

## The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

## Criminal defamation

Misuse of the law remains rampant

DESCRIBING the right to reputation as a facet of the right to life and personal liberty, guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution, the Law Commission has recommended retaining the criminal defamation law. In its 285th report submitted to the government, the panel said the right to reputation needed to be adequately protected against defamatory speech and imputation. Given that Article 19(2) provides for defamation as a ground for the imposition of 'reasonable restrictions' on the freedom of speech and expression guaranteed under Article 19(1)(a), the commission's recommendation is understandable. Also, the Supreme Court had in May 2016 upheld the validity of the law under Sections 499 and 500 of the Indian Penal Code — which prescribed a maximum two-year jail term and fine — and ruled that there was nothing wrong in sending a person to prison for defaming someone.

There can't be any disagreement with the basic proposition that the right to reputation ought to be protected. However, the misuse of the criminal defamation law to silence political adversaries, activists and journalists is causing a 'chilling effect' on free speech. The panel's argument that the law 'ensures a balance between freedom of expression and the right to reputation' is not borne out by facts.

In the past decade or so, many politicians have filed criminal defamation cases against their rivals and media houses. During 2002-11, the Tamil Nadu government filed over 140 such cases against media houses and journalists. The law's abuse is also evident in the filing of 'strategic lawsuits against public participation'. It's for this reason that the Editors Guild of India has been demanding decriminalisation of defamation. Several countries, including the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland and Sri Lanka, have decriminalised it. India must move in this direction as civil remedies are already available to a person wronged in terms of harm caused to his/her reputation.

## Tacking corruption

Selective action undermines campaign

WEST Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee may well have been speaking on behalf of the entire Opposition with her remarks on the arrest of Hemant Soren. 'Are we all thieves and they are all saints?' she asked after her Jharkhand counterpart was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on corruption charges. It was in 2013, when the UPA was in power, that Justice RM Lodha of the Supreme Court described the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) as a caged parrot that speaks in its master's voice. It was a telling comment on not only the misuse of probe agencies but also the culture of corruption that has permeated all levels of the government. A year later, the BJP rode to power on the promise of a crackdown. It now faces charges of co-opting the corrupt and unleashing investigation agencies on those who refuse to switch over to the ruling party.

The BJP has repeatedly denied targeting its political rivals, saying that the government is probing allegations of corruption or fraud irrespective of the allegiance of the suspects. As one Opposition leader after another faces the ED and CBI heat, fingers are being pointed at the political weaponisation of the agencies. Buttressing the allegations of biased and partisan action is the fact that 95 per cent of the cases being probed are against leaders of Opposition parties.

Probe agencies are meant to derive their legitimacy from being independent and impervious to political meddling. In a polarised political atmosphere, they must be seen as impartial. The reality presents a picture to the contrary. Condoning corruption is no one's case — take the corrupt to task without fail. It is selective action that dilutes the fight and casts a shadow that can make victims out of suspects.

## ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

## The Tribune.

LAHORE, TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 1924

## CIVIL COURTS IN PUNJAB

THE Note on the Administration of Civil Justice during the calendar year 1922 is a document of absorbing interest, as it not only effectively disproves the charge that the Punjabis are a particularly litigious people but also emphatically lays bare some of the most glaring defects of our judicial administration, viz, the dilatoriness of judicial proceedings and the difficulties attendant on the execution of decrees. The total number of original civil suits instituted in all courts during the year was 187,070, as against 177,184 in the preceding year and 191,702 in 1913; the number of suits for money and moveable property rose from 143,509 in the previous year to 156,380. This increase, however, does not mean that the propensity for litigation increased during the year because, as the report puts it, the rise was mainly due to the anxiety of plaintiffs to escape the increased court fees which became payable in January 1923. It might be said that the number of cases brought to the courts is large enough, even if this abnormal circumstance is left out of account; on the face of it, the number of cases instituted seems to be too large as compared with the population and commercial and industrial progress of the province. A closer analysis of the figures, however, will substantially modify this impression, and show that most of the cases were of a genuine character. Of the suits disposed of during the year, 17.34 per cent concluded without trial and 53.8 per cent were referred to arbitration, while only 27.73 per cent of the cases were contested. In other words, as many as three-fourths of the cases were either not contested or were amicably settled by the parties.

