking global climate collaboration but this remains not fully operational due to developed nations refusing to negotiate any responsibility from climate-induced losses. All in all, it is time the developed world must step forward and honour its commitments on finance and technology transfers to set zero net target.

K R Srinivasan, Secunderabad

#### AI threat to free and fair poll process

↑ PROPOS, "Rattled over quota, BJP is after me: Revanth Reddy (THI, May 02). Given the rapid spread of Artificial Intelligence in the tech world, it was on the cards that AI-enabled deepfake videos would surface during the 2024 elections. It took a malicious doctored video of Home Minister Amit Shah and turned the spotlight on the extent of the threat posed by such emerging technology on the general elections, when issues like reservations and religion-based quotas have become hot button topics. However divisive the politics of the times may be, the debate on reservations and quotas cannot be allowed to get so polemical. Quotas have been around for decades and are here to stay regardless of who wins general elections in India. It is time our leaders moved on from quota vote bank politics to other meaningful issues.

N Sadhasiva Reddy, Bengaluru

thehansreader@gmail.com

### Key meet on Antarctic Treaty in May India set up first Antarctic research station, Dakshin Gangotri, in 1983

THE Ministry of Earth ▲ Sciences, through the National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research, will host the 46th Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting (ATCM 46) and the 26th Meeting of the Committee for Environmental Protec-

tion (CEP 26) from May 20

to 30 at Kochi in Kerala. "The hosting of the 46th ATCM and 26th CEP meeting reflects India's growing role as a responsible global stakeholder in efforts to preserve Antarctica for future generations. Through open dialogue, collaboration, and consensus-building, India remains committed to upholding the principles of the Antarctic Treaty and contributing to the sustainable management of one of Earth's last pristine wilderness areas," said M Ravichandran, Secretary of the Ministry of Earth Sciences.

According to British Antarctic Survey, twelve countries represented by the Governments of Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Chile,

the French Republic, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, the Union of South Africa, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America, signed the Antarctic Treaty on 1 December 1959 in Washington. Antarctica shall be used for peaceful purposes only and the continuance of international harmony in Antarctica will further the purposes and principles embodied in the Charter of the United Nations. Recently Iran's Navy Commander, Rear Admiral Shahram Irani's claims of ownership over Antarctica cast a shadow over the South Pole continent's exclusivity and world security. "We have plans to raise our flag there and carry out military and scientific work", declared the Iranian commander.

The key items on the 46th ATCM agenda include strategic planning for sustainable management of Antarctica and its resources; policy, legal, and institutional op-

3 - Free exchange of scientific plans and data 4 - Any territorial claims put on hold 5 - Nuclear free zone erations; biodiversity prospecting; inspections and exchange of information and data; research, collaboration, capacity building and cooperation; addressing climate change impacts; develop-

ment of tourism framework; and promoting awareness.

The 26th CEP agenda focuses on Antarctic environment evaluation, impact assessment, management, and reporting; climate change response; area protection

and management plans including marine spatial protection; and conservation of Antarctic biodiversity. Over 350 delegates from more than 60 countries are expected to attend the ATCM and CEP meetings which are pivotal in the international community's ongoing efforts to safeguard Antarctica's fragile ecosystem and promote scientific research in

The Antarctic Treaty

Main Points

the region.

Convened annually under

these meetings serve as forums for Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties and other stakeholders to address Antarctica's pressing environmental, scientific, and governance issues. The Antarctic Treaty, signed in 1959 and entered into force in 1961, established Antarctica as a region dedicated to peaceful purposes, scientific cooperation, and environmental protection. Over the

years, the Treaty has garnered widespread support, with 56 countries currently party to it. India has been a Consul-

tative Party to the Antarctic Treaty since 1983. It participates in the decision-making process along with the other 28 Consultative Parties to the Antarctic Treaty. India's first Antarctic research sta-Dakshin Gangotri, was established in 1983. At present, India operates two year-round research stations: Maitri (1989) and Bharati (2012). The permanent research stations facilitate Indian Scientific Expeditions to Antarctica, which have been ongoing annually since 1981.

In 2022, India enacted the Antarctic Act, reaffirming its commitment to the Antarctic Treaty. India's scientific and strategic endeavours in the polar regions (the Arctic and Antarctic), the Himalayas, and the Southern Ocean are under the National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR) in Goa. (IANS)

### BENGALURU ONLINE

#### Bengaluru needs donors urgently as it faces blood shortage crisis

Bengaluru: It has been reported that children and patients in Bengaluru are not getting proper blood for the last two to three months. It is said that the reason for this is the rumour that blood donation in summer will cause health problems, tiredness and fatigue. Sources said that as a result the number of blood donors is very less.

Since the model code of conduct for the Lok Sabha elections is in force, no blood camps are organized in the name of political leaders' birthdays etc. Since holidays have already been given to the colleges, blood camps are not being organized in the college. Technicians of IT BT companies are not conducting camps due to financial year end. Due to this, the patients and children of Bengaluru are not getting proper blood. Previously 2500 to 3000 units were stored in the National Blood Bank. Now it is not even 2000 units. 416 poor children suffering from thalassemia registered in the National Blood Bank need 40 units of blood every day.

Read more at https://epaper.thehansindia.com

#### The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

#### Delhi bomb scare

Need to crack down on cybercriminals

HE bomb threat emails received by about 200 schools in Delhi-NCR on Wednesday turned out to be a hoax, but the perpetrators succeeded in creating mass panic and disturbing public order. The emails sent students, parents and the authorities of schools into a tizzy, with the police and fire departments receiving a flurry of phone calls from the institutions. The campuses were swiftly evacuated and the premises were thoroughly searched, but nothing suspicious was found.

The incident has demonstrated the sheer audacity and expertise of cybercriminals, who are using the dark web — encrypted online content that allows users to hide their identity and location — for their nefarious purposes. It is suspected that the hoax is the handiwork of elements from across India's borders. Even as a probe is in progress, what has made things more difficult for the police are the false messages or fake news being circulated on WhatsApp. The police have requested the citizens to be wary of rumours or misinformation. This is the second such incident in less than a month. More than 20 schools in Kolkata had received bomb threat emails in early April. Declaring that 'our aim is bloodbath', the senders had claimed that bombs had been placed in classrooms in various schools and would explode during the morning hours. That warning had proved to be a hoax, too.

The fact that several airports across the country received threatening emails earlier this week clearly shows that a pattern is being followed to cause nationwide pandemonium. With India in the midst of a General Election, security agencies and cybercrime cells need to work in close coordination and thoroughly probe every case to nail the miscreants. At the same time, there is a need for all to avoid panic and desist from mindlessly forwarding content on social media. Most importantly, criminal elements must not be allowed to disrupt the poll process in any way.

#### ED under fire

Court condemns agency's high-handedness

Delhi court has pulled up the Enforcement Directorate (ED) for its heavyhanded approach, exemplified by its action against doctors treating a person accused in a money laundering case. The court's rap underscores a concerning trend of powerful agencies, tasked with upholding the law, overstepping their boundaries and violating the civil liberties they are supposed to protect. The ED's use of stringent provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) to record statements of doctors, without any substantive link to the accused, highlights a worrying abuse of authority. Special Judge Vishal Gogne's remark about strong leaders, laws and agencies coming back to 'bite the citizens they vow to protect' is a stark reminder of the dangers inherent in unbridled power.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court has questioned the timing of the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal by the ED. The SC has highlighted the delicate balance between the pursuit of justice and the protection of civil liberties, emphasising the importance of the need for justification in depriving individuals of their freedom. Justice Sanjiv Khanna's pointed enquiry about Kejriwal's arrest in the context of the ongoing elections raises concerns about the potential misuse of Central agencies for political gains. The allegations of coercion and manipulation in the probe further underline the need for conducting an impartial investigation.

These developments bring to light critical issues surrounding the actions of probe agencies. This calls for transparency, accountability and scrupulous adherence to due process. The ED and others must demonstrate probity and integrity in their functioning.

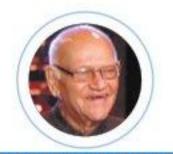
ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

LAHORE, SATURDAY, MAY 3, 1924

Labour Government's budget IF members of the two older parties in England imagined that the Labour Party would suffer in public estimation by its being elevated to office or would necessarily prove a complete failure, they must have revised their estimate by now. The budget that Mr Philip Snowden, Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Labour Cabinet, presented on Tuesday before a crowded and animated House of Commons, might, as Sir Robert Horne, former Chancellor, said, well have been made by either of the older parties. Mr Askwith, in congratulating Mr Snowden, described it as a thoroughly sound financial operation containing nothing to which the Liberals would not be able to heartily subscribe. There is nothing that smacks of socialism in the Chancellor's various proposals nor is there the remotest hint of any discriminatory taxation. On the other hand, the capitalists, who had every reason to apprehend an attempt on the part of the Labour Government for the levy of some sort of tax on capital, have been afforded some measure of relief in the shape of the remission of the tax on corporate profits. Therefore, it should not cause surprise to anyone here if Mr Snowden's speech in propounding his achievements before the House, a speech that lasted for well-nigh two hours, was frequently applauded by the govemment as well as Opposition benches and that the budget itself, excepting a proposal or two, has been very favourably received in England and has pleased both the Conservatives and the Liberals. An examination of figures reveals that the total expenditure for the year would be £790,000,000 and the total revenue on the existing basis of taxation £828,000,000, leaving a surplus of £38,000,000.

### A fearless arbiter of justice

HC judge Gautam Patel, who retired last week, distinguished himself as a true servant of the people



TRYSTS AND TURNS **JULIO RIBEIRO** 

ISGUSTED as I am by the invectives, jibes and mostly false accu-

sations hurled at each other by leaders of the BJP, the Congress and even smaller parties, I venture to write about a judge who has made me proud of being an Indian. Justice Gautam S Patel

retired last week from the Bombay High Court. The farewell function was held in the Chief Justice's court, with all judges present. The protocol followed on this occasion was not the usual one, where the retiring judge sits with the Chief Justice to hear a case and the litigants and lawyers present constitute the audience. For Justice Patel, the protocol was shunned. The courtroom was packed to capacity with all judges of the High Court in attendance. Lawyers, too, were present in large numbers.

Justice S Muralidhar got a grand send-off when he was peremptorily shifted from the Delhi High Court to the Punjab and Haryana High Court overnight in March 2020. Lawyers lined the staircases from the Chief Justice's court to the ground floor to show a truly just and fearless judge that he was appreciated and that he would always be remembered with love and respect. Public servants loved and respected by their colleagues, staff members and the people at large are becoming a rarity. That is why we should celebrate the life and times of Justice Patel.

He was a true servant of the people. I first met him during a lecture by retired Supreme



INSPIRATION: We must honour judges like Justice Patel, who are admired by colleagues and the public. FILE PHOTO

Court judge Sujata Manohar on the High Court premises. It's an annual affair in commemoration of her late father (Justice KT Desai). Justice Patel was the Secretary of the Bar Association at that time, and in that capacity had taken on the task of welcoming the guests.

I learnt that he is the son of Shirish Patel, a well-known engineer and builder from Mumbai who is widely respected by members of my generation for his unfaltering concern for the wellbeing of the citizens of my city and his own. Only last year, Shirish had asked me to endorse a public appeal made by him to the local authorities to review their plan to redevelop the Bombay Development Department chawls in the heart of the city. He appealed for more open spaces for the residents, mainly the young who wanted playgrounds, another rarity today.

I was delighted when Gautam accepted his elevation to the Bench. Many successful lawyers prefer the lakhs of rupees they make in private practice to the public service of dispensing justice to litigants. He accepted the honour and the accompanying responsibility. He took the oath

Justice Patel's address to judges and lawyers at his farewell function carried a message

about duties,

responsibilities and integrity. of office in 2013 and became an

instant success with his unshakeable sense of fair play and compassion.

My daughter, Ana, who uncannily picks up stories of good deeds that benefit the poor and the defenceless, recounted a story she had heard in Goa. There was Poonam, a backward-class girl in a Goan village who was the only member of her community who was educated. She had

appeared in a test for a seat in the Goa Medical College, but had missed her chance by a whisker. Two months later, the student who was the last to squeeze in was debarred for submitting false documents. The college decided to keep the seat vacant because of the lapse of time between the start of the semester and the debarment.

Poonam approached the High Court Bench in Goa. Justice Patel was on deputation to the Goa Bench to replace one of the judges there who had retired. She was lucky this time. Justice Patel ordered the college to admit the girl as she was next on the merit list and she was prepared to make up the lost time and not ask for concessions. Four or five years later, the Goan lawyer who had pleaded the girl's case phoned Justice Patel in Mumbai to inform him that she had not only passed the MBBS exam but also topped the list of successful candidates! The judge's goal of helping the poor was achieved.

Justice Patel left an indelible mark on the High Court Bench during his short tenure in Goa from August to October

2017. Litigants and lawyers alike, as well as the staff, spoke of him in glowing terms. I have heard these encomiums myself during one of my yearly visits to meet my brother and cousins in Goa.

What impressed the Goans was that the judge made no distinction between the powerful and the powerless, between the rich and the poor. He gave equal importance to every case placed before him. No case was 'big'. Similarly, no case was 'small'. Justice Patel was the only judge who suo motu put back on board a case in which he had already passed a judgment but later realised that he had made a mistake.

The most important matter he decided in Goa was the government notification of 2017 that transferred all environmental cases from the National Green Tribunal's west zone at Pune to New Delhi. This was inconvenient for the lawyers and litigants, and Goans smelt a rat in this move. Justice Patel took up the matter suo motu and quashed the notification. It was the last line of his order nullifying the notification that touched the Goan heart: "Truly, this is a land worth fighting for."

Justice Patel's address to the judges and lawyers at his farewell function at the Bombay High Court was marked by humour - which the lawyers were accustomed to during the 11 years he graced the Bench and a message about duties, responsibilities and integrity.

It is imperative for a developing country like ours, seeking to sit on the high table of the comity of nations, to have exemplary public servants manning the judiciary, the bureaucracy and the police. We must honour judges like Justice Patel, bureaucrats like Tejinder Khanna (Punjab) and police officers like Chaman Lal (Madhya Pradesh), who are admired by colleagues, staff members and, more importantly, by the public.

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THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Peace and justice are two sides of the same coin. - Dwight D. Eisenhower

#### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### When *jugaad* saved the day

COL DS CHEEMA (RETD)

UGAAD, an innovative way of finding simple solutions to seemingly difficult problems, has been an essential part of our lives. I recall that many people in villages and small towns used bicycle wheel rims as antennas for viewing TV decades ago. Even uneducated villagers had the practical wisdom to innovate and improvise. JCOs and other ranks in the Army are adept at it; they find one way or the other to carry out the orders of their seniors, particularly during training exercises. During the 1960s, there were many occasions when the driver of our Mahindra jeep came up with an idea out of thin air and executed it with finesse, even though he had not studied beyond Class VIII.

Earlier this year, my doctor daughter and her younger son came from Jalandhar to meet us, while her elder son, an MBBS student, arrived from Dehradun. We had two funfilled days of Holi celebrations. March 27 was the day for everyone to get back to their respective places. The doctorin-the-making wanted to take an early-morning ride through the BlaBla carpool network to reach well in time for his 9 am class; my daughter had to go back to her hospital, so she decided to leave at 8 am; my son was to leave for work at 8:30 am as usual. Everything seemed to be going according to plan till the time we dropped the young man at the pick-up point for Dehradun and returned home.

My daughter told us that she could not find the keys of her car. A hectic search proved futile. Finally, it dawned on her that her son could have taken them by mistake in a pocket of his jeans. She called him up and it came to light that the boy indeed had the keys. We discussed various options: my daughter could go by bus and her son could send the keys by post or through some BlaBla car coming to Chandigarh from Dehradun. We wondered if the boy could miss a day of studies and come back to deliver the keys.

Exasperated, I approached a driver from a neighbouring house and sought his help. He asked me to go to a Panchkula key-maker who dealt with such cases. I reached there, only to find the shop closed. I called up the person whose contact number was displayed on the signboard. All he wanted were photos of both sides of the keys; this was arranged immediately. In 20 minutes, a boy turned up at our home on a motorbike. I was taken aback when he opened the car with a key he had brought with him. He explained to me that to turn the car on, he had to use a computer code. It took him precisely two minutes to do that, and lo and behold, the engine came to life. We heaved a sigh of relief and were overjoyed at his brilliant performance. I patted the boy on the back and jokingly told him that he could earn much more in the US or Canada. He happily accepted the compliment and touched my feet. His smart work strengthened my faith in the power of jugaad.

#### Hold manufacturers accountable

Apropos of the editorial 'Covid vaccine row'; UK-based pharmaceutical firm AstraZeneca's admission that its Covid-19 vaccine can cause a rare but serious side effect, thrombosis with thrombocytopenia syndrome (TTS), is appalling. A thorough probe needs to be conducted into the matter, and the maker should be held accountable. Addressing the risks associated with the vaccine is of paramount importance to allay the apprehensions of the Indian masses. In view of the reports of Covid vaccine recipients facing life-threatening complications, the government must ensure a speedy inquiry into such cases and share the findings with the public.

AMARJEET MANN, UNA

#### Deaths due to Covid vaccine

Refer to the editorial 'Covid vaccine row'; a plea has been filed in the Supreme Court seeking compensation for vaccine injuries and the constitution of an expert panel to examine the side effects of the jab. AstraZeneca's admission about its vaccine causing TTS is disturbing. Since the Covid-19 years, there has been an increase in the number of sudden deaths. There have been several reports of healthy people collapsing and dying of heart attacks. It is suspected that it is linked to the jab. There is a need to conduct a fresh inquiry into the alleged link between Covid vaccines and unexplained sudden deaths.

CAPT AMAR JEET (RETD), KHARAR

#### Set up panel to probe vax injuries

With reference to the news report 'PIL seeks directions to study possible Covishield side effects'; the manufacturers rushed to deliver vaccines, unmindful of the potential side effects. It is alarming that a vast majority of Indians received the Covishield vaccine without even knowing the possible safety risks. Covishield recipients are right to feel betrayed. The setting up of a committee of medical experts to study the side effects of the jab is the need of the hour. The vaccination drive imperilled the lives of crores of people. The pharmaceutical firm's admission about the side effect must prompt the Central Government to fix accountability and scrutinise the role of the

regulatory authority. RAJ KUMAR KAPOOR, ROPAR

"

#### US students' protests justified

Refer to the editorial 'Pro-Palestine protests'; the police and administrative crackdown on university students in the US who are protesting against the American government's financial, military and diplomatic support for Israel in its war against Hamas is totally unwarranted and unjustified. It brazenly undermines the democratic values enshrined in the US constitution and safeguarded by international law. Instead of stifling freedom of speech and dissent and shielding Israel from accountability, the US government should address the grievances of protesters. Displaying respect for human rights and ensuring justice for all will help the country's international reputation as the leader of the democratic world.

DS KANG, HOSHIARPUR

#### Hypocrisy of the US

Apropos of the editorial 'Pro-Palestine protests'; it is ironic that a country which often poses as a champion of human rights is facing global ire for crushing dialogue and dissent on its own soil. The actions of the US are always guided by its own interests; it has scant regard for the criticism of its steps by other countries. The US usually gives priority to its economic growth over everything else. It does not safeguard the right to free speech of its citizens. DV SHARMA, BY MAIL

#### Pakistan must change its heart

The recent case of a Pakistani girl, Ayesha Rashan, undergoing a heart transplant surgery at MGM Healthcare, Chennai, is a beautiful story of humanity. The kind-hearted hospital authorities deserve kudos for raising money for the surgery. This is definitely not the first time that our doctors have helped patients from neighbouring countries. It is unfortunate that despite such kind gestures by our people, the rulers of Pakistan show no change of heart. Islamabad must understand that it could benefit immensely from cordial relations with India.

KARNAIL SINGH, KHARAR

Letters to the Editor, typed in double space, should not exceed the 200-word limit. These should be cogently written and can be sent by e-mail to: Letters@tribunemail.com

### Autocratisation poses a threat to democracy



NEERA CHANDHOKE POLITICAL SCIENTIST

ROUND 35 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of socialist sociwhen Francis triumphantly Fukuyama declared that the future belonged to liberal democracy and the West proceeded to mandate global norms of democracy - we are witnessing waves of autocratisation in the Netherlands, Hungary, Italy, Burundi, Israel, Russia and India.

The V-Dem (Varieties of Democracy) Institute, based at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden, stated in its 2024 democracy report that India was one of the worst autocratisers. The country had been downgraded by V-Dem to the status of an 'electoral autocracy' in 2018. Democracy in the country, stated the report, has declined even further on multiple metrics. V-Dem reports categorise countries into four regime types based on their score on the liberal democratic index: liberal democracy, electoral democracy, electoral autocracy and does not die in military executives weaken checks

closed autocracy. The report states that 71 per cent of the world's population (5.7 billion people) lives in autocracies. This represents a sharp increase from 48 per cent 10 years ago. A major decline in democracy has taken place in eastern Europe and South and Central Asia. The level of liberal democracy enjoyed by the average Indian is now reportedly down to the levels of 1975, ie, the Emergency.

According to the report, a

country falls into the category of liberal democracy when it institutionalises free and fair elections, ensures judicial independence, establishes robust constraints on executive overreach, rigorously safeguards civil liberties and upholds equality before the law. The government in India has occasionally used laws on sedition, defamation and counterterrorism to silence critics. A third electoral term for the BJP government "could lead to further autocratisation, given the already substantial democratic decline under Modi's leadership and the enduring crackdown on minority rights and civil society," the V-Dem report says.

Autocratisation is diametrically opposite to democratisation or the process of deepening democracy. It signifies that today, democracy



WAKE-UP CALL: What is crucial is the ability of citizens to comprehend the gradual withering away of democracy to the point where the vote is the only weapon available to them. PTI

coups, as in Chile in 1973, or through election malpractices. Autocrats now consider sudden takeovers of power politically imprudent. The use of violence to take over the government and the consequent loss of lives provoke outbreaks of outrage and resistance, or, at the least, simmening discontent. Democracy dies when governments slowly but surely subvert institutions that realise and protect democracy to a point where only elections remain. Multi-party elections are held, but under conditions that are palpably unfair. Above all, autocratisation implies a massive concentration of power in the chief executive. Elected

The theory of autocratisation alerts us to the fact that political practices and policies cannot be divided into neat compartments.

and balances and implement measures to prevent the Opposition from challenging power.

Crucially, the substantial decline of core institutions and practices of democracy takes place under the guise of legal proprieties. The process is prolonged, measured and opaque. Contemporary autocrats have perfected the art of eroding democratic institutions while maintaining democratic facades. Piecemeal changes are cloaked in appeals to hyper-nationalism and majoritarianism and through anti-minority and anti-immigrant rhetoric.

Autocratisation is process, not a predestined end to full-blown authori-

tarianism. The outcome of the process cannot be predicted. We cannot assume whether there will be a complete democratic breakdown or a return to democracy. Politics is chancy, contingent and unpredictable. Miracles can happen, perhaps. Elections, even if held under unfair conditions, can either kindle the democratic spirit, or spur the stabilisation of authoritarian regimes.

What is crucial is the ability of citizens to comprehend the gradual withering away of democracy to the point where the vote is the only weapon available to them. Nevertheless, the power of the vote gives us hope. Perhaps competition between different agendas might enable us, once again, to become what we are meant to be - Aristotle's Zoon Politikon (political animal). Perhaps the autocrat will be deterred by the fact that the idea and ideals of democracy have become the standard for judging existing regimes. After all, after the end of the Cold War, democracy, as a global norm, has been increasingly shaping expectations.

Finally, the theory of autocratisation alerts us to the fact that political practices and policies cannot be divided into neat compartments: democracy vs authoritarianism or dictatorship or fascism. There are elements of ocratic government. And autocrats or aspiring autocrats hesitate to adopt policies that draw international condemnation or lead to an uprising within the country.

India, despite the whittling away of democratic norms and institutions, has seen at least two major social movements in recent times that have challenged political power. There were massive protests led by university students against the Citizenship Amendment Act in December 2019. In the year that followed, farmers assembled at the borders of the national capital to protest against laws that allegedly favoured the corporate sector. Today, Adivasis are opposing the transfer of their land by the government to corporates. The crucial issue of who owns land in the country is being fought in the apex court. Activists and eminent legal personalities won a court battle against electoral bonds. And thousands of Indians wrote to the Election Commission to call out the objectionable language used by the PM to describe our fellow citizens amid the Lok Sabha elections. India has been and will continue to be a home for a million mutinies. We have experienced the process of autocratisation. Whether the powers that be will or will not achieve their objective of establishing a closed autocauthoritarian rule in a dem- racy depends on our vote.

### Decriminalisation of more offences the way forward



SANKAR SEN EX-DIRECTOR, NATIONAL POLICE ACADEMY

T was reported recently that the Harvana Government will take a final call on the decriminalisation of offences under about 235 Acts. These will be treated as civil offences and covered by administrative measures and other noncriminal penalties.

Criminal sanctions have been traditionally viewed as society's moral condemnation of the defendant's behaviour and its "hatred, fear and contempt for the convict" (Henry M Hart, The Aims of Criminal Law). Criminal sanction has thus a stigmatising quality. In view of the proliferation of criminal laws, it is strongly felt by some criminologists and law-enforcement experts that laws should be reviewed with the objective of decriminalisation of many aspects of human behaviour. Apart from crimes against persons and property, there are several offences which fall in the realm of immorality, such as gambling, liquor consumption, and sexual pursuits like pornography and prostitution.

It is also seen that many of these laws impinge upon individuals' freedom of action and are often either unenforceable or too costly to enforce.

Norval Morris and Gordon Hawkins, in their book The Honest Politician's Guide to Crime Control, referred to the 'overreach' of the criminal law. They argued that the criminal justice system should be stripped of moralistic excrescences so that it can concentrate on the essential. Some criminologists opine that it is obligatory on the part of society to enforce morality through criminal sanctions. Conservative criminologists like HLA Hart (Law, Liberty and Morality) and Patrick Devlin, however, believe that public morality is the 'cement of society', which must be maintained in order to prevent social disintegration. It is difficult to consider some kinds of behaviour as immoral when there is no consensus about their harmfulness.

It is also felt that decriminalisation, in a large measure, is necessary to reduce the workload on the police. The police are working under great stress and are plagued by the shortage of manpower and other mate-

rial resources. There is considerable substance in the argument of advocates of decriminalisation that when the police are not able to devote adequate



OVERHAUL: Constant efforts are needed to decriminalise unenforceable laws to ease the pressure on the justice delivery system. is took

Many laws impinge

upon individuals'

freedom of action

and are often either

unenforceable or

too costly to enforce.

important cases, they should not be burdened with probes into 'victimless' crimes. The police are indeed devoting an enormous amount of time and energy to the investigation of such cases without getting proportionate results.

It is seen that many laws are criminogenic. Sometimes, laws create crimes by labelling and encouraging deviance'. 'secondary According to the labelling theory, the person who is arrested, prosecuted and convicted internalises the label of the criminal and proceeds to act out the role and commit crimes. The law also creates 'secondary deviance'. For instance, a drug addict takes to crime to keep up his habit because the drug is illegal and expensive.

Decriminalisation has been

proposed in certain areas of criminal law. Some criminologists and law enforcement experts are of the view that sexual activities between consenting adults in private should not be the subject of criminal law in cases of adultery, homosexuality, pornography and obscenity. The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), which will soon replace the Indian Penal Code (IPC), has omitted adultery as an offence. The Supreme Court decriminalised adultery in a landmark judgment in Joseph Shine vs Union of India (2018). The IPC's Section 497, which exempts the woman from culpability as an abettor and puts the entire blame on the man, is not part of the BNS. Howev-

er, the new statute's Clause

84 has retained the IPC's Section 498, which penalises a man for enticing the wife of another man so that she may have intercourse with any person.

Under Section 377 of the IPC, homosexuality was both a non-cognisable and punishable offence. However, the apex court struck down Section 377 and decriminalised same-sex relations between consenting adults.

The BNS has dropped Section 309 (attempted suicide) of the IPC. However, attempted suicide with the intent of preventing a public servant from carrying out his/her duty is

still a punishable offence. Sections 292 and 293 of the IPC state that by itself, possession of obscene material is no offence unless it is so possessed for the purpose of sale, hire, distribution, public exhibition and circulation. Section 293 prohibits the sale of obscene material to any person under the age of 20. In 1969, Denmark became the first country in the world to legalise pornography. Initially, there was a great rush for obscene material, but soon the craze faded and people did not pay much attention to pornographic books and other material freely available for purchase.

Similarly, perhaps, the time has come to think about decriminalisation of gambling by permitting it under licence. In Japan, law enforcement authorities focus on the activities of professional gamblers. No action is taken against betting for small sums of money. While decriminalising gambling, there should be essential safeguards; for example, no attempt must be made by people who indulge in gambling to use force or violence on anybody or entice juveniles into their group to further their activities.

The drug menace has become a malaise afflicting many countries. Like a tidal wave, illegal drugs are invading the global market. In the US, there is a growing feeling that criminalisation of heroin has done more harm than good. Advocates of decriminalisation acknowledge that the drug is a destructive commodity which requires control. Decriminalisation means the removal of criminal penalties for the use of heroin, but narcotic trafficking would remain a crime. Drug addiction should be viewed as a health-related rather than a criminal problem.

Similarly, cases registered under the liquor laws significantly increase the work on the police without solving the problem itself. There is a growing realisation that criminalisation is not an appropriate response to social and medical problems. Constant efforts are needed to decriminalise unenforceable laws to ease the pressure on the justice delivery system.

#### time to the investigation of

**OUICK CROSSWORD** 

- ACROSS
- Without purpose (7) Bore a hole in (5)
- Find no takers (2,7) 9 Small attached label (3)
- 10 Basic source (4) 12 Ship's cargo list (8)
- 14 Scientific study of plants (6)
- 15 Restore to good condition (6)
- 17 Easygoing (8) 18 Look over cursorily (4)
- 21 Small spot (3)

25 Case for the accused (7)

- 22 With great enthusiasm
- (2,1,3,3)
- 24 Young dog (5)

Down: 1 Care, 2 Nigeria, 3 Intemperance, 4 Casual, 6 Valid, 7 Rowdyism, 8 Fait accompli, 12 Perfumed, 15 Obscure, 16 Adhere, 18 Singe, 19 Lest.

#### DOWN

- 1 Bode (5)
- 2 Disorderly crowd (3)
- 3 Advantage (4) 4 Coiled (6)
- 5 Utterly weary (3-5)
- 6 Lacking information (2,3,4)
- 7 A shellfish (7) 11 At odds (3,2,4)
- 13 Extreme wickedness (8) 14 Increase gradually (5,2) 16 Unfounded rumour (6)
- 19 Perchance (5) 20 Sharp blow (4) 23 Unhealthily pale (3)

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION Across: 1 Convince, 5 Over, 9 Right, 10 Shallow, 11 From day to day, 13 Elated, 14 Across, 17 Fast and loose, 20 Monocle, 21 Pause, 22 Duel, 23 Reticent.

#### SU DO KU 9 6 8 4 8 5 2 4 2 6 8 HARD

#### YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION 6 3 4 8 2 1 4 2 5 1 8 9 7 3 8 9 2 7 6 5 4 4 1 3 7 9 5 2 8 6 6 8 4 2 3 1 7 4 9 5 8 2 3 6 1 4 7 6 1 3 9 5 4 1 8 9 5 6 2 2 5 3 7 4 8 CALENDAR MAY 3RD 2024, FRIDAY Shaka Samvat Vaishakh Shaka 13 Vaishakh Parvishte 21 Hijari Krishna Paksha Tithi 10, up to 11.25 pm Brahma Yoga up to 2.19 pm

Shatbhisha Nakshatra up to 12.06 am

■ Moon in Aquarius sign

#### SUNSET: FRIDAY 19:01 HRS CITY MAX MIN Chandigarh 35 19 New Delhi 38 20 Amritsar 33 18 35 Bathinda 17 Jalandhar 33 16 Ludhiana 34 19 Bhiwani 36 24 Hisar 36 18 36 20 Sirsa Dharamsala 27 15 21 06 Manali 25 13 Shimla 22 Srinagar 07 Jammu 33 18 16 Kargil 05 13 Leh 04 Dehradun 37 20 Mussoorie 24 13 TEMPERATURE IN OC

FORECAST







#### Godrej split: Sharing a brand will hold the key

The family's asset division plan has done well to minimize scope for a wrangle over a brand prized for elasticity across markets. Like a Möbius strip, the brand can be split, but not apart

s a brand, Godrej arguably draws level with Tata on a key measure: Its defiance of marketing dogma on brand elasticity. For more than a century, Godrej has been a byword for household security, as it began with locks, as much as for personal hygiene, with soap its next big foray. The name has since adorned all kinds of products, from refined oil to refrigerators, and attracted customers for a wide range of services from interior decor to property loans. While Tata is much bigger, Godrej has proven just as elastic in being stretched across diverse fulfillers of needs. Marketing convention would have each brand identified with a specific need, all the better to embed it deeply in people's minds. So, Coca-Cola works as a fizzy refreshment, but can't be stretched too far without weakening its appeal. Since a brand is best defined as a name that conveys a distinct set of values nurtured steadily over time, however, the more universal its basic proposition, the more elasticity it enjoys. If Tata has long staked its name on market trust, which all brands try to earn but few achieve, Godrej earned its basic cred for security. This is valued widely too, placed as it is on the second widest slab of 'Maslow's hierarchy of needs.' Safety, hygiene and health are all related. What seems to favour Godrej in ventures beyond these fields is that security, like trust, can straddle diverse markets as a promise made by the very sight of its logo. It is abstract. And that lends it elasticity.

This week, the family behind the Godrej brand declared a split of assets into two business groups. Soaps and suds on one side, locks and fridges on the other would be the retail-level view of it. For investors, it's more complex: The Godrej Industries Group (GIG) of brothers Adi

and Nadir Godrej will house listed firms Godrej Industries, Godrej Consumer Products, Godrej Properties, Godrej Agrovet and Astec Lifesciences, while the Godrej Enterprises Group (GEG) of their cousins Jamshyd Godrej and Smita Crishna will have the unlisted Godrej & Boyce, which has over a dozen divisions, as its flagbearer. What's crucial from the brand's vantage point is how the turf has been carved up. Care was taken, it appears, to keep their key piece of intellectual property secure and free of conflict. As reported, the family pact includes a deal not to compete among themselves for six years, except in real estate. After that, they can venture into each other's other markets, but not under the Godrej brand. Accordingly, GIG has exclusive rights to it in sectors of proven success such as fast moving consumer goods (like soap), financial services, pharma, diagnostics and chemicals, while GEG has that privilege in defence, consumer durables (like ACs and fridges), medical devices, construction materials, interior design, electric mobility, software services and security products (like locks and safes). This will prevent brand wrangles. In real estate, both plan to work in alliance, possibly with GIG as property marketer and GEG as land developer, as they've done under an earlier agreement that's said to have held steady. This field of overlap will be under watch. It doesn't just offer them a big chance to unlock value, given a vast bank of land held by the latter in Mumbai, their moves here will reveal how well they do as co-guardians of the Godrej brand.

As the fortunes of both GIG and GEG could depend on the space they share in the minds of people, both need to stay fully invested in the brand's integrity. Like a Möbius strip, the brand can be split—but not apart.

#### MY VIEW | FARM TRUTHS

#### Redistribution: Who is afraid of effective and progressive taxes?

They're needed to fund essential public services and foster a society with equal opportunity for all



University and visiting fellow at the Centre de Sciences Humaines, New Delhi

ndia's political debate on inheritance tax and wealth tax has led to fears of tax terrorism, with the incumbent National Democratic Alliance (NDA) using the issue to attack the principal opposition party, Congress. Although the latter has clarified that neither a wealth nor inheritance tax is part of its poll manifesto, questions have arisen on the feasibility and desirability of such a proposal. The use of taxation as a tool to redistribute income and wealth may be an important issue, but a far bigger one is inequality, which is high in India and has risen over the last three decades.

We don't have nationally representative income data, except from the India Human Development Surveys (IHDS) of 2005 and 2012. IHDS data shows that the Gini coefficient of income inequality in 2012 was 0.54, having worsened from its 2005 level. This places India among major countries with the worst inequality. But even if we look at official metrics, inequality of consumption expenditure has increased secularly since 1993, reaching a peak in 2011-12 There are no comparable income/consumption surveys after that. On the other hand, tax data from the World Inequality Database (WID) suggests that both income and wealth inequality in India are at their highest levels ever since records began. In 2022-23, 22.6% of all income accrued to the top 1% of the population. On wealth, India's top 1%

accounted for 40.1% of all wealth in the economy. One may quibble about the methodology of WID estimates, but still, multiple trackers indicate that inequality in India remains high and has trended up in the last three decades. It is undisputed that the real wages of casual wage workers in rural areas have either remained stagnant or declined for almost a decade. It is also undisputed that the largest corporations have seen the fastest profit growth in recent years, with a rising number of billionaires. It is equally clear that even better protected regular workers have seen their real incomes decline.

Taxation as a means to redistribute income and wealth is probably as old as governance itself. However, its form and content vary across countries. Even income tax and capital gains tax are redistributive, as these are levied on high-bracket earners and asset owners to fund programmes aimed at uplifting the poor and offering basic necessities such as health, education, nutrition and livelihood support, apart from the usual governance needs like law-and-order. All governments have done it and India's present administration is no exception. Inheritance and wealth taxes have also been in wide use across the world. While some countries abolished these, including India, which axed its

#### **OUICK READ**

Inheritance and wealth taxes have been widely used globally but we axed them in India for their inefficiency as instruments of resource mobilization rather than any inherent problem.

While those taxes may not be useful, our other direct taxes are inadequately progressive. Large firms, for example, end up paying a lower effective tax rate than

inheritance tax in the mid-1980s and wealth tax in the last decade, the reason was their inefficiency as resource-mobilization tools more than anything else.

Given our own experience, inheritance and wealth taxation may not be the most efficient way to get resources for government spending. But even for other impositions such as income tax. capital gains tax and corporate tax, what matters is the nature, efficiency and progressivity of such taxation. Unlike indirect taxes, taxes on income or capital gains are typically progressive, with the rich expected to pay a higher share than the less well-off. The reality in India, though, is a taxation policy which

is too weakly progressive. The effective tax rate in 2020-21 for large corporations with profits above ₹500 crore was 19%, while those with profits of less than ₹1 crore paid an effective tax rate of 25%. The corporate tax break awarded in 2019 helped companies increase profits even though consumption and private investment hardly witnessed any acceleration.

For a country with significant deprivations of nutrition, education and health, and with stagnant incomes for most people, generating resources to subsidize the poor is not a choice, but a necessary instrument of governance. However, despite significant deficits, government spending on essential public services such as education and health remains low, with a real decline over the years. The inability of successive governments to spend adequately on these essential public services is attributable not just to a lack of political will, but also of resources. Our tax-to-GDP ratio is among the lowest among middleincome countries, with almost no increase in the last three decades. This happened despite average economic growth of above 6% annually. An effective tax policy that's truly progressive in application is necessary to fund essential public services. It is also an effective instrument to create an egalitarian society with equal opportunity for all.

#### 10 PEARS AGO



It is not very unreasonable that the rich should contribute to the public expense, not only in proportion to their revenue, but something more than in that proportion.

**ADAM SMITH** 

#### THEIR VIEW

#### Save lives by making organ donation our default option

SRINATH SRIDHARAN



corporate advisor. @ssmumbai

n India, the gap between demand for organ donations and their supply is huge. With thousands of people spending years on organ waiting lists, this is worrisome. Estimates indicate around 500,000 people in the country are grappling with organ failure. About half of them rely on dialysis for kidney functions, 150,000 face liver failure and 100,000 suffer from underperforming hearts, lungs and other vital organs.