## Address gaps in defence allocation

Need to prioritise military modernisation, which determines combat proficiency



CUDAY BHASKAR  
DIRECTOR, SOCIETY FOR  
POLICY STUDIES

THE defence allocation in the interim Budget for the 2024-25 financial year is Rs 6.21 lakh crore (around \$75 billion). This has been described by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) as a record allocation. The MoD's press release says that this amount is 4.72 per cent more than what had been budgeted in the 2023-24 financial year, even as Rs 1.72 lakh crore (which amounts to 27.67 per cent of the defence budget) has been allocated for capital expenditure — a critical component for modernisation of the military inventory.

Putting these figures in context, India plans to acquire 31 MQ-9B armed drones from America's General Atomics Aeronautical Systems at an estimated cost of \$4 billion. This amounts to a whopping Rs 33,000 crore and the payment will be spread out over an agreed time period of a few years.

For any nation, investing in its defence preparedness in an adequate and sustainable manner is a complex and costly process. There are many indicators to assess the defence allocation. The guiding tenet is that each nation and its elected government (in democracies) or the elite in power (in authoritarian regimes) decide how much they are willing to spend on their military capabilities. The total amount as a percentage of the GDP is a useful benchmark.

In 2022, this ratio for major nations varied from 0.6 per cent in the case of Indonesia to 7.4 per cent of the GDP for



NOTE OF CAUTION: Make-believe can prove to be dangerous in national security matters. ANI

Saudi Arabia, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). India was estimated to have spent 2.4 per cent of the GDP for military purposes. This amounted to \$81.4 billion. On the SIPRI list, India was fourth after the US (\$877 billion), China (\$292 billion) and Russia (\$86.4 billion).

The allocation for the border-guarding Central police forces are not included in the defence budget (they are under the purview of the Home Ministry). Hence, the actual allocation to the Indian defence establishment, comprising the three armed forces, the Coast Guard, the Defence Research and Development Organisation and the defence PSUs and factories, is different from the SIPRI figure.

Against this backdrop, a more granular reading of the current defence allocation draws attention to structural trends of the last decade that present a not-so-rosy picture of India's defence spend.

The current Budget estimate (BE) for 2024-25 is an increase of under 5 per cent over the BE of 2023-24, but it may not even

Parliamentarians have drawn attention to the high level of obsolescence in the Indian military inventory.

compensate for inflation. To that extent, this could be seen as an interim, standstill allocation till the next government assumes office later this year.

However, what is more problematic is the pattern of defence allocation in relation to the GDP. As per a PRS Legislative Research report, in FY

2023-24, this figure was 1.97 per cent; in the current year, it is estimated to be 1.9 per cent. It merits recall that in 2018, the Standing Committee on Defence had recommended that the MoD should be allocated a fixed budget of about 3 per cent of the GDP to ensure adequate preparedness of the armed forces, but this recommendation has not been accepted by the government.

The first trendline of the last decade is that defence spending, which was about 2.2 per cent of the GDP in 2013-14, has gradually come down (barring a spike in one year to cater to the OROP and bunched payments, delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic) to below 2 per cent. Considering the political priorities, it is unlikely that this figure will increase in any meaningful and significant manner.

How does this affect the modernisation of the military inventory, which in turn determines the combat proficiency of the Indian *fauj*? The capital component of the BE is a good indicator and here again the trendline is not encouraging.

The current capital expendi-

ture has been pegged at Rs 1.72 lakh crore. This figure has to be contextualised in two ways. The first is the slow decline in capital allocation. The PRS report (February 2023) notes that while this was 32 per cent of the defence budget in 2013-14, it was estimated to have come down to 29 per cent in 2023-24.

Furthermore, given that India is among the top importers of military inventory, the rupee's value against the dollar is an indicator of how much India is actually able to buy in the global market. It was Rs 60.95 per dollar in 2014 and slid to Rs 83.1 (as on January 10, 2024). This would automatically depress the forex value of the rupee when paying for past and current acquisitions.