India's organ donation rate is among the lowest globally, with only 0.86 donations per million people. Our pool of organ donors is egregiously inadequate. Regrettably, an average of around 20 individuals awaiting organ transplants lose their lives every day Although living donors constitute the majority, accounting for 85% of all donations in India, post-death organ donations, especially of the liver, heart and kidneys, persist at alarmingly low levels.

Should we establish organ donation as a fundamental opt-in by law, with a provision allowing individuals to opt out for personal reasons? This needs a national debate. While the idea may appear stringent at first, it is underpinned by humanitarian principles. Note that it would still offer people a choice, while making donations the default option. Medical experts emphasize the profound value of a single cadaver donation: It can save up to eight lives and positively impact over 75 others. Organ donation is a powerful act of altruism, offering hope to those in desperate need of life-saving transplants.

In a welcome development, the annual number of cadaver donors in India surpassed four digits for the first time in 2023. According to the National Organ & Tissue Transplant Organisation (NOTTO), there were 1,028 deceased donors in 2023, up from 941 in 2022. Each cadaver, on average, contributes to three transplants. NOTTO, operating under the directorate general of health services, which works under the Union ministry of health and family welfare, serves as the apex centre for organ and tissue donation and transplantation in India.

The term 'cadaver donors' refers to those whose families donate organs after they are declared brain-dead so that patients facing end-stage organ failure can use them. Brainstem death, legally recognized under the Transplantation of Human Organs Act, has

reshaped the posthumous organ donation scenario. While only a limited number of organs and tissues can be donated after a natural cardiac death, the scope expands significantly after brain-stem death, with some 37 different organs and tissues becoming available for donation.

 $radio\,programme, aired\,on\,26\,March\,2023,$ A digital registry was set up for the willing to

450,000 people have pledged their organs. However, it's crucial to note that not all deaths qualify for organ donations. Vital organs such as the heart, lungs, kidneys and pancreas can only be harvested from individuals pronounced brain-dead by doctors.

limits for harvesting and transplanting organs that vary from one organ to another. The window is shortest for the heart and

In the 99th episode of his Mann Ki Baat

Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighted the importance of cadaveric organ donation. make an Aadhaar-verified pledge, and over

> QUICK READ The gap between demand for organ donations in India and their supply is huge. Around 500,000 people are estimated to be grappling with organ failure and their wait may be painfully long.

A law that makes everyone There are strict time opt for organ donation unless one chooses to opt out would serve a humanitarian cause by boosting supply. It would also do the Indian economy a good turn.

lungs (about 4-6 hours), followed by liver and pancreas, and then kidneys. In the case of individuals who have pledged organs dying of natural causes at home, harvesting can only be done if the deceased's family promptly informs the hospital or concerned NGO about the death. However, eye corneas, heart valves, skin and bones can still be harvested with some delay

While many individuals support organ donation in theory, they may not take proactive steps to register as donors. Integrating organ donation as a fundamental duty, with

> an opt-out option to make it non-binding, would align well with the principle of dignity and respect for the deceased.

Aadhaar cards are used for various administrative purposes, including paper-work for the last rites of the deceased. The inclusion of organ-donation preferences in the Aadhaar database would ease the process. It would let the last wishes of people be honoured swiftly after their death without placing this burden on grieving families.

A policy that makes organ donation the default setting for everyone would not only have profound humanitarian implications, it would also make economic sense for India. Increasing the availability of organs for transplantation would serve the overall cause of healthcare well. It would reduce the need for costly long-term treatments such as dialysis for kidney patients or prolonged hospital stays for those awaiting vital organ transplants. This could deliver substantia healthcare savings, freeing up resources for other essential medical services and research initiatives. Moreover, a healthier society results in a more productive workforce, contributing to economic growth and national savings through reduced absentee ism and disability expenses.

Additionally, successful organ transplants can enhance productivity by enabling individuals to return to work and contribute actively to society. There would also be a positive impact on social productivity that cannot be overstated, as healthier individuals are always better equipped to participate in community activities. The well-being of people makes a society more productive. Organ donation thus serves both social and economic ends. Let's opt in.





MY VIEW | THE LAST WORD

### Trying to predict what the voter will choose: A weathervane job?

India's anti-defection law has made party choice crucial and election results susceptible to which way the 'wind' is blowing



INDIRA RAJARAMAN is an economist.

he recent Lokniti pre-poll voter survey
was played up in press reports for the
wrong reasons. Voters' party preferences got headlines, but pre-poll findings
on party shares are always suspect
because voters may not have finally
chosen, or might not reveal their true choice even
if they have.

What the survey yielded of value was issues of concern to voters. It provided a pointer to contesting parties about what to focus on in their campaigns. Employment and inflation are the two issues of topmost concern. Climate change has not entered the popular conversation, even though this is not some dour bell tolling death in the distance, but a more urgent and ever-present threat of disruption of everyday life through extreme climate events.

In every survey, the wording in which responses are phrased matters. Employment could be 'roz-gaari,' a term derived from the single-day duration of hiring in the agricultural context. Educated respondents might use the term 'naukri,' for the longer-duration contracts being sought. Ultimately, neither rozgaari nor naukri quite captures what the respondent is looking for, which is livelihood (jeevika). Parties have to outline what they will do to restore widespread access to livelihoods.

I am compelled to sound yet again the stroke-of-the-pen reform I have consistently advanced as the way out. Small enterprises have been the traditional route through which labour-force entrants have found livelihood and life, and this has been closed off by restricting permission to use the Reverse Charge Mechanism (RCM) in GST, even though it was (and remains) generally permissible under the GST law. Universal permission for the RCM (capped to prevent misuse) will restore much needed legitimacy to manufacturing and service

enterprises below the GST registration threshold. The Lokniti survey report is unfortunately not accessible. From press reports, responses are subclassified by religion and caste, but not for the key demographic—the new voter aged 18 to 22 (too young to have registered in 2019). The Election Commission reports "over 2 crore" (20 million) newly registered voters in the larger age group of 18-29, out of a total electorate size of 969 million. That is too small to affect the overall outcome, but it would have been useful to have their responses separately from those of repeat voters.

Starting from what concerns them, voters map onto whichever party (or, rarely, individual candidate) can best address the issue/s of relevance to them. The pre-poll survey should have asked if voters had chosen, without asking them to reveal their choice. That would have yielded a truthful answer, and from that, the residual fraction of undecided voters open to campaign persuasion.



Members elected to Parliament

with a party affiliation will be tied

to their party line on all matters

put to a parliamentary vote, as

ensured by an anti-defection law

passed back in the mid-1980s.

That law swung the focus of

our polls away from candidates

to parties, which in turn made

party choices subject to the

electoral equivalent of met

forecasts on wind direction.

The electronic voting machine (EVM) is the critical intermediary entrusted with the task of reflecting voters' final choices in the results. The formidable logistical issues involved in the deployment of EVMs and booth manpower, along with adequate supplies of indelible ink, are handled by the Election Commission. Some electronic experts like

Madhav Deshpande have spoken of how the EVM process in place is susceptible to tampering. But PRS Legislative Research has issued a series of six short videos to demonstrate that the EVM process is robustly protected. The debate will probably never be fully resolved.

Members elected this year to Parliament with a party affiliation, as in all national elections over the last 40 years, will be tied to their party line on all issues put to a parliamentary vote. The Anti-Defection Law (the 52nd amendment to the Constitution in 1985), mandated that a mem-

ber of Parliament or a state legislature can be disqualified from membership if he or she "votes or abstains from any crucial voting contrary to the directive circulated by his/her respective political party." This has made the numbers garnered by any party, singly or in coalition, the only election outcome that really matters, in terms of the laws that will be passed by the new Lok Sabha. The

smooth passage of that Constitutional amendment

was itself facilitated by the huge parliamentary majority of the then ruling party.

In this situation, do the attributes of individual candidates matter at all? The candidate's caste has always mattered, enough for parties to factor caste into their choice of candidates. PRS Legislative Research has made information publicly available

on parliamentary attendance and the performance of contestants who have been members before. However, local involvement and accessibility might matter much more. Incumbent candidates seeking another term are likely to have gained traction if they have successfully interceded with the relevant state and local authorities to secure benefits for their constituency. Empirical work by Tariq Thachil and Adam Auerbach shows that the emergence of political leadership in urban informal settlements is critically a function of the ability to deliver

local benefits like water and sani-

tation through that kind of intercession.

The fact remains, though, that the Anti-Defection Law has swung the focus of elections decisively away from individual candidates to parties.

This, in turn, has made the voter's choice of party subject to the electoral equivalent of meteorological predictions. If there is a hawa (a wave) in some direction, should they go with it even if they might otherwise have chosen differently?

MINT CURATOR

#### Self-driving Teslas can't duck the US-China 'silicon curtain'

Cheap hardware will win Asia's EV race, not advanced software



DAVID FICKLING
is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist covering climate change and energy.

hat's the value of a good story? \$82 billion, to judge by Tesla's 15% share price gain on Monday. That's the effect of news that the company had won tentative approval to roll out its driver-support technology in China, following a surprise meeting with Chinese Premier Li Qiang on Sunday.

Trying to decipher the entrails of Elon Musk's gnomic pronouncements is never an easy task. Is he planning to release a cutprice Model 2 sedan next, or a robotaxi? Is he in favour of action on climate change, or does he think it's communism? Does he even care much about making cars these days, when there is so much fun to be had posting memes and launching rockets?

The lightning visit to China at least clarifies the narrative on the last point, according to Morgan Stanley analyst Adam Jonas: "Even the smallest gesture of commitment (an unannounced trip to Beijing) has elevated meaning here, combating concerns over Musk's commitment to Tesla."

The difficulty comes when you dig beneath the vapourware of stories and ambitions, and look at what has actually changed for Tesla. It's rather less than meets the eye.

You might not know it from the way Musk talks, but Tesla's driver-assistance system—misleadingly and dangerously dubbed 'Full Self-Driving' (FSD)—has been falling behind the competition of late. Mercedes-Benz is already selling vehicles in the US that allow drivers to take their hands off the wheel and eyes off the road in low-risk conditions.

That's known as Level 3 autonomous driving, a step beyond the Level 2 technology used by Tesla's FSD. BMW has added the same feature to its new 7 Series saloons in Germany, while Honda released a small number of Level 3 cars as far back as 2021.

Alphabet's Waymo is aiming a step further, with Level 4 self-driving that won't even prompt passengers to take over in tricky circumstances. That has put it well in advance of both Tesla and General Motors' Cruise, as my colleague Dave Lee wrote earlier this year.

This makes reports of a Tesla-Baidu tie-up perhaps the most interesting thing to come out of Musk's China trip. The Chinese search giant has been building an open platform for autonomous cars and is running robotaxi pilot projects in Beijing, Wuhan and Chongqing. It's not clear how deeply the collaboration will go, but Tesla's best prospect of catching up on autonomous driving will require pooling expertise with rivals, rather than staying in splendid



Elon Musk's visit to China got Tesla a deal with Baidu, but will it help?

isolation. The Baidu alliance might be a first step towards that.

Even so, it's hard to justify Monday's \$82 billion share price pop. In America, FSD is a way of taking advantage of steadily improving consumer confidence and lacklustre offerings from rivals to sell EVs for a significant premium to the sticker price. Conditions in China could scarcely be more different.

With sentiment still stuck around the pessimistic levels it hit during Shanghai's 2022 lockdown, inflation barely in positive territory and dozens of EV-makers rolling out new models, the industry is engaged in a price war. For the cost of a single Tesla Model 3, you could buy three of BYD's Seagull mini-hatchbacks or splash out on Xiaomi's SU7 sports car, which looks and drives like a Porsche. The Model Y is still holding on to its position as China's best-selling car, but the race in Asia this year will be won by the cheapest hardware, not the most cutting-edge software.

Given geopolitical sensitivities around data privacy and national security, it's a coup that Tesla has managed to clear Beijing's requirements on FSD at all. Washington is investigating Chinese sensor technology in cars and forcing Bytedance to divest its TikTok social network, and US social networks operated by Alphabet and Meta remain banned in China.

It will be a big challenge for Tesla's machine-learning to translate any lessons picked up in China to other countries, where it posts more than three-quarters of its revenue. With a 'silicon curtain' now descending between the US and China, Baidu is already cut off from the most advanced AI chips; it has also had to deny reports that its chatbot is being used by China's People's Liberation Army.

There's another risk, a darker one. There were 956 crashes and 29 fatalities between 2018 and 2023 involving cars using Tesla's autonomous tech, as the US National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has reported. That this toll has barely attracted adverse comment is a testament to Musk's status as a modern American folk hero who moves fast and breaks things. Should self-driving American cars start killing people on the streets of Shenzhen and Changchun, Tesla might not be able to count on such a forgiving attitude. 
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MY VIEW | PEN DRIVE

### Is hiring to meet diversity quotas an unfair approach?

DEVINA SENGUPTA



writes on workplaces and

ompanies are making a big mistake. Many recruiters in India are nudging their human resource (HR) teams to show a preference for hiring women at the junior-most levels, be it candidates looking for jobs on college campuses or those with barely a few months of work experience. This is a quick-fix hiring bias that will not help a company meet its gender-diversity target in the long run. And there is a good chance that in its attempt to fulfil a certain diversity quota, more suitable candidates who do not meet the gender criterion may get rejected.

"In one of the leading global IT firms, there is a lot of push to hire women, and sometimes in teams, about 60-70% are women. But move up the ladder, and not even 25% remain. The company failed to retain most of them because of its hiring bias in the initial stages," observes an HR head at an IT company in India. Consider what Abhijit Bhaduri, talent management advisor

and executive coach, has to say as he calls out biases that come into play in base-level recruitment, when resumes reveal nothing about the competence of candidates for work roles, but only school, college, city, gender and other such details. "Often, the language in job advertisements [has] an inherent bias towards—or against—one gender or group," says Bhaduri.

Artificial intelligence (AI) tools used in recruitment promise to eliminate biases, but then again, AI needs human oversight in most cases of early adoption. In any case, companies must invest in training their managers responsible for hiring to check these biases. Crucially, the data that trains AI engines also needs to be periodically checked for biases that may keep a group out of the consideration set.

While biases of ethnicity, age, gender and alumni fraternity have long been prevalent in India Inc, at career-starting levels, many people struggle to cope with more subtle ones—such as pin-code identification of an address as a proxy for the family's broad social status—that may take years to erase or reduce in prominence on a resume.

Since the Indian IT sector is one of our major recruiters from colleges across the

country, its young recruits are expected to acclimatize quickly to the work environment and fall in line promptly with the way things are done. But, behind this facade of uniformity among new recruits, there are young urbane professionals whose relative sophistication in social terms can put them ahead of their peers. As insiders reveal, line managers often show a preference for those with urbane accents and behaviour that may take others from smaller towns or more modest backgrounds more time to acquire.

While new IT executives are typically quick to learn, no matter where they come from, rarely are investments made to ensure that managers overcome biases on this score. In a skill-driven sector where the biggest cost borne is the wage bill for employees, this

should not be the case.
At most companies with a diversity agenda, a gender imbalance seems to have top-most salience as an issue to be

others from smaller towns or more ackgrounds more time to acquire. stage its wom out, identify jo w IT executives cally quick to matter where are from, rarely tments made to Many companies are meeting

their gender diversity goals by hiring at the entry level but this a point at which other biases can come into play. Also, it doesn't address higher-level imbalances. Recruiters must guard against

attrition while ascending the hierarchy and invest in systems and practices that are designed to pay strategic attention to diversity as a corporate mission.

addressed. Many women drop out before reaching mid or senior levels, and these positions sometimes get plugged with new hires without much thought given to whether someone from another team within the company could be trained for the vacant profile, even if this would preserve the desired diversity ratio without requiring a lateral recruit. It is rare for a company to conduct an internal study to check at which stage its women employees are dropping out, identify job roles that have traditionally

been male bastions, and, if identified, understand why this might be so.

A company keen to ensure equity should also check if its women candidates are recruited using parameters that are based on biases. Arundhati Bhattacharya, chairperson and CEO of Salesforce India and former chairperson of State Bank of India, disclosed that it took her decades to spot biases in her style of recruiting. In a recent

interview, she told me how after a training programme at Salesforce, she realized that she had earlier succumbed to the common practice of asking men and women candidates different sets of questions. In Bhattacharya's words, "For instance, I would ask [a woman candidate] about family, I would ask how old the children were, I would ask where they were, and ask how she would manage in case the job required a lot of travel. I realized I was not asking men about travel, I was not asking men about where their children were and how old they were."

India Inc has been trying to get its policies right. Its benefit programmes now include leave for maternity and paternity, even for adoption and parental care. The experience of the covid pandemic led a drive for a more empathetic work culture. All these are steps in the right direction. But knee-jerk moves also abound, especially in attempts to over-

come decades of unfairness.

Gender, ethnicity and age discrimination are complex issues that cannot be resolved by hiring more diversely at the base level. Attrition while ascending the hierarchy must be guarded against. Companies ought to invest in systems that are designed to pay strategic attention to diversity.



#### **Chronicle** 3 MAY 2024

#### Delay in voting figures: EC must be transparent

he question that Opposition leaders and public intellectuals raise about the Election Commission of India on what they perceive as lack of transparency and the will to act on time requires the immediate attention on the part of the poll body and corrective action. One of the serious allegations is that the EC took 11 days to come out with an official release on the final percentage of polling in the first phase of election to the 18th Lok Sabha. It is a fact that a press release of the EC, published through the Press Information Bureau of the Government of India on April 30, 2024, put out the final figure of polling in the first phase as 66.14 per cent; it also recorded the final figure for the second phase as 66.71 per cent. These are against 69.43 and 69.17 per cent, respectively, in

the 2019 elections. The public is given to understand that the EC had indeed put out the same figures on its app the day after the polling for the first phase. The EC may have its reasons to take the technological route and update the data but it must realise that the public collects authentic information when it places it in the public domain as it has done on April 30. It is untenable that the EC does not follow a regular, familiar route in disseminating critical information related to the general election. It must form and then follow a

protocol for such key elements of its functioning.

There is also criticism of the EC for its failure to update the number of actual voters in each constituency and the number of voters who exercised their franchise. It defies logic that the EC provides an occasion for political parties to raise such serious allegations. The EC conducts elections on the basis of an electoral roll which goes through several rounds of revision before being finalised ahead of the voting. It gets the form on voting in each booth a day after the date of polling and hence should have all the data, including on the number of people who have voted in each constituency, without much difficulty. There is no reason why it chooses not to publish it as soon as it has it.

People in the know of the process claim that there cannot be foul play with respect to the numbers since representatives of the political parties at the booth level have the same set of data, and they can verify them on the date of counting. However, it is incumbent upon the mammoth machinery of the EC to get the data collated and aggregated; it is not a great idea to depend on booth-level agents of the parties who will have little idea of the whole picture. Moreover, the general public would rather have the data from the constitutional body mandated to conduct the polls, and not from

The EC last week sent notices to both the BJP and the Congress on the alleged violation of the Model Code of Conduct. In fact, the charge against Prime Minister Narendra Modi was pretty serious in that he is alleged to have made communally divisive speeches during election rallies. There has been no action from the poll regulator and the Prime Minister keeps making speeches that have similar content nonstop. The EC will be failing in its job if it is unable to intervene in time and stop the wrongdoers. It must do the right thing and then be seen to be doing so.

#### T20 WC: Too few young faces

In picking India's 15-member squad for yet another T20 World Cup, the selectors have relied heavily on established players like Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli to end an 11-year drought in ICC trophies by defying the record that shows Team India has not won this white ball cup since stunning the cricket world in the maiden event in 2007.

The selectors have been charitable in overlooking Hardik Pandya's load of recent troubles at Mumbai Indians and naming him vice-captain while betting on him getting back his mojo in Team India colours. A challenge for him lies in proving his old prowess as a pace bowling all rounder and finisher is intact.