To their credit, parliamentarians have drawn attention to the high level of obsolescence in the Indian military inventory. In 2018, the Standing Committee on Defence cautioned that while a modern military ought to have an equal share (33.3 per cent each) of its equipment in the three categories (vintage, current and state-of-the-art), the Army had 68 per cent of its equipment in the vintage category, 24 per cent in the current one and a mere 8 per cent in the state-of-the-art category. It also noted that the Army had a substantial deficiency of weapons, stores and ammunition. And as the PRS report points out, the committee "found that adequate attention has been lacking with respect to both policy and budget for modernising the ageing armoury", which represents a hiatus in long-term strategising.

The next government will have to address these critical gaps in higher defence policy and resource allocation if India is to deal with the many challenges it is likely to face in the near future. Make-believe can prove to be dangerous in national security matters, as the events of October 1962 demonstrated.

## THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

The need of the hour for the armed forces is to embrace change and adopt cutting-edge technology. — Gen Bipin Rawat

## Highs and lows of recovery operation

LT GEN HARWANT SINGH (RETD)

BACK in 1964, a three-tonne Army vehicle with two occupants went missing from among the vehicles deployed for stocking in Ladakh. A search was carried out at various traffic checkpoints, but no trace was found of the vehicle and the men.

Before the onset of winter and closing of Zoji La, all companies deployed on this route were required to cross the mountain pass by October 24. The last to pull out was the recovery company at Khalsi in the Indus valley. In the second half of October, as the seasonal melting of snow came to an end, the water level in the Indus river dropped. The company personnel, while they were moving out of Khalsi, spotted a vehicle nearly submerged in the river.

Obviously, this was the missing vehicle. The company commander, a young Captain with just four years of service, decided to recover it from the riverbed, even though he had a deadline to meet for reaching his destination with his colleagues.

A makeshift raft was constructed and lowered into the river with the help of a rope, with two volunteers (a JCO and an NCO) standing on it. The JCO succeeded in attaching the tow chain to the vehicle, but before the raft could move away, the chain was pulled. The raft capsized, throwing both the JCO and the NCO into the water. While the NCO managed to swim to safety, the JCO was swept away (his body was never found and he was presumed dead).

Decidedly, someone was at fault for not conducting the operation with due care and diligence. The unit commander was apparently responsible for the tragedy. Some action against him was warranted.

In his defence, the Captain contended that as his unit was the last to cross Zoji La, it had no time to carry out a proper retrieval of the missing vehicle. He could have left it to be recovered later by the personnel at Leh. He claimed that the operation was expedited so as to retrieve the bodies of the two soldiers who were believed to be inside the vehicle, or to rescue them, in case they were still alive.

In the JCO's citation, it was highlighted that he volunteered to enter the river with the main aim of searching for the soldiers rather than to fish out the vehicle. He was posthumously awarded the Ashok Chakra.

The Captain, who was initially being held responsible for the JCO's death, finally received the Army commander's commendation for his well-intentioned effort. Sometimes, the difference between a kick and a pat on the back can be slender.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## The Gandhis must go

Refer to 'No takers for Gandhi family covenant' (*Nous Indica*); the Gandhis have become a liability for the Congress and the nation at large. The family lacks the ability to lead, and hence, it does not appeal to the masses. Rahul Gandhi, for example, has a "nervous, unformed quality" about him, as former US President Barack Obama once pointed out. From embarking on Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra to spending time with porters at a railway station, the Gandhi scion's best efforts to connect with the masses are falling flat. The Gandhis are holding on to the Congress as if they own it. It is unfortunate that the family is putting itself above the party.

VIRENDER SINGH LATHER, KARNAL

## Congress a rudderless ship

Apropos of 'No takers for Gandhi family covenant'; the family has lost much of its sheen. The party that was once helmed by stalwarts like Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi no longer has a competent leader. Sonia and Rahul Gandhi lack the leadership skills that Nehru and Indira had. Despite being in politics for decades, Sonia remains an 'outsider'. Rahul may have come a long way since he was labelled 'Pappu' by his detractors, but he is not capable of anchoring the party. The Congress is committing one political blunder after another. The Gandhis and the Congress must treat all coalition partners as equals.