The omission of Rinku Singh, a star batter from a humble background, is causing ripples as he has scored runs at a rapid pace of 176.23 per 100 balls in T20Is. It is a rate not matched even by big run makers like Kohli and Rohit who have often been found wanting in taking to the fearless aggression against the new ball that has been the winning formula in the most modern and evolved

The choice of Shivam Dube as a big hitting late middle order batter expected to set up massive totals or finish games in the chase is about a concession to youth despite the many eye-catching performances members of the young

brigade have turned in at the ongoing IPL.

The basic conservatism in which the re young in-form players is seen in the bowling department too with Mohammad Siraj and Arshdeep Singh being the foils to the estimable Jasprit Bumrah. The recall of Yuzvendra Chahal does justice only to his regaining form but not to a few IPL googly merchants who are shining.

Sanju Samson, for his calmness in an anchoring role and Rishabh Pant for staging a most remarkable recovery from a life-threatening car crash, are the most apt choice for wicket-keepers, which meant the obsession with K.L. Rahul as gloveman had to be forsaken.

Young Yashasvi Jaiswal had to be handed the reins and the licence to attack from the start. The youth has earned recognition with stirring deeds, but the team itself seems to be heavy in age for what is thought to be a game for people with an audacious approach. Team India may need a lot of heavy hitting to

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#### Will 'Robin Hood' taxes be the answer for India?



Sanjeev Ahluwalia

ehind the din of hether Congress Party likely, as alleged by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, to tax wealth and inheritance if it comes to power, lies the stratagem of sig-nalling to the top 10 per cent of Indians, whose share in the national income surged from 45 per cent in 1981 to 64.6 per cent by 2023, that only the BJP lies between them and the deep sea of marauding socialists and other opportunists. It proved effective too by provoking the Congress, now lulled into a habitually reactive mode, to go all out to deny the allegation. The question is why did they bother?

The share of Congress voters in the top 10 per cent by wealth is likely to be negligible. The BJP has been good for urban busiprofessionals and government servants who population segment. The Congress' best shot at power, as of all other Opposition parties, is to tap the seething resentment amongst the have-nots. Farmers, workers and the minorities together are more than one half of the voters. The neatly devised Mahalakshmi scheme of the Congress manifesto targets 220 million poor via an assured direct transfer of ₹0.1 million per year payable to the oldest woman in a poor family. This should cost around ₹4.4 trillion (for 44 million poor families), or about 1.4 per cent of the GDP this

At present this "promise" hangs in the air with no identified source finance. Will this come at the expense of the Garib Kalyan Yojna, which now provides free food to 110 million people, which costs about ₹2.05 trillion, and the end of cheap fertiliser costing another ₹1.64 trillion? The alternative is to pancake it onto the existing

welfare schemes, that will enhance the fiscal deficit from a projected, already high 5.1 per cent to an even more unsustainable 6.5 per cent. Are the BJP's dreams being countered with even bigger Congress dreams? Had the Congress acted true to its voter base, it could have proposed a new tax on wealth and inheritance. The share in wealth of the top one per cent (10 million) individuals increased from 12.5 in 1981 to 39.5 per cent in 2023 as per Bharti, Chancel, Piketty and Somanchi (2024). Marxist writers Patnaik and Ghosh assess the potential of a 2 per cent wealth tax and 33 per cent inheritance tax levied on this set at ₹12.1 trillion in

That the Congress shun-ned this bold approach reflects the dilemma of all middle-of-the-road parties. Politics and not economic theory drives tax policy in India. The politically docile, urban middle class is the only cash cow now available which spends more than one half its income on Union, state, or municipal tax compliance.

Liberal capitalistic economic opinion warns that resurrecting wealth and inheritance tax is a distraction. India should instead focus on accelerating growth with fiscal stability, the benefits from which overshadow a tax funded redistributive tax policy.

Far better, they say, to incentivise earning ₹100 than to give the same as a tax-funded dole. Far better to incentivise new private sector jobs than to increase tax-funded expensive gov-ernment jobs. There is merit in this argument.

Sadly, the external conditions are not supportive. Global growth is low, which is sinking all boats. Automation, robotics, and AI are likely to squeeze human employment. Tax traditionally favours capital investment via tax rebates, rather than

Far better to make India a competitive and efficient economy first, which attracts more capital than it exports — like the **United States. Once** this is achieved, imposing a wealth and/or inheritance tax becomes an option.

human capital development — the key resource in a service-led economy. The wealth of an economy is the competitiveness of its workforce and the efficacy and resilience of its institutions, not the volume of land or physical and finan-cial capital alone. An additional 300 million Indians will boost the population by 2060. Enhancing public expenditure for education and healthcare are, consequently, the surest way to dilute constraints on economic growth, with lightly regulated private industry and services generating new jobs. Memories are short in

the social media age. India has a history of wealth appropriation. Ceilings on the ownership of land were imposed in the 1970s zovernmentlevel legislation and surplus land was redistributed. In 1971, the privy — gu. under purses guaranteed amounts Constitution, paid annually to the erstwhile hereditary rulers of colonial India in exchange for their voluntarily merging with India — were terminated and judicial scrutiny of the Constitution-amending act under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Large-scale nationalisation of industry followed. No government since has implemented privatisation of India's mammoth public sector, after Atal Behari Vajpayee's 2000-2003\_push floundered. In 1978, Prime Minister Morarji Desai of the Janata Party diluted the fundamental right to property, making it subject to legislated constraints. In 1985, the Estates Duty Act 1953, a quasi-inheritance tax, was abolished by Rajiv Gandhi's Congress govern ment. In 2015, the wealth tax of 1955 was abolished by Narendra Modi's first

government, citing low revenue performance.

So, are new taxes on wealth and inheritance the answer to the twin prob-lems of unfunded welfare and infrastructure needs the latter increased by the investment demands of the energy transition and low revenue collections of around 19 per cent of cur-rent GDP for Union and state government combined?

This is a chicken and egg question. The generation of private, domestic wealth is a choice to defer present consumption for future gains via investment — a significant input into economic growth. Bleeding the rich and the near-rich can reduce the incentive for savings-led investment in India. The establishment of the Gift City in Gujarat as an international financial hub insulated from the domestic economy only serves to preserve part of the resultant value addition from international financial transactions, as do Singapore, London, or New York. The outward flow of domestic capital is still regulated. The INR is still a managed currency. Taxing wealth or inheritance can aggravate the undesirable, financial sub-culture of undercover operations, to wealth overseas in tax

Far better to make India a competitive and efficient economy first, which attracts more capital than it exports—like the United States. Once this is achieved, imposing a wealth and/or inheritance tax to generate public resources and level the playing field across individuals becomes an option. More likely though, the process of making the economy competitive would automatically build human capital and create enough merit-based opportunities, making family wealth only a residual input into the future value of an individual. Social divisions like caste might also matter less. Till we get to Ram Rajya (good governance), populist, Robin Hood-style 'quick fixes" can only score a self-goal.

> The writer is adviser, Observer Research Foundation

#### **LETTERS**

#### **CONG MAY TEAR UP CONSTITUTION**

Having torn up his own government's ordinance way back in Sept. 2013, calling it a complete nonsense, it is amusing to hear Rahul say that the Modi-Shah duo will tear up and throw away the constitution if they win the elections. Rahul is naive and inexperienced. Whether it is the presumed tearing up of the constitution by the BJP or Sam Pitroda's remark on Inheritance Tax or Congress' attempts to carve out a quota for Muslims, the Congress gives enough ammunition to the BJP to come out firing on all cylinders!

Kangayam R. Narasimhan Chennai

#### **JUSTICE DONE**

The Fast Track Mahila Court in Srivilliputhur is to be commended for sentencing Assistant Professor Nirmala Devi of Devanga Arts College to 10 years rigorous impris-onment for luring female students to do sexual favours for Madurai Kamaraj University officials. The accused, who doesn't deserve even crocodile tears, has proved that a herself!

P.G. Menon

#### **TIMING OF ARREST OUESTIONED**

When Delhi Chief minister Aravind Kejriwal was arrested, both AAP and opposition parties called it a conspiracy and questioned the motive and timing of the arrest. Now the Supreme court also raised the same question before ED and sought explanation. The reason is not far to seek. It was AAP, under the charismatic leadership of Aravind Kejriwal which brought humiliating defeat to both BJP and Congress in earlier state elections twice, despite a hectic election campaign by Narendra Modi and his cabinet. The ruling gov-ernment used the opportunity of alleged corruption to put him behind bars as he is the only leader who could challenge the formidable ruling party at least in Delhi and nearby states like Punjab and Haryana.

> K. S. Sundaram Coimbatore

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As US Jews turn from Zionism, it's campus politics that offers hope

ruch to the consternation of the pathetically insipid Joe Biden administration as well as its rabidly right-wing Republican Opposition, student protests over the unfolding genocide in Gaza have been spreading throughout the US. They offer hope, which has been in short supply. At the same time, for the Zionist right they unintentionally serve as a distraction from the very atrocities that enrage most of the protesters. The main story is still unfolding in a starving Gaza, just as it was five or six decades ago in a beleaguered but unbending Vietnam.

That does not, of course, render it irrelevant or even peripheral. The vast demonstrations demanding an end to American apartheid in the 1960s and the subsequent mobilisations against the Vietnam War challenged both state and federal administrations, and contributed

to the end of that horrific conflict in 1975. In the preceding years, it wasn't uncommon for those involved in the resistance to be derided as pinkos, reds or Communist dupes, in a reflection of the recent McCarthyist era. These days the charge is antisemitism. That weapon, too, is hardly new. It has been deployed over the decades against anyone who questioned Israel's predilection for ethnic supremacism. What's relatively unusual is the extent to which young Jewish Americans are revolting against their nation's attachment to the Zionist state that most of their parents' generation embraced.

To some extent, residual right-wing antipathy towards Jews springs from the left-wing inclinations of many of their intellectuals. American science and culture would have considerably been diminished without the input of Jewish immigrants from Europe. They also enriched America's political landscape, reflected lately in both Senate majority leader Chuck Schumer and independent senator Bernie

Schumer attracted the headlines when, as the highest-ranking Jew in American politics, he mildly denounced the inclinations of the Likud-led regime in Israel and called for an election to replace Benjamin Netanyahu. That contributed to the Democratic effort to focus resentment on the current Israeli PM and his despicable regime, instead of accurately recognising Israel's consistent drift towards dispossession and genocide ever since the Nakba.

There is evidence that many young Jews won't be fooled by the 'hasbara' narratives that entrapped their elders or the fantasy that Zionism is an essential component of Jewish identity. As many of them have recognised, after their exposure to anti-Zionist Jews and Palestinians at university, the essence of Jewish experience embodies a concept of humanity that Mr Netanyahu and his acolytes fail to recognise. That poses a problem for Zionism's biggest assets — its useful idiots in the US, a category that ranges from the President to most legislators and much of the bureaucracy

Something has changed, though, in the past couple of decades in the US and Israel. No US President has been unfriendly towards Israel, but some have challenged its excesses. All of them have known that Israeli militarism relies on US beneficence. That remains intact even as Biden administration pretends to challenge Israeli excesses while supplying the weapons required to perpetrate the atrocities.

Almost a century ago, Americans who militated against the death of democracy in Spain in the 1930s were categorised as 'premature anti-fascists'. They were rarely accepted into mainstream politics even during the Soviet alliance during World War II. The McCarthyism that descended after that war, disproportionately targeting Jews, violated every principle that the US purports to wor-ship. Since then at least, free speech has been a right reserved for adherents to the officially

sanctioned mainstream.

That has occasionally been disrupted in decades gone by. But perhaps never so potently as in recent months. Despite Mr Netanyahu and Mr Biden's best efforts, the frequently nonsensical claim of antisemitism no longer carries much weight.

Woody Guthrie had the river, rather than the university, in mind when he wrote more than 80 years ago, "Roll on, Columbia, roll on/ Your power is turning our darkness to dawn". Some 20 years later, his spiritual descendant Bob Dylan reminded "mothers and fathers throughout the land" not to "criticise what you can't understand" because "your sons and your daughters are beyond your command". That echoes, in a way, the early 20th-century Lebanese poet Kahlil Gibran's well-known warning: "Your children are not your children./ They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself."

When "Life's longing for itself" is being strangled in Gaza or anywhere else, surely it is incumbent upon anyone with a humanitarian impulse to resist it. Whether or not the rebellion across US campuses achieves its aims, gratitude is owed to those who tried.

— By arrangement with **Dawn** 















## FRIDAY, MAY 3, 2024



#### WELCOMING STRENGTH

US President Joe Biden

Why is China stalling so badly economically, why is Japan having trouble, why is Russia, why is India, because they are xenophobic. They don't want immigrants. Immigrants are what makes us strong

#### The GST stunner

The record collections signal a robust economy and the improved efficiency of tax administration

HE RECORD GOODS and service tax collections during April (mostly for March transactions) signal a robust economy. As the data reveals, the 12.4% year-on-year increase in collections to ₹2.1 trillion has been driven by a decent 13.4% increase in domestic sales. Some part of the double-digit growth would surely have been the result of year-end adjustments by tax assesses, but the government's estimates for FY24 would have been comfortably exceeded. There is ample evidence that consumption demand for premium products and services has been strong. This is particularly true for sectors including automobiles, consumer durables, hotels and even food products. As such, it appears that spends on high-end products, which also attract a higher tax rate, are boosting the collections.

The strong mop-up can also be attributed to an increasing formalisation of the economy as the government steps up vigilance and streamlines processes compelling companies to become compliant. The government must be complimented for the administrative measures, especially efforts to spot fake invoicing and registrations, and also the initiatives taken to ensure companies file their returns. By addressing evasion, the tax base has also widened over the years. If GST collections have grown at a better or same pace as collections of other taxes, the efficiency of the tax authorities has certainly played a big role.

There are those who point out that the ratio of GST-gross domestic product (GDP) has not gone up much since the consumption-based levy was rolled out in July 2017. One reason for this has been the politically motivated cuts in the rates for certain products as well as the impact of the Covid pandemic. The GST-GDP ratio was 6.3% in 2021-22, up from 5.7% in 2020-21, and went up further to 6.7% in 2022-23. Going by the second advance estimate for GDP, the ratio is estimated to come in at just under 7% for 2023-24. On balance therefore, given the major disruption from the pandemic, the trend is quite encouraging. Again, many have argued, the multiple rates need to be pruned. That may be the right thing to do to keep the construct of the tax simple. However, the fact is that aggregate consumption in the economy has been growing at an anaemic pace — private final consumption expenditure (PFCE) grew at only 3.5% in Q3FY24 and at 2.4% in Q2FY24. There is evidence to suggest rural demand remains fragile — real wages have been stagnant for close to one and a half years now — and that sales of a range of essential goods are sluggish.

Raising the GST rates on essentials at a time when food inflation continues to remain high would, therefore, hurt the weaker sections. In fact, given how robust the collections are, it is more than evident that high tax rates are not a deterrent and affluent consumers are not hesitating to spend. Despite the continuation of the cess, sales are reasonably good. As such, there is no case for either lowering rates or raising them just yet; the move to a three-tier structure and thereafter to a single rate of 12% or 14% can be considered later when the revival in consumption is more broad-based. Or perhaps in March 2026 when the cess will end. In the meantime the GST Council could consider bringing in more products in its ambit; petroleum, for instance, though states are unlikely to agree.

#### Al can't reject your no good, very bad idea

**YAEL BIRAN HAS** worked for the last 25 years as an animator for mostly corporate clients, capitalising on her talent for colourful illustration, movement, and figuring out what her customers want but don't know how to articulate. Recently, she sat on her couch at home and was "freaking out" about her life's work. She had several big expenses on the horizon, and her usual workflow of about a dozen annual projects had dwindled to three in the past year.

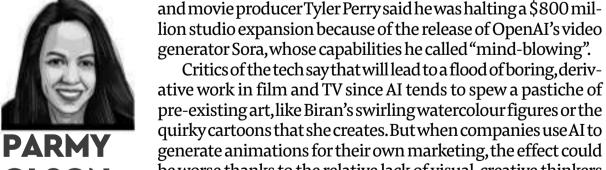
The reason was obvious: artificial intelligence.

More of the clients and creative agencies she worked with were trying to do animation work themselves, and she suspects they were using AI tools to do so. Biran is resigned to what that means for her, but she has a stark warning for what clients are about to lose: the people who challenge your terrible ideas.

"What we give to clients is the ability to say 'no' to their ideas," says Biran. "They're not visual people, and they know what they think they want. And then a lot of times it really needs tweaking. Sometimes in a major way."

The content that generative AI models can now conjure can sometimes look as good as anything created by humans. Creative agencies have been using tools from New York-based video generation startup Runway to develop concert backdrops for

Madonna and graphics for CBS's "Late Show With Stephen Colbert," often saying it saves them hours or even weeks of work. Earlier this year, actor



be worse thanks to the relative lack of visual, creative thinkers **OLSON** among their ranks. They'll use AI tools to churn out graphics Bloomberg that — as with Hollywood's overuse of CGI — look impressive but fail to make a meaningful impression on other humans. One design agency, for instance, tried making a short animated film graphic for

a British health-care provider that was meant to train doctors on their bedside manner. The script said medical professionals should listen carefully to their patients and avoid behaving like they were going through a checklist. Yet the resulting animation showed a physician sitting with a patient and a giant list being marked off above them. That's not how visual communication works, says Biran. "People will see a checklist and go away thinking, 'checklist'."

When corporate clients try putting together a slideshow, they'll also gravitate toward displaying some of the same text already being spoken in a presentation, but that can make a presentation more confusing. There's a reason for the phrase "A picture paints a thousand words". Images can elevate subtext and advance a message, but figuring out which images are best requires people who are skilled at thinking visually, like Biran. "We think in pictures, and we gravitate towards metaphors," she explains. "And so we can help identify the subtext."

Corporate clients often believe they are visual thinkers too, perhaps because so much of the content people see online now is visual on platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. But passively consuming graphical content doesn't mean you can do a decent job making it.

Businesses would do well to avoid outsourcing too many aspects of creative work to AI, even as they shift much of their marketing spending — which for North America and Europe tends to hover at around 9% of capital expenditures — to generative AI. Biran predicts that in a few years, more companies will realise they

need visual thinkers "and they will circle back and ask for our help". That may be an optimistic view, considering generative AI models are only becoming more sophisticated, with the possibility of greater reasoning capabilities to boot. But companies will also need people who understand visual communication to challenge their ideas, and they won't get that from sycophantic AI models that don't experience colour and sound. They'll get that from humans, who will need to get paid.

#### JUDICIAL PING-PONG

DAMEPL VS DMRC IS YET ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF A JUDICIAL TAX ON BUSINESS

### March of the Arbitrary Raj

Views are personal

impact on

economy is huge

SANJAYA BARU

Political commentator and policy analyst

**BUSINESS EXECUTIVE** who has spent his entire professional life knocking on doors through corridors of power in New Delhi and state capitals, described pithily the change in the policy environment since the pre-liberalisation era of the "Licence-Permit-Control Raj". "In the old days," he says, "we used to chase joint secretaries in Udyog Bhavan. Then we had to chase secretaries. Then came the erawhen we were liberated from babudom, but we had to still supplicate before ministers. Today, it is a waste of time chasing bureaucrats or ministers to get hurdles out of the way of business. We now genuflect before judges."The Licence Raj has been replaced by an Arbitrary Raj, he says.

The judiciary, once viewed as protection for business from the arbitrariness of the Licence-Permit-Control Raj, has today become yet another pillar holding up the Arbitrary Raj of governance. Indeed, many had hoped that an Arbitration Raj would liberate them from governmental and judicial arbitrariness, but that has not yet happened. Even when mutually agreed upon arbitration proceedings come to a conclusion, governmental and judicial arbitrariness intervenes.

Pradeep Mehta's recent book, Supreme Court and the Indian Economy: A Story of Economic Impact of Six Landmark Cases of the Supreme Court (Academic Foundation, Delhi, 2024), sums it up well when it draws attention to the "uncertainty" created by judgments that "reopen earlier decisions and override economic growth and hurt the creation of jobs. The outcome uncertainty of a ruling hurts business, compliance, and society overall. One way to move towards a sounder middle ground would be by applying an economic impact/cost benefit analysis as being fundamental to responsible and sustainable judgments".

Mehta and other authors in the book recommend "the institutionalisation of assessment of disputes, where a dispute or concern that a stakeholder may have in terms of economic or environmental concerns must be adequately addressed. To this end, an independent committee of experts of diverse subject back-

grounds is required, to assist the court in

balancing its assessment and undertak-

Consider the example they cite of *Shivashakti* Sugars Limited vs Shree Renuka Sugar Limited, where the court observed that the economic impact and effect of a decision ought to be kept in mind, and critically, the court needed to "avoid that particular outcome which has a potential to create an adverse effect on employ-

ing quantifiable analysis."

ment, growth of infrastructure or economy or the revenue of the State".

It would appear none of these considerations crossed the minds of the Supreme Court judges who pushed the envelope of Arbitrary Raj in the case involving Anil Ambani's Delhi Airport Metro Express Pvt Ltd (DAMEPL) and the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC). First, an arbitration tribunal gave its opinion in favour of DAMEPL. Then, a high court judge ruled in favour of that decision. Next, a two judge high court bench reversed that ruling. Following which, two Supreme Court judges overruled the two high court judges. On top of it all, another SC bench overturned the verdict of their brother judges.

My former colleague Swaminathan S Anklesaria Aiyar has dubbed this as judges playing ping-pong. Commenting on this bizarre legal game in which the left hand of the nation's highest judiciary questions the actions of the right

hand, Aiyar says that such reversals of the courts' When arbitrariness own decisions not only replaces arbitration, open a Pandora's box of the economic wasteful litigation but call into question the wisdom of the judiciary. Indeed, businesses, they raise doubts about governmental judicial intent and motive. revenues, and the During my brief tenure

as the secretary-general of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce

and Industry (FICCI), we invited a senior Supreme Court judge to speak about the economic cost of judicial arbitrariness, even ignorance, and sought guidance on how to remedy this. Quite honestly, there is no better remedy than the exercise of restraint by the so-called "Learned Judges" in matters where (a) the judiciary ought to have a limited role; (b) the judiciary should be guided by subject matter expertise and not legalese alone; and (c) where the judiciary should respect the system set up for arbitration.

The last, however, requires that even the government should respect the decisions arrived at through arbitration. Having institutionalised arbitration especially in matters pertaining to business and commerce, successive governments have been encouraged by bureaucrats to disregard the outcome of arbitration and pursue judicial action. In the case of *DAMEPL vs DMRC*, at the very first instance, the arbitration proceedings went in favour of DAMEPL. Why then question and challenge it?

When arbitrariness replaces arbitration, the economic impact not just on businesses and governmental revenues concerned but on the economy as a whole is huge. It raises the cost of business and political risk. The fact is that despite policy reform and governmental good intentions, investment risk in India remains high because of the uncertainty created by different arms of the State — ranging from investigative, enforcement, and compliance agencies of the government to the lowest and

highest levels of the judiciary. Bibek Debroy, chairman of the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council and someone who has extensively researched the burden of outdated laws on economic freedom and business competitiveness, quoted the Roman Publius Tacitus to say, "The more numerous the laws, the more corrupt a State." Some rephrase that quote to say, "The more corrupt a State, the more numerous the laws." Either way, Debroy concluded, "The correlation is not in doubt." So the question arises whether avoidable judicial intervention, in the name of interpreting and defending law, is in the interests of the public at large, or even in that of the justice seeker or whether it only serves the interests of the powerful, contributing to governmental arbitrariness, imposing a cost on the economy as

### Building resilient India-Europe trade ties



**SUNJAY J KAPUR** 

Chairman, CII Europe Committee, and

**IN THE DOMAIN** of global trade, the alliance between India and Europe stands out for its vast potential and bright prospects. Exploring the forthcoming business and trade scenarios, particularly through the prism of free trade agreements (FTAs) with Europe, underscores the critical importance of acknowledging the collaborative efforts that drive us toward a stronger, more resilient partnership. Towards this end, the historic India-EFTA Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) is the first FTA inked with a binding commitment from the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries to invest \$100 billion in India. It is a promising development. India is currently engaged in active discussions regarding ongoing FTAs within Europe, including the recently signed EFTA agreement with Switzerland, Norway, Liechtenstein, and Iceland, as well as negotiations with the European Union and the UK, which are nearing finalisation.

The relationship between India and Europe is characterised by its depth and diversity, spanning historical, economic, and cultural dimensions. With Europe standing as India's thirdlargest trade partner, the magnitude of our economic synergies cannot be overstated. Bilateral trade between India and Europe expanded significantly over the last decade, rising to

\$185.16 billion in 2022-23. India's exports to Europe increased to \$96.90 billion in 2022-23, while imports went up to \$88.26 billion. India saw a trade balance of \$8.65 billion with the European economy during 2022-23.

Against this backdrop, further discussions on a bilateral trade agreement between India and EU and India and the UK hold immense promise. However, our success in these negotiations hinges not only on economic considerations but also on our capacity to integrate ethical, environmental, and

social dimensions into the framework. By aligning our efforts in these areas, we can lay the groundwork for a partnership that not only drives economic prosperity but also fosters inclusive development and societal well-being. By incentivising collab-

oration between Indian and Europe businesses, the FTAs can pave the way for a mutually beneficial partnership. It is imperative, however, that Indian industries align their offerings with the demands of the European market to fully capitalise on this opportunity. By focusing on products with significant import potential in Europe, we can unlock new avenues for trade and investment.

The journey ahead necessitates a deeper level of collaboration, aligning policies and regulations while recognising the unique economic and social contexts of each region. Firstly, there is a need for collaboration across borders, sectors, and industries. Accelerating the transition to a circular economy requires the sharing of knowledge, resources, and best practices. Secondly, a pivotal aspect is the investment in innovation and infrastructure that

supports circular practices, such as

As we strive to achieve India's \$2 trillion export target

non-tariff barriers that hinder the efficient flow of trade

by 2030, we must prioritise the removal of tariff and

recycling, remanufacturing, and product-as-As we chart our course a-service models. These toward economic practices not only dimincooperation, we must ish waste but also generate new business opporalso confront the tunities and jobs, challenges posed by thereby fostering ecoevolving regulatory nomic growth. Particularly noteworthy are the landscapes areas of e-waste and

> packaging design-forrecycling, offering substantial opportunities for collaboration. The third crucial aspect is education and awareness. Shifting mindsets and promoting the adoption of sustainable practices among consumers, businesses, and governments are imperative. Cultivating a culture of responsibility towards our environment can create a powerful movement towards zero waste.

Yet, as we chart our course toward

enhanced economic cooperation, we must also confront the challenges posed by evolving regulatory landscapes. Measures such as the Europe's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) and Deforestation Regulation underscore a global shift towards sustainability. While these regulations present obstacles for Indian exporters, they also emphasise the urgency for our industries to embrace sustainable practices and enhance compliance measures.

Looking ahead, it is clear that sustainable and inclusive growth will define the future of international trade. As we strive to achieve India's \$2 trillion export target by 2030, we must prioritise the removal of tariff and nontariff barriers that hinder the efficient flow of trade. Diversifying trade relationships and increasing investment flows will not only spur economic growth but also create employment opportunities, knowledge-sharing, and foster shared prosperity.

To navigate the complexities of the future business and trade landscape, innovation will serve as our greatest asset. By embracing forward-thinking solutions, addressing challenges headon, and demonstrating a spirit of collaboration, we can build a partnership that transcends borders and lays the foundation for a resilient and sustainable future.

#### **LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**

#### US campus protests

It is courageous of college and university students across many countries, mainly the US, that they are putting themselves on the line for a cause, the rightness of which they are convinced. They speak out against Israel's genocidal war on Gaza. The wave of protests voicing support for the Palestinians and opposition to the war resonate with the international community. The anti-war protests sparked by the sheer scale of death and destruction in Gaza cannot be

described as 'anti-Semitic'. Given the unending plight of Palestinians, public display of pro-Palestinian sentiment is a normal human reaction for which there must be space on campus and elsewhere. We should put humanity above race and religion. In John Donne's words, 'any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in humankind'. The Palestinians are human like the rest of us. We must show human compassion and empathy. We must extend our moral support to the Palestinian cause. The Palestinian flag held aloft (and flying

high) in the midst of white smoke resulting from police action has spoken of the inevitability of justice and peace triumphing over injustice and war in the march of time. —G David Milton, Maruthancode

#### A good example

It is good to see the huge Godrej empire split without the usual animosity, bickering and court cases. Though this is not the first time such a division has happened, it should serve as a guiding post to other break-ups which are bound to happen. A quiet

division without any drama is beneficial to the shareholders of the company too and therefore must be encouraged by the authorities. Owners of family businesses must understand that old corporate governance will not be in the best interests of the company, and splitting of assets between heirs, if done during their lifetimes, would save much of the grief that almost inevitably follows splitting of the assets, will or no will. —Anthony Henriques, Maharashtra

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-PAPER WITH PASSION-

#### **Voter inertia**

Low turnout in early phases of Lok Sabha polls is a cause of concern for parties, EC and democracy

The lukewarm voter response in the first two phases of the ongoing Lok Sabha elections raises several questions about the underlying reasons for their apathy. Is the weather a deterrent, or is it disillusionment with governance, scepticism towards nominees/parties, or lack of faith in electoral procedures like Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs)? Indeed, there is a pressing need to rekindle voter enthusiasm and participation in the electoral process. An initial speculation regarding low turnout often points to adverse weather conditions. The scorching heat can indeed discourage voters, especially in regions prone to extreme climates. However, while the weather may play a role, it is seldom the sole determinant of voter participation. A more substantial factor contributing to voter apathy lies in the prevailing disillusionment with governance. Citizens, disappointed by unfulfilled promises, rampant corruption and inefficient administration, often perceive their votes as inconsequential. This disenchantment can lead to voter iner-



tia, where individuals feel disengaged from the political process altogether. Also, scepticism towards parties and their nominees exacerbates voter apathy. In an era marked by populism, polarisation and political opportunism, many voters struggle to identify with candidates or parties that truly represent their interests. The prevalence of dynastic politics and candidate selection based on nepotism only deepens this distrust. The leaders' conduct leaves much to be desired. Many times, they switch sides making a mockery of the voters' decision. Sometimes even the party the voters voted for joins hands with its arch-rival. In such scenarios, voters have reasons to feel cheated.

As if all this were not enough, there are doubts about the efficacy of the electoral process itself. Many people are given to doubt the machinery employed, including the EVMs. The introduction of EVMs was hailed as a milestone in ensuring transparent and efficient elections. However, over time, scepticism and conspiracy theories surrounding EVMs have proliferated, eroding public trust in the process. Allegations of tampering, malfunctioning machines and lack of transparency in EVMs handling have sowed the seeds of doubt in the minds of voters. Their perceived vulnerability to hacking or manipulation, coupled with the absence of a paper trail for verification, has fuelled apprehensions about the sanctity of elections. In such an environment, restoring faith in electoral procedures becomes imperative to bolster voter confidence. The situation turned so grave that the matter was taken to the Supreme Court. On this front, introducing measures such as VVPATs alongside the EVMs can go a long way in rebuilding voters' trust. Indeed, it would take an effort by the Election Commission as well as the political class to instil a sense of confidence among people that their vote is sacrosanct. By demonstrating integrity and a genuine commitment to serving the public interest, political parties can rebuild the trust with for-now disillusioned voters.



People visit the seafront on a hot summer day, in Mumbai

### Upholding the Fourth Estate in digital age



In an era marred by misinformation, censorship and threats to journalists, the celebration of press freedom assumes greater significance than ever before

should have a Government without newspapers, or newspapers without a Government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter - Thomas

Every year on May 3rd, the world comes together to celebrate World Press Freedom Day, a day dedicated to honouring the fundamental principles of press freedom, defending the independence of the media and paying tribute to journalists who risk their lives to report the truth. In an era marked by misinformation, censorship and threats to journalists worldwide, this day holds more significance than ever. Press freedom is the cornerstone of democracy. It empowers citizens by providing them with access to diverse viewpoints and information, enabling them to make informed decisions. A free press serves as a watchdog, holding Governments and powerful entities accountable for their actions. It acts as a voice for the voiceless, bringing attention to social injustices and human rights violations.

Despite the crucial role they play, journalists around the world face numerous challenges in their pursuit of truth. They encounter threats, harassment and violence, both online and offline. Many journalists risk imprisonment or even death for daring to report on sensitive issues. Censorship, propaganda and attacks on press freedom have become increasingly prevalent, hindering the ability of journalists to fulfil their vital role in society. World Press Freedom Day. Since 1993, it has been observed globally to honour a declaration made by African journalists in Windhoek, Namibia, in 1991. It commemorates press freedom principles and acknowledges journalists' courage. UNESCO awards the Guillermo Cano Prize to those

preserving press freedom. While technology has revolutionised the way information is disseminated, it has also presented new challenges for press freedom. Social media platforms the Government exerting tight have become powerful tools for control over media outlets.



spreading information, but they have also been weaponised to spread misinformation and silence dissenting voices. Journalists must navigate through a digital landscape fraught with fake news and online harassment, often at great personal risk. India, home to one of the world's largest and most vibrant media landscapes, has faced scrutiny in recent years regarding its press freedom record. According to the World Press Freedom Index compiled by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), India's ranking has seen fluctuations. In the 2023 index, India was placed at 163 out of 180 countries, indicating significant challenges to press freedom within the country.

"When asked to bend, the media crawled. And when asked to crawl, it cringed."This statement was made by Advani in the context of the Indian media's behaviour during the Emergency period (1975-1977), imposed by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. During this time, press freedom faced severe restrictions, with journalists being arrested, newspapers censored and

PRESS FREEDOM IS

THE CORNERSTONE OF A DEMOCRACY. IT **EMPOWERS** CITIZENS BY PROVIDING THEM WITH ACCESS TO **DIVERSE** VIEWPOINTS AND INFORMATION, **ENABLING THEM TO** MAKE INFORMED DECISIONS Advani's quote reflects his criticism of how certain sections of the media capitulated to Government pressure and failed to uphold journalistic integrity and independence. It suggests that instead of resisting unjust demands or censorship, some media outlets complied with the Government's wishes, even to the point of degradation. This quote serves as a reminder of the importance of a free and independent press in holding those in power accountable and safeguarding democracy. It highlights the need for journalists to remain vigilant in upholding the principles of press freedom, especially in times of political turmoil or authoritarian rule. British politician Edmund Burke is often credited with coining the term in the late 18th century, referring to the gallery of the House of Commons as the fourth estate, symbolising the press's influence on political affairs. The term "fifth estate" underscores the transformative role of social media in democratising access to information, enabling individuals to participate in role journalists play in safe-public discourse and chal- guarding democracy and prolenging established institutions and power structures.

empower users to share news opinions and perspectives instantaneously, bypassing traditional gatekeepers of infor-

mation. On World Press Freedom Day, we must reaffirm our commitment to defending press freedom and protecting journalists worldwide. Governments must uphold the principles of free speech and ensure the safety of journalists within their borders. Civil society plays a crucial role in advocating for press freedom and holding those who seek to suppress it accountable. Media organisations must continue to strive for independence, transparency and ethical journalism, even in the face of adversity. World Press Freedom Day is also a day to celebrate the courage and resilience of journalists who risk their lives to report the truth. It is a day to honour those who have faced persecution, imprisonment and even death for their commitment to upholding the principles of press freedom. Their dedication serves as a reminder of the invaluable guarding democracy and promoting transparency.

(The writer is an associate professor, views are personal)

#### Time to curb fake videos in elections



Of course, technological

development has taken place

rapidly in the world in the last

few decades. The increasing

use of digital platforms has

made life easier and faster, but

along with this benefit, some

serious risks related to cyber

security are also coming to

the fore. With the boundless

nature of cyberspace, the

threats associated with it and

the deceitful methods and

tools of cyber criminals, the

trend of cyber-attacks is con-

Apart from this, terrorism

and fundamentalism are also

finding shelter in cyberspace.

As Prime Minister Narendra

Modi said, "Cybersecurity is

no longer limited to the dig-

stantly changing.

A deepfake video of Union Home Minister Amit Shah sparks outrage during the Lok Sabha election campaign

**¬**he ongoing Lok Sabha election campaign has suddenly taken a very ugly turn after a fake video involving Union Home Minister Amit Shah has surfaced. Accusations and counter-accusations are common during campaigns and are not considered harmful. However, it is unacceptable for anyone or political party to resort to using 'deep fake' technology to release fake videos against their oppo-

nents to win elections. In a recent case, the country's Home Minister, Amit Shah, has become a victim of 'deepfake' technology. Amit Shah delivered a speech at a BJP election rally in Siddipet, Medak district of Telangana on April 25. The video of this speech was allegedly tampered with and shared on social media. Fact checks have proven this video to be

completely fake. In this fake video, Amit Shah is allegedly seen announcing the abolishment of reservations for Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Other Backward Classes (OBC). Now, imagine if someone could abolish the

above-mentioned classes in the country. It is an impossible thing.

In reality, an old video of Amit Shah has been edited, in which he was talking about ending Muslim reservations. In this original video, ST and ST have been added in place of Muslims. However, the question arises as to how the fake video may look exactly like the real one.

Fake videos are created with the help of software. As we know, the use of machine learning and artificial intelligence tools has increased in the market these days. In this technology, the tone and voice of a person are captured with the help of machine

learning. In fact, with the help of new technology, the face of a person who is not even a part of reservations provided to the that video is fitted into the Mumbai.

video. It is difficult to tell the difference between real and fake in a video manipulated through this technique.

Whoever leader or political party created and released fake videos showing Amit Shah announcing the abolishment of reservations, how serious an act they have committed to spreading hatred in A complaint has been lodged

by Prateek Karpe, an office bearer of BJP's Mumbai unit, at Bandra Kurla Complex (BKC) Cyber Police Station. The complaint states that a deepfake video of Amit Shah was created, posted and shared on the internet, to defame BJP leader Amit Shah. The complainant also requested the police to immediately remove the fake video and register a case against those accused who allegedly shared it to create enmity and hatred among various castes. Based on the complaint, a case has been registered against the social media han-

dle of Maharashtra Youth

Congress and 16 others under

various sections of the IPC

and IT Act at Bandra-Kurla

Cyber Police Station in

ital world. It has become a matter of national security." Cyberspace has become the new battleground. The Government must take strict action against these elements. Meanwhile, one only hopes that the authorities concerned would curb the menace of deep fake videos sooner rather than later with an iron hand. (The writer is a senior jour-

nalist and author of two books; views are personal)

#### **EMPOWERING VISUAL NARRATIVES**

Madam — Apropos the news article, "A picture is worth a thousand words," published on May 1, this is my response. The depiction of sexual violence against women in the media often portrays them as helpless victims, reinforcing stigma and shame. Ankita Anand, a survivor herself, challenged this narrative by spearheading a campaign urging media outlets to rethink their imagery. Instead of portraying women as passive victims, she advocated for images that reflect their resilience and agency. Anand's efforts, along with initiatives like the image bank by the Hri Institute, mark a significant step in reshaping visual narratives around gender-based violence.

Through campaigns like "I Never Ask For It," survivors are reclaiming their stories, using mediums like textiles to challenge societal attitudes towards gender-based violence. These initiatives underscore the transformative power of imagery in shaping public perception and fostering empathy. Ultimately, the portrayal of sexual violence in the media should prioritise dignity and empowerment, amplifying the voices of survivors and challenging ingrained biases. It's a collective responsibility to ensure that visual narratives reflect the strength and resilience of those affected, rather than perpetuating harmful stereotypes.

Rian Mehta | Chandigarh

#### **CHINA'S SHADOW POLITICS**

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Why is the BJP avoiding China in campaigning?" published on May 1, this is my response. The discourse surrounding China in Indian politics is a delicate dance where words and actions are carefully measured. While the former Army Chief's blunt assessment of China as India's primary threat is refreshing, it also underscores the gravity of the situation. The recent revelations about the India-China confrontation shed light on systemic failures and diplomatic intricacies shaping bilateral relations.

#### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR **India's semiconductor mission**

Social media platforms

propos the news article, "Semicon ecosystem: A revolution in India." published on May 1, this is my response. The surge of semiconductor development in India marks a pivotal juncture in our technological evolution. As our reliance on technology deepens, so does the significance of these minuscule chips, which power everything from smartphones to space missions. India's strategic vision to foster a robust semiconductor ecosystem is commendable, as evi-

The Government's cautious approach, aiming for diplomatic disengagement while hinting at alternative alliances reflects the complexity of the issue. However, the opacity surrounding critical events like the Kailash Heights incident raises questions about political oversight and decision-making during times of crisis. As the election rhetoric tiptoes around recent confrontations, focusing instead on historical grievances, individuals like Naravane risk overshadowing the valorous efforts. Amidst the political manoeuvring, one thing remains clear: addressing the China challenge requires strategic foresight and resolute

Zara Khan | Mumbai

#### **DANCE UNITES PEOPLE**

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Celebrating the Universal Language of Dance," published on April 30, this is my response. Dance is a lot more than just body movements. It is a universal language that speaks to the soul. By using dance as a tool for change, you can turn your passion into a powerful force for social good.

denced by ambitious projects and partnerships aimed at reducing import dependency and fostering innovation. Initiatives like the India Semiconductor Mission and skill development programmes underscore a concerted effort to nurture indigenous talent and infrastructure. Geopolitical shifts, especially amidst the China-US trade tensions, offer a timely opportunity for India to emerge as a preferred destination for semiconductor manufacturing.

However, challenges persist, particularly in bridging the skill gap and accessing advanced technology. Collaborations with global leaders and initiatives to attract talent back to India are steps in the right direction. The road ahead is promising, with India poised to not only meet its self-sufficiency goals but also emerge as a global leader in semiconductor innovation, contributing significantly to economic growth.

Advait Rao | Bengaluru

The wonderful aspect of dance is its ability to speak volumes without uttering a sin-

It is a great way to share one's passion for dance, impart new skills and foster a sense of unity. One of the greatest strengths of dance is its finesse and ability to touch people emotionally. Remember, every little step counts when it comes to making a difference through dance. Dance comes in many forms, from ballet to hip-hop and from contemporary to folk. A talented dancer will naturally embrace all these styles and weave them into choreography. This not only enriches the dancer's performance but also acknowledges the global tapestry of dance. A dance community is a great space for everyone, regardless of their age, race and gender. After all, diversity is the lifeblood of creativity. Said John Dryden, the literary critic and an accomplished poet from England: "Dancing is the poetry of

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

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the pioneer

#### **FIRST COLUMN**

#### THE ROLE OF EMOTIONAL **INTELLIGENCE**

The mastery of emotions is a pivotal factor in shaping success and fulfilment



n a busy world, as individuals navigate through various personal and professional challenges, their ability to understand and manage emotions plays a critical role in determining success, well-being and overall fulfilment. It is the emotions that shape how individuals interact, communicate, lead and innovate, thereby ultimately driving organisational success and fostering a positive work culture. Often it is found that much of an individual's behaviour is the result of emotions. However, these emotions are not a great guide to how one should behave in challenging situations. That is why identifying and working through them helps make better decisions. Feelings and needs are intertwined and knowing one helps an individual understand the other. it is the feelings that are the gateway into what health needs are thereby, promoting the individual to take appropriate action and enabling the self to grow and heal. If one is not in touch with their feelings, one may end up not knowing what they need which may further lead to indecision or emotional outbursts and the same is being faced in today's scenario be it the corporate world or the world of education.

The importance of emotional intelligence cannot be overstated in this fast-paced and interconnected world. At the workplace, what forms the utmost need is the combination of self-awareness, emotional intelligence, effective communication and a supportive work environment. By implementing such strategies, organisations can foster a culture where employees feel empowered to manage their emotions positively, leading to increased productivity, job satisfaction and overall well-being. Emotional intelligence positively correlates with job satisfaction. Employees with higher emotional intelligence are more satisfied with their jobs, as it fosters purpose, belonging and commitment.



Employees with high emotional intelligence excel in interpersonal relationships, conflict resolution and adaptability, while emotionally intelligent leaders inspire trust, motivate teams and cultivate a positive work environment. By promoting emotional well-being, organisations optimise employee performance and achieve better business outcomes. Recognising the importance of emotional well-being, organisations implement initiatives to support employees' mental health be it wellness programmes, counselling services or flexible work arrangements. Stressreducing activities, workload management, work-life balance and emotional validation can reduce absenteeism, turnover and healthcare costs, promoting a healthier and more resilient workforce.

Organisations should look for silver linings or alternative perspectives that can help reframe the situation in a more positive light, for emotionally intelligent employees can bounce back from failures, learn from setbacks and thrive in the face of uncertainty. By practicing self-compassion, focusing on strengths and investing in ongoing learning and skill development to enhance competence and confidence, can an individual effectively manage challenging emotions in the workplace and foster a more positive and productive work environment.

Remember, a workplace that acknowledges and supports the emotional needs of employees can promote mental health, reduce stress and prevent burnout. Emotions are not only inevitable but the most essential ingredient in the workplace. Recognising them and then cultivating them can lead to a more engaged, collaborative and resilient workforce which will ultimately contribute to the organisation's success and sus-

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

### AFSPA repeal: A step towards 'Naya Kashmir'



Amit Shah's proposal to repeal AFSPA in J&K could restore normalcy, but it must consider the broader implications and evolving security of the region



ecently, the Union Home Minister Amit Shah said that the Centre will consider the removal of AFPSA in J&K. This statement assumes significance as it reflects the Government's vision towards J&K and most importantly Prime Minister's promise of Naya Kashmir. Soon, after the Lok Sabha elections, the focus will be panned towards J&K as the Union Territory is scheduled to go for polls in September this year. After abrogating article 370, the Government seems to turning towards solving another long-standing conundrum in J&K- AFSPA. At the security and strategic level, this attempt will accelerate the cleaning of Pakistan's propaganda by cleaning up their psychological warfare designs in J&K and will provide full throttle for holistic development. Before the Government sets its approach, it must see the bigger picture

The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act gives sweeping powers to armed forces (which also extends to CAPF under Section 2) and most significantly provides them legal immunity for their actions under Section / of the act. However, the Supreme Court in 2016 struck down this blanket protection from prosecution. The Supreme Court said "It does not matter whether the victim was a common person or a militant or a terrorist, nor does it matter whether the aggressor was a common person or the state. The law is the same for both and is equally applicable to both". The sweeping powers under Section 4 of the act include ·1, Arrest without warrant,

·2. Fire (After due warning) upon or use other kinds of force even if it causes death, against the person who is acting against law or order in the disturbed area for the maintenance of public order.

·3. To enter and search any premises in order to make such arrests, or to recover any person wrongfully restrained or any arms, ammunition or explosive substances and

·4. Stop and search any vehicle or vessel reasonably suspected to be carrying such person or weapons. The AFSPA debate stems from two perspectives first is security necessity and second is cases of extrajudi-



THE IMPOSITION

OF AFSPA IN THE STATE OR UT ITSELF EXPLAINS THAT THE STATE HAS ALMOST LOST ITS CAPACITY TO **DEAL WITH THE** SITUATION AND WHEN THE STATE LOSES ITS CAPACITY, IT MEANS THAT THE ADVERSARY OR ANY ADVERSE SITUATION WILL SOON GRIP THE STATE, LEADING TO MAYHEM AND A BREAKDOWN OF

cial killings in the Northeast. The most debatable part is the second one which has made this act controversial. In 2004, a thorough review of the act of was done by the Justice Jeevan Reddy Commission which concluded that the act should be repealed and observed that "agitations such as in Manipur and elsewhere are merely the symptoms of a malaise, which goes much deeper" and called on the Government to address the "core issues.". However, the importance of National security somehow gets shadowed by a few cases of misuse of the act.

Call for AFSPA comes under extraordinary situations which if not controlled or mitigated can result in serious consequences from the genocide of Kashmiri Pandits in 1990, 1986 Kashmir riots killing 2000 2000 people primarily Hindus, Sopor firings in January 1993 killing 40 people to Bij Behara firings in October 1993 killing 60 people. Such horrifying incidents need stringent measures in place and a certain amount of free pass to operate efficiently. "We feel that by revoking special legal provisions, which are in place here, definitely our operational capabilities will be compromised," General Officer Command (GOC) of Army's Srinagar-based 15 Corps Lieutenant General Syed Ata Hasnain said in 2011. To deal with a situation that is spiralling out day by day in a state requires effective operational dominance over the adversary which can only be possible if armed forces can freely operate.

The imposition of AFSPA in the state or UT itself explains that the state has almost lost its capacity to deal with the situation and when the state loses its capacity then it means that the adversary or any adverse situation will soon grip the state leading to mayhem and breakdown of

breakdowns are not ordinary and demand extreme measures and interventions to normalise and any constraints in intervention will affect the normalisation process therefore to let "normalisation" progress an effective emergency response mechanism is required which AFSPA provides. A call for the removal of AFPSA should only come when the security removal is a significant to the control of the removal of the remo ment is significantly improved or secured as hurried removal might bring back the old situation. The case of a fresh wave of radicalisation in 2018 in J&K after the killing of terror poster boy Burhan Wani is one incidence where a cautious decision must be made to decide the removal of AFSPA

AFSPA is not immune; it has its limitations and misuses. For example, the Nagaland case in 2021 of killing innocent 14 civilians or the 1995 Kohima Massacre where 16th Rasthtriya Rifiles fired upon civilians mistaking the sound of the tyre bursting for a bomb attack killing 7 and injuring 36. The free pass or the freeness in the name of operational efficiency or capabilities has also led to some serious consequences which are eroding the primary objective of the act. The AFSPA Act is in place to mitigate the extreme situation in the state and to aggravate it. Such incidents aggravate the situation and further complicate the situation in a state. Therefore, these immunities either required a removal or needed a proper check to put caution in the exercise of powers by the armed forces which later was done by the Supreme Court in 2016.

AFSPA cannot stay for long as extraordinary or exceptional situations are temporary and once under control, AFSPA could be withdrawn. If it goes beyond necessity, then AFSPA's presence would hinder the normalisation process. The national security. Such situations of normalisation process does not

only include fighting with the adversary it also includes the restoration of a peaceful and harmonious environment. A state of being normal is only when the state begins to function without any constraints, fear and anxiety. AFSPA being in place distorts the state of being "normal" and rather heightens the anxiety and fear which in the long run affects the democratic ecosystem and governance in a state that might further lead to sociopolitical instability if overlooked. The case of J&K ever since the removal of Article 370 has significantly improved there was a 66 per cent drop in terror cases in J&K. The union territory has also seen a significant drop in terror recruitment under Army's Operation Sahi Raasta. According to reports only seven youth joined terror groups last

As the security environment in J&K is significantly improved, a call for the removal of AFSPA is well reasoned. Now, the CAPF presence would easily tackle any security situation if arises as the substantial threat of terror now seems to be subsiding. Like the Government withdrew AFSPA from Punjab in 1997 it should soon take a call on J&K as well, though few CAPF presence can be there considering bordering areas the operation of the act must be withdrawn.

The removal of AFSPA will facilitate and exhort confidence and peace among people. Most importantly, eliminates the sense of fear and accelerates the pace of normalisation and developmental processes at socio-political levels. The Prime Minister's promise in Naya Kashmir lies beyond the security to society and politics which will only strengthen after the removal of

(The author is an Advocate based out of New Delhi, views are personal)

#### Engaging in the theatrics of India's electoral carnival

In the realm of political theatre, candidates await their turn in the merry-go-round of power, setting the stage with tension and anticipation

n anticipation of the 18th Lok Sabha elections in ■ India, political parties have fervently engaged in pre-electoral activities, including candidate selection, issue advocacy and public discourse-all these, much before the official announcement by the Election Commission (scheduled from April 19 to June 1, 2024). Of particular significance is the burgeoning cohort of 18 million first-time voters, who observe the electoral spectacle with keen interest as parties vie for their support by proffering ambitious pledges. Within this theatrical milieu, the composition of the Lok Sabha, comprising 543 parliamentary constituencies nationwide, assumes paramount importance. Each constituency plays a pivotal role in



electing a singular representative, who assumes the mantle of voicing their constituents' concerns within the Lower House of Parliament. Thus, amidst the cacophony of democratic fervour, the formation of the (18th) Lok Sabha emerges as a focal point, embodying the democratic ethos and the intricacies of electoral representation within India's diverse polity - as we witness this chaotic carnival

(read dance) of democracy. Now picture this: Rallies echoing with rehearsed oratory; meetings buzzing with the monotonous drone of 'scripted' discourse; and the landscape littered with towering hoardings and captivating advertisements—all vying for attention like desperate contestants in a reality TV show. Each candidate, eagerly awaits their fate in this grandiose spectacle, hoping to shine bright enough to avoid being relegated to the shadows of political obscurity. But, as they say, once a politician, always a politician.

This grand orchestra of democracy will see nearly a billion people herded like cattle into over a million polling booths, expected to cast their votes in a choreographed charade to determine the future Government.

In the realm of electoral politics, politicians assume the role of adept illusionists, skillfully concocting promises tailored to captivate the electorate. Through artful rhetoric, they conjure visions of development and inclusivity, appealing to voters' emotions despite the potential disparity with reality. Parties engage in a theatrical spectacle, donning elaborate garb and competing for attention with promises of infrastructure, welfare and prosperity. However, voters' decisions ultimately reflect both their susceptibility and the manipulative prowess of politicians. This electoral charade underscores the complex interplay between rhetoric, perception and voter agency in contemporary democratic processes. Here past performances mat-

NATIONAL

**SECURITY** 

Enter the Narendra Modi Government, riding high on the waves of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, with a later addition of 'Sabka Prayas'. Since 2014, the Modi administration has been pulling rabbits out of hats faster than a magician from electrifying villages to construction of toilets across the country in a bid to make India defecation-free, to digitising governance (Digital India), Startup India and standing up for the people and the world during emergencies like Covid19. Of course, like any good magic show, there's always a healthy dose of criticism to keep things interesting - after all, what's a politi- characterised by extravagant

cal spectacle without a little touch of drama? India's diplomatic endeavours have bolstered its global stature, marked by strategic alliances with major powers and initiatives like the International Solar Alliance, etc., fostering collaboration in trade, technology and sustainable development. Concurrently, domestic developments such as Ayushman Bharat for healthcare, Saubhagya for rural electrification, Jan-Dhan Yojana for financial inclusion and so on, underscore efforts toward inclusive progress. Nonetheless, socio-economic disparities persist, emblematic of the ongoing challenges amidst India's democratic evolution on the world stage. The Indian electoral process is

occasions. One cannot forget that in this grand symphony, the Election Commission stands as the linchpin, ensuring the sancti-

rallies, serving as vibrant showcases of democracy

where ordinary citizens are

swept into the extraordinary

theatre of politics. Whether

attendees arrive voluntarily

or are transported en masse,

these gatherings epitomise the essence of democratic

engagement. Amidst a back-

drop of waving flags and resonant slogans, the democrat-

ic spirit radiates, offering a

glimpse of both the triumphs

and tribulations of competing

political factions. Central to

this spectacle, is the tireless

efforts of party workers,

orchestrating the mobilisa-

tion of supporters for these

ty of free and fair elections despite recurrent criticisms. Imagine the stalwart veterans anxiously clinging to their phones, praying for one more display of their experience in the political limelight, while the current faces (read chosen MPs) pace like restless lions in the corridors of authority, fearing either the sweet embrace of reselection or the bitter sting of rejection. But there's nothing to fear. For

in the unpredictable world of politics, one never knows when the pendulum of fortune will favourably swing back. So, let us Vote so that the elected parties work to fulfil their manifesto.

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

### The Statesman Incorporating and directly descended

from THE FRIEND OF INDIA - Founded 1818

#### **Order and politics**

s Uttar Pradesh braces for yet another phase in the election cycle, the dynamics of law and order loom large over the political landscape, with both the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Samajwadi Party (SP) vying for electoral advantage. The narratives emerging from the heartland state paint a complex picture of governance and its implications on the electoral calculus. There is a palpable sense of relief among many voters who believe that stringent law enforcement measures by the state's BJP government have ushered in an era of stability and security. For them, the crackdown on crime represents a tangible improvement in their daily lives, where they can go about their work or business without the looming spectre of lawlessness. However, it is essential to tread carefully when analysing the narrative surrounding law and order. While the purported reduction in crime is undoubtedly a welcome development, questions arise regarding the impartiality and inclusivity of these measures. The perception that certain communities are disproportionately targeted or marginalised under the guise of maintaining law and order raises concerns about the nature of governance and justice. In the realm of electoral politics, the issue of law and order becomes a double-edged sword for political parties vying for power.

On one hand, the BJP, which champions a toughon-crime stance, may attract voters who prioritise security and stability above all else. The promise of a safer society resonates strongly with segments of the electorate who have borne the brunt of rampant crime in the past. On the other hand, the SP may seek to highlight issues of justice and equity, emphasising the need for fair and impartial law enforcement measures. In a diverse and pluralistic society like Uttar Pradesh, where communal tensions often simmer beneath the surface, the need for impartial governance becomes paramount.

As the election unfolds, it is imperative for political leaders from both parties to strike a delicate balance between maintaining law and order and upholding the principles of justice and inclusivity. Parties that can navigate these complexities with nuance and sensitivity are likely to resonate more strongly with voters who value both security and equity. Ultimately, the electoral fortunes of parties will hinge not only on their ability to tout achievements in law enforcement but also on their commitment to fostering a society where every citizen feels safe, valued, and empowered. In the quest for power, let us not forget the fundamental principles of justice and fairness that underpin a thriving democracy. In this electoral context, it is crucial for voters to critically assess the rhetoric and actions of political parties regarding law and order. Beyond the surface-level promises of security, citizens must evaluate the long-term implications of policies on communal harmony and social cohesion. By engaging in informed discourse and holding leaders accountable for their governance, voters can contribute to a more robust and inclusive democratic process.

#### **Philippine Dynasts**

n the archipelago of the Philippines, where history intertwines with the present, a modern-day Shakespearean drama unfolds. The ongoing feud between the Marcos and Duterte clans, reminiscent of the Montagues and Capulets, serves as a cautionary tale of the perils of dynastic politics and personal vendettas overshadowing the greater good of the nation. At the heart of this feud lie two powerful families, each with its own legacy of controversy and corruption. On one side stands the Marcos dynasty, epitomised by the shadow of a brutal dictator whose reign was marked by oppression and plunder. Opposing them is the Duterte clan, led by a President whose tenure was characterised by a ruthless war on drugs and a penchant for inflammatory rhetoric. Their animosity is not merely a matter of personal disdain. It has real consequences for the Filipino people and their future. As the two families engage in a battle for supremacy, governance is compromised, and the nation's progress is hindered. The recent skirmishes over confidential funds and constitutional revisions highlight the extent to which personal ambitions overshadow public service. Moreover, the unpredictable nature of this feud leaves foreign policy in flux, with alliances shifting as quickly as the winds of political fortune. From cosying up to China to pivoting back towards America, the Philippines finds itself caught in a geopolitical tug-of-war, with little clarity on its longterm strategic direction. But perhaps most concerning is the impact of this feud on the democratic process itself. As the Marcos and Duterte camps gear up for the next election cycle, the spectre of dirty politics looms large. With both families facing potential legal repercussions for past misdeeds, the campaign is likely to be marred by mudslinging and character assassination, further eroding trust in the political establish-

Yet, amid this turmoil, there remains hope for a brighter future. The Filipino people have shown resilience in the face of adversity, rallying behind causes such as education reform and anti-corruption efforts. Grassroots movements and civil society organisations continue to push for accountability and transparency, challenging the entrenched power structures that perpetuate dynastic rule. Their efforts serve as a beacon of light in the darkness, reminding us that change is possible when the people unite behind a common cause

In the end, the Philippines stands at a crossroads. Will it succumb to the petty squabbles of feuding families, or will it rise above the fray and forge a path towards true democracy and prosperity? The answer lies not in the hands of politicians or dynasts, but in the collective will of the Filipino people to demand better and strive for a brighter tomorrow. For only by transcending the legacy of the past can the Philippines truly fulfil its immense potential and claim its rightful place on the global stage.