WG CDR CL SEHGAL (RETD), JALANDHAR

## Boost for housing

With reference to 'Housing for all'; the Central Government has done well to improve rural housing under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin. Announcing a fresh scheme in the interim Budget for housing for the middle class is another step in the right direction. Owning a house is every person's dream. It is unfortunate that though the middle class plays a key role in keeping the economy running, most people in this group have no choice but to live in rented accommodation. The construction of two crore houses over the next five years will be a boon for many people across the country.

KR BHARTI, SHIMLA

## US-India ties

Refer to 'US drones'; after a hiccup, the US has finally cleared the sale of MQ-9B drones to India in a deal worth nearly \$4 billion. The White House had its way after some posturing because scuppering the deal would have undermined its policy objective of positioning India as a counterweight to China and seeking its help in ensuring the safety of sea lanes in the Indian Ocean and the Gulf region at a time when the situation is volatile there. Surprisingly, the US administration has taken a call on selling drones to India despite the ongoing probe into the alleged plot by an Indian national to kill designated terrorist Gurbatwant Singh Pannun.

GREGORY FERNANDES, MUMBAI

## A belated honour

Apropos of the report 'Bharat Ratna for LK Advani, architect of Ram Mandir movement'; PM Narendra Modi announced the government's decision to confer India's highest civilian honour on BJP veteran LK Advani, the man who shaped the Ram Janmabhoomi movement which witnessed a fitting finale with the consecration of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya recently. Advani is largely credited with the electoral and political rise of the saffron party in the late 1980s and the 1990s, which is evident by the fact that the BJP — which won only two Lok Sabha seats in the 1984 General Election — bagged 85 in the 1989 polls, 120 in 1991 and 161 in 1996. The honour for Advani (96) was long overdue.

KUMAR GUPT, VIA MAIL

## Reader's tryst with The Tribune

I welcome *The Tribune's* decision to launch three four-page daily pullouts — *Delhi Tribune*, *Haryana Tribune* and *Himachal Tribune* — to deliver hyperlocal news to readers. I was introduced to *The Tribune* by my teacher in school. Seven decades on, my bond with this paper is as strong as ever. It is commendable how the newspaper, despite the many vicissitudes during its journey from Lahore to Chandigarh, has faithfully upheld the legacy of its founder Dyal Singh Majithia and is going strong as a leading daily.

MOHINDER SINGH, NEW DELHI



# A small nation's attempt at playing the bully



**P STODDAN**  
FORMER AMBASSADOR

**W**HAT if your small neighbour thinks it can teach you a lesson? Normally, it is the big countries that tend to lord it over small ones. For instance, the US has been throwing its weight around in nearby or far-off places, such as Cuba, Panama, Iraq, Syria, Libya and now Yemen. China is a big-time bully in Asia, constantly using coercion and intimidation to push its unlawful claims and project its power deep into the maritime heart of Southeast Asia. China knows that bullying works. It has been successful in bringing many governments into submission. Several Western nations, after a show of resistance, have ultimately bowed to China. Even the mighty America bent eventually for deal-making, sending envoys to buy peace with China. As if bullying is not enough, Beijing has been resorting to humiliating countries that have defied it. Australia is the latest case in point. It has been punished for taking the lead in banning the use of Huawei's 5G network equipment and calling for a probe into the origins of Covid-19.

The list could be endless. Likewise, Russia has been accused of using aggressive and heavy-handed tactics against its neighbours like Georgia, Armenia, Ukraine and Moldova through its support for the breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Crimea, Donetsk and Donbas' Luhansk. Russian President Vladimir Putin had stirred a controversy in 2014 by belittling the existence of Kazakh statehood by stating that "Kazakhs never had any statehood" before the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. Since then, many Russian leaders have touted the idea that the territory of Kazakhstan was given as a 'gift' to the Kazakh people by the Russians and that it would be in their advantage to "remain in the greater Russian world". Surely, such statements couldn't be dismissed as fringe sentiments. Putin's remarks on Kazakhstan came just months after Russia annexed Crimea. Many countries wonder if they will be next. In a most recent case, Uzbekistan's foreign ministry had to summon the Russian Ambassador over a controversial remark made by nationalist politician Zakhar Prilepin, who called for Russia to 'annex' Uzbekistan, whose labour migrants come en masse to work in Russia. Of course, such statements coming from Russian chauvinists receive a furious response from former republics. At