Desert Storm

Given that the ancient desert land has seen countless wars, valiant heroes, and bloody battles since antiquity, the romantic template of a 'David versus Goliath' equation has its natural resonances – Ravindra Singh Bhatti is tapping into his 'Independent' status and twisting it to his advantage. For once the hunted (common citizen) has become the hunter, and his game is the full-time politicians who are exposed and shamed for their excesses, easy promises, and divisive agenda



I ummers are particularly severe in the Thar desert with temperatures shooting up to 50 degrees Celsius. Dust raising winds can morph into full blown storms in the unforgiving swathes of the arid region with rolling sand hills. But this year, there is a different type of storm sweeping the undulating topography ~ a political one that has gripped the imagination of the simple, hardy, and deeply traditional folks of the clustered Jaisalmer-Barmer-Balotra districts.

The reverberations of this desert storm are being felt across the vast and ancient land of Rajputana or Rajasthan, and it has clear auguries for the future political possibilities of

the entire nation. As the nation finds itself mired in the regressive clutches of the past with its electoral passions veering around polarising narratives of Hindus and Muslims, caste census, mangalsutras et al, with the real issues of employment, agrarian crisis, inflation etc., taking a back seat ~ comes the refreshing campaign of a 26-year-old youth pitching on securing water for his parched constituency, job opportunities for the desperate youth, socio-economic development of his backward constituency, basically everything that ought to be consuming the politicians, but isn't.

As we remain gripped by meaningless guarantees of individual cults, dynastic appeals, partisan purity or even regional/castiest/religious promises, the fact that India faces hard issues that afflict all and not just select groups, is seemingly lost on career politicians.

But in a situation that sounds counterintuitive (given the presumed backwardness of the region), the popular appeal of a Ravindra Singh Bhatti (proudly 'Independent') from Jaisalmer-Barmer-Balotra Lok Sabha constituency talking inclusively for the 36 Biraadari cutting across all possible religious, castiest, and socio-economic divides, is

a rare breath of fresh air. Since he is 'Independent',

he does not have to sing hosannas about any party leadership and their purported infallibilities or superhuman capabilities; he only talks about his own abilities and not any single, double or triple engines.

His tone is patriotic, and not jingoistic or exclusivist. And yet, without any partisan brand to assure him of any en bloc vote, he seems to be defying logic by cavalierly attempting to defeat both the national parties i.e., the BJP and the Congress.

No amount of rallies by the biggest political names in the country can match his juggernaut. While big-talking, big-offending, and big-promising partisan politicians are doing

what they do best i.e., polarise local communities and promise the moon, Ravindra is 'their boy' who reaches out generously, humanely, and sincerely. He drew mammoth crowds that shamed the supposed starpower and organisation of cash-rich political parties. There is something raw, organic, and even hero-like about his persona

and the smart political newbie plays the son-of-the-soil card with immense pride, dignity, and decency.

Given that the ancient desert land has seen countless wars, valiant heroes, and bloody battles since antiquity, the romantic template of a 'David versus Goliath' equation has its natural resonances ~ Ravindra is tapping into his 'Independent' status and twisting it to his advantage. For once the hunted (common citizen) has become the hunter, and his game is the full-time politicians who are exposed and shamed for their excesses, easy promises, and divisive agenda.

Unbeknownst to many, this harsh desert land is typical of 'Mini India' with its myriad diversities of all possible deno-

minations who live cheek-byjowl in relative peace, harmony and convivial amity (as did other regions, till the 'politicians' of divide or appeasement arrived on the scene).

Ravindra is only revisionist in approach when it comes to invoking the civilisational social fiber of the land, otherwise he only talks of development and socio-economic issues, and so the full-time politicians are inadvertently made to look awkward, small, and outdated.

The wholesomeness of the situation is magnified when you see participants of the two major national parties not trying to out-shame each other but strive to keep pace with the

relentless 'hope' ignited by the irrepressible Ravindra Singh Bhatti.

His example is

a glorious rebuttal to those who lazily complain about TINA (There Is No Alternative) factor for the depressing state of politics in the country. Seemingly, the low turnout of national polling data indicates fatigue, frustration, and disin-

terest ~ but the crowds in Jaisalmer are on to something special, and something big that could shake the status quo of the country.

His example could seed 'Ravindra Singh Bhattis' from Manipur, Jammu and Kashmir or Andaman & Nicobar Islands, and that could change the ensuing amorality of our politics.

His success is important from the perspective of much needed 'hope' against the prevailing 'system' (to which all national and regional parties have contributed since independence).

It will force navel-gazing for existing politicians and set the agenda for the future. Divisive politics of hate or appeasement must stop, and real issues must take over.

Unlike the birth of an Aam

Aadmi Party (the last new 'idea' in the Indian political mainstream), there are no heavy weights of society to hold supportive dharnas, no affluent backers, and not even any nudging political rival, for he threatens the entirety of the 'system' and not just any one party (unlike the successful birth of AAP which was focused against the-then ruling party).

The template of Ravindra Singh Bhatti must also succeed for what it potentially suggests ~ the power of an average 'Independent' individual to change the much-needed conversations, debate, and narrative.

Single-minded determination, dash and pluck saw him win as the University President, then as an MLA, and now he is eyeing a MP seat (all as an Independent) ~ if this isn't an 'Indian Dream', what is?

There is also a certain welcome 'normalcy' and simplicity about a teacher and homemaker's son who studies and does his law (without posturing any 'martyr-syndrome' or pretended piety) and then proudly espouses real issues in local dialect with aplomb, stands tall and talks firm, but with a much needed measure of decency.

After a long time, a natural student leader has succeeded in capturing the political imagination after the likes of Vajpayee, Chandrashekar, Jaitley, Tharoor etc., who could conflate education, youthfulness, idealism, and nativism without resorting to bigotry or hate.

While Jaisalmer-Barmer-Balotra is just one seat out of 543 and Ravindra may or may not win, he has already done the impossible of shaking up the 'system' and offering 'hope' ~ therefore, even it is too good a dream to come true, one must pray for his success for the betterment and dignity of constituency, his state, and his country, towards which he professes equal love and reverence. India in these dark times has seen a flicker of change, hope, and now waits for 6 June to see if indeed it is a case of a major Desert Storm!

A MEMBE



#### OF THE

### Hope for lower food prices

s expected, President Marcos' latest decision to relax the rules on the importation of agricultural products is being opposed by traders and middlemen who have been unduly enriching themselves by buying low from farmers and fishermen and selling high to consumers. The President has directed the Department of Agriculture (DA) to simplify its policies and procedures on the importation of farm products and remove other nontariff barriers that restrict or delay their entry to the country. These include quotas, import licensing schemes and bureaucratic regulations that have the net effect of increasing the cost of imports. Their removal or easing will therefore boost supply in local markets and ultimately bring down prices of essential farm products. It should be noted that this will not come at a loss to the government in terms of foregone revenues.

Under Administrative Order No. 20, signed by Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin on April 18, the DA was directed to coordinate with the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of Finance to streamline procedures and requirements in the licensing of importers, minimize the processing time of applications for importation, and exempt licensed traders from the submission of registration requirements.

The DA was also ordered to streamline procedures and requirements for the issuance of sanitary and phytosanitary import clearance, which needs to be released within 15 days,

#### INQUIRER

otherwise, applications with completed documents will be deemed approved. The Sugar Regulatory Administration was also told to simplify the importation of sugar by allowing direct purchases by the agency's accredited importers and accepting more traders to participate.

The DA was tasked to similarly review and revise guidelines on the importation of frozen fish and other marine products while the Bureau of Customs, where many complaints of delayed releases are raised by the private sector, was ordered to prioritize the unloading and release of imported agricultural products

agricultural products. By addressing the delays that lead to additional costs for importers, the entry and availability of imported agricultural products will hopefully be timely and cover the supply shortages of farm products. However, the success of this order will depend in large part on the surveillance team created under AO 20. Made up of representatives from several departments and law enforcement agencies, it is hoped that the body will be able to pinpoint snags and other potential roadblocks early on and immediately find solutions to them. The team can also focus on unscrupulous middlemen who have often been blamed for the high prices of farm produce ~ even during times

of abundant supply.

Perhaps the President already had this in mind when he included the police and other law enforcement bodies in the surveillance team to go after these scalawage.

these scalawags.

AO 20 is indeed a very timely measure that, if implemented correctly, could really help lower the prices of agricultural products. However, the implementation of AO 20 should go hand in hand with the timely implementation of the DA's three-year plan for the country's agricultural sector.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### editor@thestatesman.com

**BHOPINDER** 

SINGH

The writer is Lt Gen PVSM,

Lt Governor of

Andaman & Nicobar Islands

and Puducherry

#### Die with dignity

SIR, I refer to your editorial, "End of Life". There are moral, legal, ethical, religious, and scientific dimensions to end of life decisions ~ Euthanasia. There may be good clinical medicine but there is also the reality of financial costs. We cannot disregard the economic reality of modern medical care ~ whether it is in a Staterun hospital or insurance covered health care.

This practice is generally illegal, but there is a movement worldwide toward greater social and legal acceptance. Attempting or assisting death is a criminal offence in many countries. However, in India, in a pioneering judgment, the Supreme Court legalised passive euthanasia, stating that it was a matter of a 'living will'. Doubtless, death is a loss, and the notion of assisted dying is very odd. Perhaps we should speak of assisting patients on the verge of death by providing loving, compassionate care. Laws with ample safeguards should be enacted to allow certain patients who are terminally ill to die with dignity. Like the many laws we have from the time of British rule, the proposed British legislation can "lead by example and set a new standard for compassionate end-of-life care in the modern world" for other nations.

Yours, etc., H N Ramakrishna, Bengaluru, 28 April.

#### DISAGREE

SIR, This is apropos of M A Madhusudan's letter "Compulsory voting" published today. I write to submit a diametrically opposite view. Compulsory voting will only improve the stats on voting ~ the "pratishat" (percentage) tally that the media keeps reporting down to the last two decimal places.

Considering our demography, even if the voting in percentage terms is low, it affords a wide sample base in terms of numbers because approximately 15 lakh eligible voters belong to a single constituency. In the specific instance of low turnout (percentage wise) in the first phase of polling this year, heat wave conditions, netas switching sides/ parties at the drop of a hat, voters nonchalance and the sentiment that voting does not bring about a change in governance are factors that have been at play.

Moreover, at the ground level, compulsory voting will be dif-

ficult to achieve and may even lead to tyrannical behaviour of overzealous election officials out to achieve a 100 per cent voter turnout. A cent percent voter turnout will not by itself bring about governance that is accountable and transparent. On the contrary, the attendance of our elected representatives in parliament and state legislatures and the quality of debates ought to be of more concern than the voter turnout.

Yours, etc., Avinash Godboley, Dewas, 30 April.

#### BIAS OF WESTERN MEDIA

SIR, This refers to Harsha Kakar's article, "Western perceptions and Indian realities" (30 April). General Kakar has rightly stated that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has had the best of relations with Western leaders in his twin terms so far. Not so with the Western media, who have an assortment of descriptors for him ranging from strongman to autocrat.

This was demonstrated yet again when Rahul Gandhi's Indian-American advisor, Sam Pitroda, weaponized recent Western media headlines in an attack on Modi. Excessive interest from the Western media in Indian elec-

#### NOTA OPTION

**SIR**, Voters of some areas have decided to void their votes for some reason which is not at all a good sign for democracy. Rather than deciding to nullify the vote, the last and best weapon is to opt for 'NOTA' (none of the above), which will surely have far-reaching effects. Elections are a right time for voters to test their representatives and representatives should also know the voters' choices. All political parties and representatives should be aware of it and analyze it seriously.

Yours, etc., Nabnit Panigrahi, Rayagada, 28 April.

tions has always been perceived as interference in domestic affairs. Even Indira Gandhi was targeted by the American media when she refused to buckle under their negative projection. When India conducted nuclear tests during Atal Bihari Vajpayee's tenure, Western news organisations painted India as the villain of the peace. It blamed India for spending on nuclear weapons rather than the far more urgent need to alleviate poverty.

Barring a few exceptions, selfproclaimed foreign clairvoyants have been predicting doom for India in spite of its record GDP growth. While they may have some justification for their critical reporting, the same Western news conglomerates have been ignoring attacks on freedom of expression in many other countries including China and Russia. Even EAM S Jaishankar, who has been cultivating American media his entire career, found faults. He has said the foreign media attacks India "not because they lack information, but because they think they are also political players in our elections". While it ignores the vicious attacks on the Jewish community in the West, it indulges in Modi-bashing while reporting from India. As PM, Mr Modi has kept both the Indian and the foreign press at an arm's length. He has become the first PM not to address a single press conference in a decade. Dissemination of irresponsible and inaccurate news makes his or her job much easier. Yours, etc., S S Paul,

Nadia, 30 April.



### Balance needed with dynamic injunctions

**SUNITA TRIPATHY AND REVA MAKHIJA** 

The issue of dynamic injunctions is a complex one. On the one hand, the court is confronted with judicially engineering newer ways to present effective remedies to the intellectual property right-holders and shield them from repeated infringement. On the other, these dynamic injunctions do run the risk of going over-board in their application and possibly transgressing into the territory of judicial overreach.

Having said this, it is important to be cognizant that the issuance of dynamic injunctions need not necessarily be excessive at every instance. One of the foremost criticisms of this class of injunctions is that it is usually accompanied by website-blocking orders, decisions that are predicated on the assumption that the entirety of the website hosts illicit, infringing content. In fact, the Bombay High Court recognised this danger in *Balaji Motion Pictures*, wherein Justice G.S. Patel highlighted the need for scrutiny and reflection on the use of John Doe orders, which are similar in operation to dynamic injunctions.

Overarchingly though, it is agreed that this special class of injunctions are an attempt, or at the very least a thoughtful start, intending to prevent and limit the problem of free-riding that often obscures the incentive to grant intellectual property protection.

India is a party to both the WIPO Performers and Phonograms Treaty, 1996 (WPPT) and the WIPO Copyright Treaty, 1996 (WCT) and has thus reoriented her approach to balance the rights of the intellectual property owner, while simultaneously providing sufficient economic incentives to stimulate the creative industries operating in the digital space. The Delhi High Court has come to acquire notoriety for its jurisprudence on intellectual property matters, and its creative application of granting dynamic+ injunctions is no exception. The court



in April 2019, in *UTV v 1337x*. introduced the concept of dynamic injunctions by virtue of its power under Section 151 of the Civil Procedure Code, 1908 to immunise the copyright-holders from 'mirror/redirect/alphanumeric' websites. The rationale behind legally transplanting the concept of dynamic injunctions, whose facets are resplendent in Singaporean law on to a domestic context was to combat the irreparable losses caused by ubiquitous "hydra-headed" websites or, "flagrantly infringing online locations".

Usually, issuance of dynamic injunctions is restricted to protecting the existing works of the right-holders. In August 2023, the Delhi High Court in the *Universal City Studios* order, carved out an exceptional model of dynamic injunctions, one which would also operate prospectively, and protect the future works of the rightholder. The primary concern with this expansion of the injunction is that it fails to account for the possibility of a dispute of ownership of the copyright. The natural presumption of ownership of the copyright in favour of the plaintiff discounts the very real potential of there being a third-party claim over the work, which may well add to the cumbersome nature of the court

process, proving counterintuitive to the aim of the remedy of dynamic injunctions.

Circling back to the larger point on proportionality, and whether Indian courts by issuing dynamic injunctions which are most often coupled with website-blocking orders are justified in their approach, our considered opinion is that in light of the fact that the jurisprudence on dynamic injunctions is still evolving, it does not seem prudent to completely write off the utility of dynamic injunctions as a legitimate remedy to combat 'mirror/redirect/alphanumeric' websites. That said, there are legitimate concerns of disregarding user rights, noncommercial use of digital content, and chilling effect on free speech that do require to be addressed with as much clarity as possible.

Justice Pratibha Singh in the *Star India Pvt. Ltd.* case, recently allowed the blocked websites, which were not "primarily infringing" in nature to approach the court with an undertaking guaranteeing that there would be no illegal dissemination of the plaintiffs' content on their part, post which there would be a consideration as regards modifying the injunction. Some would argue that it is too little,

too late - and perhaps that stand has merit when justifying the economic incentive for a copyright system. However, we must acknowledge that times have changed drastically since the 1990s and creators are often found collaborating with users to allow for greater reach and develop new transformative use of their content. Hence it is an important opportunity to strike a fine balance. As put forth in the *UTV* judgement, while expanding upon the quantity v. quality test, the court held that website-blocking orders "should not create barriers to legitimate trade", and thus a dynamic injunction that would suspend any infringing platform's website in its entirety instead of blocking the specific content - is one of the few, but major deficiencies of this remedy.

Therefore, when remedying infringement, courts must understand the full ramifications of how much control must the owner be allowed while denying or allowing use of content for any public or non-commercial purpose.

Ever since the WCT & WPPT, India has been desirous of signalling clearly that she respects the need to balance rights, so the regulatory aim is to prevent an excessiveness or

abuse of the system. However, she fully endorses the economic incentive to provide a limited monopoly for creative industries, and denying an equitable remedy such as a dynamic injunction in light of primary facie evidence would make that social contract meaningless. So it cannot be asserted enough that the intellectual property owner's interest must be protected through decisions that envisage reasoned orders laying out the lack of abuse of the system and thus provide a sound basis to enforce the remedy as a mechanism of preventing free-riding.

To make a case for having a judicial temper for dynamic injunctions, we can refer to the Bombay High Court's decision this January in *UTI Infrastructure Technology and Services* Limited v. Extra Tech World and Ors., wherein the bench resorted to the use of a dynamic injunction to protect public interest relating to preventing the infringement of sensitive personal data such as PAN records. In instances such as these, the issuance of a dynamic injunction is almost automatically necessitated. It is difficult to expect that the plaintiffs, who are service providers of the Income Tax Department, entrusted with processing PAN Applications and other PANrelated information, approach the court on several instances to restrain other anonymous, unnamed infringers thereby compromising national security.

Therefore, there are certainly valid, conflicting opinions as to the utility and overbroad nature of dynamic injunctions, but in our considered view the first step is to iron out the inconsistencies in the court's understanding of when and how to invoke these injunctions. That would require an understanding and application of uniform standard of proportionality wherein the issuance for a dynamic injunction is required to strike the fine balance.

(The writers are, respectively, Professor of Law, and a student at the Jindal Global Law School, O.P Jindal Global University, Haryana.)

life expectancy and access to

unipolar to a multipolar world, politi-

cal scientist John Ikenberry envisions

The Global South, in this scenario, is

more passive and lacks leadership,

and both the Global North and Global

East compete for its loyalty and coop-

But as we transition from a

resources are maintained".

#### **100 YEARS AGO**

#### **OCCASIONAL NOTE**

"WITH a minimum of discussion" the House of Common rejected Mr, Lansbury's amendment to the Army Bill, proposing that a soldier on recruitment should have the power of deciding whether he would carry out orders which had to do with a trade dispute. A more mischievous attempt to weaken authority cannot bo imagined. Government is responsible for internal order, as for defence against external enemies: in the last resort it must call upon the Army to put down attacks upon life and property. No doubt, the soldier in such cases is in a difficult position. If under military orders he fires on a mob and kills, he may be amenable to the civil law; if he disobeys his superior, he is punished for disobedience. But the civil law of the land is seldom put into operation against the soldier who has acted under orders, and it is accepted as a practice if not a rule that the remedy for the improper use of military force in riots and similar disturbances lies in action against the authorities responsible. In any ease, the use of soldiers in civil disturbance is to be deprecated, Employment in such work tends to demoralise them, or at least to sap their professional pride.

#### **NEWS ITEMS**

#### **RESCUE WORK IN TUNNEL NEAR EUSTON**

AN electric train crashed into the rear of a special standing in the tunnel, a mile outside Euston Station. The latter was crowded with excursionists for the Cup final.

It is officially announced that the number of injured is not definitely known, but probably amounts to twenty. It is stated that two have keen killed. | The special had come from Birmingham and elsewhere, and was crowded with Aston Villa supporters. It had stopped near the terminus when the majority of passengers were standing up getting their wraps and overcoats, and the electric train crashed into the rear, where most of the casualties occurred.

Rescue work was carried out in the semi-darkness of the tunnel. Many of the injuries inflicted on the passengers were of a serious nature. A few women were aboard the train.

#### LIBERALS' ATTITUDE **DEPUTATION LEAVES FOR ENGLAND**

THE Right Hon. V. S. Srinivasa Sastri and Mrs. Besant addressed a special meeting which was called to give them a send-off on their departure to England in connection with the deputation recently appointed by the National Convention at Allahabad.

Mr. Sastri condemned the action of the Central Provinces Swarajists in the Legislative Council, characterising it as a great blunder. In his opinion the Swarajists ought to have advanced the country's cause by using the constitution with a view to disclosing what he called "its impossible 'safeguards. " Referring to the deputation, Mr. Sastri said that their work would mainly consist in putting India's case before the British public and Parliament. He thought that a Royal Com-mission was inevitable in view of the present political deadlock in the Assembly and in some of the provincial

legislatures. Mrs. Besant said that a National Convention was the only effective method of representing a united national demand for Home Rule.

Lady Emily Lutyens' counselled patience and trust in the Labour Government. Mr. Sastri. Mrs. Besant and Lady Lutyens leave for England by the stearner *Maccdonia*.

#### **ANTI-RACIAL CAMPAIGN IN UNIVERSITY**

THE secret society known as the Ku Klux Klan, whose activities had begun to diminish especially in the eastern part of the United States, has intensified its anti-racial campaign particularly in the

metropolitan area of New York. Large numbers of flaming crosses are crected at night and robed klansmen hold meetings in secluded spots. One

suburban community has been torn with bitter dissension, the Klan having requested the resignation of a priest who is a member of the board of directors of a bank. The Klan's activities have extended to Columbia University, where southern students signed a protest requesting the ousting of a negro resident from the dormitory. The authorities decided that the negro was within his rights. In the meantime the Klan invaded the Campus of the University and erected

The students are divided, many supporting the negro. A squad of detectives is guarding the dormitory against violence. The incident has aroused great public interest.

its flaming cross and bombarded the

negro with threatening letters.

### Is the Global South now obsolete?

**BINA SHAH** 

hen I was a teenager, the world was divided between the First World and Third World, terms first defined by the French anthropologist Alfred Sauvy in 1952. The First World was the affluent developed world, the industrialised nations of North America, Europe and Australia: stable and democratic, life held infinite satisfaction for its citizens.

On the other hand, the Third World, where I lived, was characterised as poor, illiterate, underdeveloped, violent and insecure. The Second World was made up of the Soviet Union and the countries aligned with it, but it was more familiarly known either as 'the enemy' or 'those Communists'. We paid little attention to it even when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, bringing the Second World right to the doorstep of the Third.

We were told that the First/ Third World had more to do with economics than politics, but the two seemed inseparable when it came to the power the First World wielded over the Third. First World countries used a lot of influence and money to keep them away from the clutches of the Soviet Union. Building on the foundations that colonialism and imperialism had laid for them in the previous two centuries, the First World gained free access to the Third



people's self-esteem and pride in their own identity. The First World rewarded those

Third World countries for their loyalty with generous foreign aid, favourable trade deals, and unending support for their governments, no matter how corrupt or undemocratic. Indeed, the First World coined the term 'banana republic' to describe some of these Third World countries, even as they propped up their autocrats and encouraged them to function as the polar opposite of Western liberalism for half a century.

By the 1990s, the world had benefited from 20 to 30 years of decolonial studies and Marxist economics,

Edward Said's powerful work on Orientalism and Gayatri Spivak's on subalternity, the liberation theologies of South America and the anti-apartheid movement of South Africa. The term 'Third World' began to give way to the 'Global South', somewhat due to political correctness but mostly out of their own loathing for an appellation that symbolised dysfunction and underdevelopment.

The Global South is made up of Latin America, Africa and Asia. Yet some countries in it began to achieve economic industrialisation: India, China, Brazil. Today, the inclusion of very rich countries like the UAE and Saudi Arabia as well as tiny Costa Rica and prosperous Malaysia raises the question of whether the 'Global South' term is now stretched beyond

usefulness, too racialised, or even simply obsolete?

Not so, according to political researchers Nour Dados and Raewyn Connell. In their eyes, "the use of the phrase Global South marks a shift from a central focus on development or cultural difference toward an emphasis on geopolitical relations of power". Former colonies aligned as countries whose interests clashed with industrialised powers in the West and the Communist bloc, thus ignoring Cold War divisions of the '50s and '60s.

Today, the Global South is more than just "a metaphor for underdevelopment". Instead, it references "an entire history of colonialism, neoimperialism, and differential economic and social change through which large inequalities in living standards,

a Global North, a Global South, and a Global East, led by China and Russia.

> eration. Still, when South Africa took Israel to the International Court of Justice on charges of genocide in Gaza, many Global South countries rallied behind the cause of ending the conflict in Gaza and getting Israel to face international law for its alleged war crimes. South Africa's historic defeat of apartheid gave the accusers' case moral as well as legal weight. Instead of just backing Palestine in places like the ICJ and the

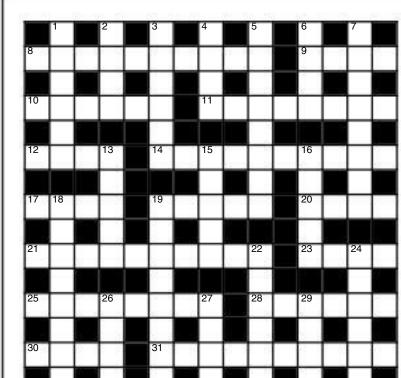
> UN, the Global South was now taking

direct action against Israel in those

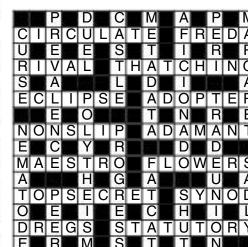
very forums. This marks a powerful change in the way these countries align and negotiate global conflicts. In politics, sometimes language reflects these changes and sometimes it is a precursor or even an instigator of change. Like the movement of tectonic plates that creates earthquakes on the higher ends of the Richter scale, the deliberate use of the term 'Global South' will instigate a major shift towards a world where global justice must prevail.

Dawn/ANN.

#### CROSSWORD



#### YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION



#### **ACROSS**

- Partly swapped permanently bleating female, we hear (4,3,3)
- Mount, in turn, but a little awkwardly (4)
- 10 Let out to catch bug
- 11 Flipping idiots! Man U player's unexplained marks on body
- 12 One's book a little bit of 14 They hate spending money abroad – this grates
- 17 Old horny creature rolling round floor (4)
- 19 Michael gutted to stop doing jobs round the house? Clearly
- 20 Start to dredge North Yorkshire river – you may have to work at it (4) 21 Dross! Oscar unlikely for
  - creaking old British drama
  - 23 Soldiers going round at speed 25 Accompanied earl ordered
  - guards around (8) 28 Doris's daughter dressed in red cuddling sweetheart 30 Confuse extremists in
  - Delaware (4) 31 Fair happening shortly – he's outside with dodgems at first
- Cycling home, finally stopping where they sell wine 2 A time to seal off copper
- mine entrance 3 No change in Washington rarely guilty
- 4 Colours ultimately faded of course (4) 5 Ian still occasionally appearing
- in dock, curiously Runs into old PM around

Teesside town

- Stoke are playing the epitome of Englishness?
- 13 Violently assaults in Chelsea
  - 15 School getting parent's letter
  - 16 Attacker not a motorcyclist?

NO-292767

- 18 Tots are busy with a balloon, perhaps (8) 19 Party rubbish? He gets a
- woman (8) 22 Mess in dish – language!
- 24 What can I earn in Bangkok? Say, that's capital (6)
- 26 Have to defend English poet 27 Attracted Prince – one
- extradited? (4)
- 29 Tough outside but somewhat easier indoors (4)

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



This 400 paar is a joke, 300 paar is impossible and even 200 paar may be a challenge for the BJP to get the way things are going. The BJP losing its majority seems to be a foregone conclusion

SHASHI THAROOR Congress leader



The BJP collected donations from the companies that manufactured the vaccine. Not only is there a threat to the Constitution, but you (people) also have a threat to life

AKHILESH YADAV Samajwadi Party chief

Barely any 'Nyay' or

'Guarantee' for NRIs



PM Modi is lying about the benefits of UCC that it will help everybody. Instead, if UCC is implemented, it will put at stake the existence of SCs, STs and OBCs. BJP will destroy the Constitution

MAMATA BANERJEE West Bengal Chief Minister

#### A mixed bag

he Indian economy presents a contrasting picture; robust fundamentals and optimistic growth projects on the one hand while on the other, shrinking job opportunities for the struggling middle and lower-middle class and widening disparities. Amid hectic campaigning for the Lok Sabha elections, the country is witnessing multiple and often contradictory narratives on the state of the economy. The ruling dispensation, quoting various international agencies, is focusing on how the economy has fared better than expected and the momentum is likely to continue, despite the volatility of the global economy. The National Statistical Office's second advance estimates have pegged growth for the full year at 7.6%. As per the International Monetary Fund's Regional Economic Outlook report, India has been a "source of repeated positive growth surprises". There are expectations of the growth momentum continuing this year as well. In its recent World Economic Outlook, the IMF has upped its growth projections to 6.8% in 2024-25, from its earlier projection of 6.5%. The Reserve Bank of India too is optimistic. In the last monetary policy committee meeting, it projected growth at 7%. The Asian Development Bank has also upped its estimate of growth

this year to 7% while the World Bank has pegged the economy to grow at a marginally lower rate of 6.6% in its recent South Asia Development update. Rating agency Crisil expects growth at 6.8%. This range of GDP growth estimates from 6.5% to 7% does suggest that the Indian economy is likely to remain the

Despite all the growth talks and positive outlook, growing unemployment remains a major area of concern for India

fastest growing large economy in the world. However, growing unemployment remains a major area of concern. The share of educated youths among all unemployed people increased from 54.2% in 2000 to 65.7% in 2022 according to the latest figures by the International Labour Organization. There has also been no significant growth in real wages since 2014. The country risks squandering its 'demographic dividend' - the economic growth potential from a big working-age population. The unemployment problem is a symptom of larger and deeper issues - employability and job creation, and, therefore, also education, ease of doing business and infrastructure. Manufacturing's share as a percentage of GDP has remained stagnant in the last decade despite a few incentive policies unveiled by the government. The lack of a large-scale industry means half of India's population still depends on agriculture for their livelihoods - which is increasingly becoming unprofitable. At 3%, the growth in overall private consumption expenditure — the money people spend on buying things - is the slowest in 20 years. Creating more productive forms of employment opportunities for the millions entering the labour force each year should be the top priority for the government. Experts like former RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan have questioned India's reported economic growth figures, suggesting that the actual growth rate might be much lower than claimed.

#### **Mere Manifesto!**

#### 2014

CONGRESS: Had only a passive take measures to "protect overseas Indians from exploitation or

BJP: Had a twoline note on the soft power potentiality of overseas Indians in strengthening 'Brand India' and promoting its national interests

#### 2019 CONGRESS: Promised to re-Affairs and set up a Committee of

establish Ministry of Overseas Indian OCIs to oversee the work of Indian missions regarding NRIs, affordable education for NRIs' children, an NRI Invest Scheme, and financial and logistical services for their safe return to India

BJP: Committed to "creating an institutional mechanism to regularly engage and deepen the cultural relationship with Indians living abroad." Proposed to strengthen the MADAD portal services, launch

#### 2024 CONGRESS: No mention of

BJP: Has a brief section titled 'Vishwa Bandhu Bharat' maintaining its position to economic ties with the

AN OUTDATED 40-YEAR-OLD EMIGRATION ACT OF 1983 GOVERNS THE OVERSEAS MIGRATION OF INDIANS AND THEIR WELFARE WHILE MIGRATING AND



It's time parties

brought tangible

policy outcomes

diaspora meet-ups

and empty promises

beyond flashy

in manifestos

Dr DIVYA BALAN

ith two phases of the 18th Lok Sabha polls concluded, the nation's political pulse is inevitably raised as speculations about the upcoming five phases abound. While India's democratic fate depends on who wins this election, the competing parties nationwide are leaving no stone unturned to secure victory margins. In the multi-party setup in India, releasing an election manifesto in a time-bound manner is considered one of the major poll-related activities to influence people's voting behaviour. This political tradition has been followed since the first general election of independent India in 1951 and holds a significant place in our electoral landscape.

Despite the fact that the majority of voters may not read the manifestos, the political row over its contents and the media attention often results in exposing the effectiveness, or the lack thereof, of party lines and policy agendas of contending political factions in addressing and mitigating the key issues facing the country. After all, a manifesto is an official roadmap document that provides critical clues regarding the attitude and responsiveness of the parties towards various sections of the population, including the Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) and Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs).

Overseas Indians in Manifestos While the first general election provided voting rights to partition refugees on their declaration of intent to reside permanently in India, the Nehruvian approach of "expatriate Indians who abandoned the county did not need the support of India" resonated in the electoral discourse until the third general election. It was the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (now Bharatiya Janata Party), which in its election manifesto of 1962, urged for safeguarding the interests of overseas Indians in matters concerning dual citizenship, right to vote and their experiences of discrimination in foreign lands.

Yet developmental and welfare agendas, such as poverty alleviation, economic modernisation and industrialisation, dominated the electoral debates in the initial decades of independence. This was followed by the reservation question and Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi-motivated communal politics echoing the entire late twentieth century. That said, the 1999 National Democratic Alliance (NDA) manifesto promised schemes to simplify tax and investment procedures for overseas Indians. Expanding on the previous point, the 2004 NDA manifesto pledged to strengthen multidimensional linkages with the diaspora, granting them dual citizenship, and favoured their investments, especially in healthcare. However, the Congressled United Progressive Alliance won the 2004 general election and established a Ministry of Non-Resident Indians' Affairs, later renamed the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA).

Marking a significant shift in diaspora policies, the MOIA introduced the Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) scheme in August 2005 to develop networks and partnerships with overseas Indians. This landmark policy reimagined India as a de-territorialised cultural polity with NRIs and PIOs as active stakeholders in the country's international standing, economic

growth and human development. Acknowledging "the vital role remittances play in bolstering the country's finances," the 2009 Congress manifesto asserted that if elected to power, the party would continue to take measures to "intensify the involvement of over-

seas Indians in development" by creating opportunities for starting business ventures in India. Other promises were to introduce 50% seat reservation for PIO/NRI students in selected universities and protect the interests of Indian workers in the Gulf.

diaspora

#### **Getting Sidelined**

The subsequent general elections witnessed national security, economic growth, employment, anti-corruption and foreign policy gaining greater traction in the campaigns with NRI issues finding their way to manifestos in a relatively diminutive manner. The Congress' 2014 manifesto had only a passive reference that it will take measures to "protect overseas Indians from exploitation or threats", while the BJP's had a twoline note on the soft power potentiality of overseas Indians in strengthening 'Brand India' and promoting its national interests globally. After winning office, the BJP govt merged the MOIA with the Ministry of External Affairs, thus virtually downgrading overseas Indian affairs into a mere segment of India's foreign policy.

The 2019 BJP manifesto committed to "creating an institutional mechanism to regularly engage and deepen the cultural relationship with Indians living abroad." The proposal to strengthen the MADAD ('MEA' in Aid of Diaspora in Distress) portal services was reassuring, but the promise to launch a 'Bharat Gauray' campaign to enhance Indian missions' engagement with overseas Indians was rather rhetorical. The Congress criticised the MOIA

Over 22,000 NRIs landed in Kerala by chartering 'vote flights' from Gulf to exercise their political franchise on April 26

merger for its disruptive impact in ensuring the social welfare and safety of overseas Indians. It promised to re-establish the MOIA and set up a Committee of OCIs to evaluate the work of Indian missions regarding NRIs, ensuring their concerns are addressed and their interests protected. (see infographics)

#### Non-committal in 2024

There is no mention of overseas Indians in the current election manifesto of the Congress. It is a disappointing omission from a national party when its candidates seek to reach out to the NRI vote bank in several States. At the same time, the BJP's manifesto has a brief section titled 'Vishwa Bandhu Bharat', maintaining its position to strengthen cultural and economic ties with the diaspora and involve them in the country's growth and development while offering support in times of need.

The BIP manifesto claims that Indians living abroad "feel empowered and connected", in contrast to the reality that NRI voters are left without a voice, practically disenfranchised and disconnected due to the absence of remote voting provisions. Besides, an outdated 40-year-old Emigration Act of 1983 governs the overseas migration of Indians and their welfare and protection while migrating and returning.

Despite the grave indifference of ruling and opposition parties from time to time, these critical overseas populations, who are spirited Indians to the core, maintain firm sociopolitical affiliations, fund campaigns and mobilise votes for their favoured parties via online platforms. This we have seen time and again in the second phase of the ongoing Lok Sabha election held on April 26, when more than 22,000 NRIs landed in Kerala by chartering 'vote flights' from the Gulf countries to exercise their political franchise.

A similar trend is expected in the upcoming phases as well, including in Telangana, which has a large NRI population well known for influencing the previous victories of the Bharat Rashtra Samiti in the 2014 LS elections and the BJP candidates in North Telangana districts of Karimnagar, Nizamabad and Adilabad in the 2019 general elections.

The scorching heat might be a concern for all parties as it has dimmed the spirit of the campaign and affected voter turnout. However, nothing could stop enthusiastic NRI electors from flying down to their constituencies to cast votes. That being the case, it is high time political parties addressed the NRI issues with resoluteness and brought tangible policy outcomes beyond flashy diaspora meet-ups and empty promises in the manifestos.

(The author teaches Migration Studies at FLAME University, Pune)

#### Letters to the

Editor

#### Highly unjust

The selective action of the ECI against senior statesman K Chandrashekhar Rao is highly unjust. (EC bars KCR from campaigning, May 2). In this regard, my question to the ECI is, why no action against other ministers for making inflammatory speeches? Why did the EC fail to issue a notice to Prime Minister Modi, even though, he was caught on the wrong foot? Emboldened by the EC's inaction, the BJP stalwarts are brazenly using anti-Muslim tirades in their speeches. Thus the ECI is sparing the guilty and condemning the innocent, which is a travesty of justice.

> PH HEMA SAGAR, Secunderabad

#### Strained ties

The Indian-Canadian relationship is already passing through rough weather and the latest incident of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau attending a pro-Khalistan event has made the matter worse between the two countries. If ever someone needs proof that Canada has been giving a platform to separatism and extremism, this event would have removed all their doubts. Such developments not only harm bilateral relationships but encourage a climate of violence. If Canada really wants to alter the path of bilateral relations with India then they will have to introspect and make a course correction. BAL GOVIND, Noida

Write to us at letters@telanganatoday.com

### Cartoon Today HE HAS MODILOSIS, SIR. HE CAN TURN ONLY ONE SIDE - THE OPPOSITION. Nodi and Revanth (2007) yoursem

#### India in the

hotspot

■ The Economist

#### Maharajas of the biggest democracy

Walk into the office of a senior government official and you will find the same scene. Behind a large desk sits the man (or, occasionally, the woman) in charge. Arrayed in front of him are neat rows of chairs.

■ The Gulf News

#### Rahul's role in shaping India's destiny

The present government of nationalists, faces a formidable challenge from a diverse coalition of opposition parties striving to gain ground under the informal leadership of Rahul Gandhi.

Al Jazeera

#### India more unequal than under British?

As Modi contests for a rare third term, the gap between rich and poor in India — already significant in 2014 has widened into a canyon. India's income and wealth inequality have become among the highest in the world.