**OWN GOAL:** Maldives President Muizzu's anti-India campaign would adversely impact his nation. PHOTO: AP

the same time, Prilepin's statement has been applauded by other Russians who talk about the need to disavow the collapse of the Soviet Union. China's attempt at driving a wedge between India and its neighbours is well-known. Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu is a rabid Islamist whose 'small-country politician' mindset is being used by China, Pakistan and Turkey to rile India. They may have used Muizzu to corner India while they prefer to hide behind the scenes. It is necessary to view the move as a calculated component of their messaging. Muizzu made the right noises during his recent visit to China. He signed several MoUs, including one on becoming China's 'security partner' for four years from this year. China

The Maldives' unprovoked attack on India was a case of reverse bullying. New Delhi needs to make an example of the island nation.

promised to build a commercial harbour and expand the airport in Male to boost tourism, besides integrating the Maldivian economy with China's flagship Belt and Road Initiative and the development of the blue economy. The joint communiqué talked of a "comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership", with both sides agreeing to firmly support each other in safeguarding their respective core interests, upholding national sovereignty, independence and national dignity and firmly opposing external interference in the affairs of the Maldives. These are things for India to get worried about, especially with regards to jointly developing the blue economy and Chinese 'research vessels' and spy ships prowling in the Indian Ocean, collect-

ing sensitive data. After his return from Beijing, Muizzu struck a defiant note, saying that his country may be small but that "doesn't give them the licence to bully us". The President asserted that the Maldives is not in anyone's backyard and stressed that the Indian Ocean did not belong to a specific country. But his small-country syndrome is counterproductive when it comes to realism. The Chinese are no fools to sacrifice their market interests in India just for the sake of half-a-million Maldivian population. Beijing is a master at using small countries as a means for psychologically bullying others. To let others attack is a mode of aggression — an assault by proxy applied by the Chinese in their non-contact warfare or information warfare strategy. Cyberbullying, for example, is being increasingly used for verbal abuse or name-calling to defame leaders. Three junior Maldivian ministers were used to make derogatory remarks against the Indian leadership. This is a new method of warfare. Of course, the episode has hurt Indians, who expressed anger. The comments had triggered an instant outcry, with '#Boycott Maldives' and '#Say No to Maldives' trending on social media. Indians cancelled their trips to the island nation, while tour operators pledged not to hard-sell the Maldives. It

goes to show how seemingly harmless acts can trigger disruption. However, Muizzu's anti-India campaign would prove detrimental to the Maldives sooner rather than later. His brinkmanship will create severe hardship for his people, who rely on imports of essential items from India. His actions are bound to lead the country into financial debt, political turmoil and civil strife. Muizzu may be dreaming of transforming the Maldives into Singapore, but he is forgetting that in 1988, it was India that helped the nation thwart a coup attempt by businessman Abdullah Luthufi and a few armed mercenaries. The majority of the Maldivians do not wish to jeopardise their ties with India. They would rather worry about their future and not about Muizzu. India hasn't done anything coercive against its smaller neighbours. Nor does India have a desire to alienate a country. When heading the erstwhile USSR, Joseph Stalin once asked then Indian Ambassador: "What is the name of this tiny Indian island?" The envoy replied: "This is not an Indian island. It is Sri Lanka, an independent nation." A puzzled Stalin asked: "Why?" The Maldives' unprovoked attack on India was a case of reverse bullying. New Delhi needs to make an example of the island nation.

# Radicalisation bodes ill for strife-torn Manipur



**JAIDEEP SAIKIA**  
SECURITY & TERRORISM ANALYST

**T**HE past nine months have witnessed grave travesty of justice in Manipur. People have been uprooted, countless lives have been lost and several women have been sexually assaulted. One can imagine the sangai, the famed dancing deer of Kangleipak (ancient Manipur), shedding tears. The ad hoc manner in which normalcy is being sought to be restored in the state is bewildering. Even as the ethnic chasm deepens, the most disturbing thing is that the state has allowed a radical outfit, the Arambai Tenggol, to have free rein. These 'dart-wielding horsemen' of yore have anointed themselves as the protectors of Meitei supremacy. On January 24, the group's leader, Korounganba Khuman, summoned 37 Imphal valley-based legislators and two MPs and coerced them into taking an

oath in front of Manipur's primordial deity Pakhangba to 'protect Manipur'. While it is not altogether a new phenomenon in the North-East (the All Assam Students' Union and the United Liberation Front of Asom had exhibited such vigilantism during their heyday), the chastisement that the valley is witnessing is disturbing. Some of the demands that elected representatives have been pressured to convey to New Delhi, including the institution of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Manipur and the fencing of the border with Myanmar, are perfectly valid, the latter notwithstanding the fact that the Free Movement Regime would have to be reworked. However, demands such as the withdrawal of the Assam Rifles, abrogation of the Suspension of Operations (SoO) agreement with Kuki militants and the removal of 'illegal' Kuki immigrants from the Scheduled Tribe list are fraught with danger. The fact that the Kangla Fort episode took place close on the heels of a three-member Union Government team visiting Imphal is even more disconcerting. Certain informed people are questioning whether



**ETHNIC UNREST:** Manipur has been on the boil since May 2023. PHOTO: REUTERS

the Kangla event had the blessings of the Centre, so silent it has been both in the run-up to the event and afterwards. Although it began as a localised arrangement, the SoO pact with Kuki militants was formalised on August 22, 2008, after a due process by the Ministry of Home Affairs. The events of May 3, 2023, triggered clashes between the Meiteis and Kukis. The SoO mechanism may be faulted for a number of reasons, including the fact that arms which are now being used against the Meitei community and security forces were permit-

It is a poor reflection on the Indian republic that a section of its citizenry is seeking the removal of a force that has sacrificed so much for Manipur.

ted to be retained. The Union Government has to be called out for this unacceptable oversight. The history of cessation of hostilities with belligerent groups in the North-East shows that in most of the cases, illegal arms were allowed to be retained. The erstwhile Bodo Liberation Tigers in Assam, too, was allowed such absurd concessions. But it is also true that if the Kukis were allowed to retain their arms, organisations such as Arambai Tenggol and other Meitei groups looted police armouries after May 3 without let or hindrance.

Indeed, these are the very weapons that are being used to threaten, maim and kill Kukis. A dialogue process, if it leads to the cessation of violence by even a minimal degree, is desirable. New Delhi should not, therefore, even countenance the abrogation of an arrangement that has withstood 15 long years. Negotiations, great effort and bridge-building have gone into firming up such an agreement. Course correction should guide discretion and the rule of law. Rearguard action, including stringent enforcement of the SoO ground rules, should be accorded priority. By the same token, the issue of 'illegal' migrants among the Kuki population has to be carefully handled. After all, if there are 'new Kukis' such as Thadous in Manipur, there are also Meiteis who are Christians. It would, therefore, not be correct to take a simplistic view of matters. In any event, if an NRC exercise with 1951 as the cut-off year is undertaken, as demanded by Arambai Tenggol, the question of illegal migration would be automatically addressed. Regarding the clamour for the removal of the Assam Rifles from the valley, it is a

ridiculous demand. If the Arambai Tenggol feels that the Assam Rifles is being partisan and is consequently seeking the ouster of the force from Manipur, it is clearly because of the firm manner in which the personnel have acted against valley-based insurgent groups such as the United Liberation Front (Koirang), People's Liberation Army (Manipur) and the People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak. These and a couple of others, collectively known as the Group of Five, are largely from the Meitei lot. Moreover, it is a known fact that the Assam Rifles has decisively acted against Kuki militants. Derision for a force raised as the 'Chachar Levy' way back in 1835 — and one which has been hailed as the 'Sentinels of the North-East' — is unwarranted. It is a poor reflection on a republic which has stepped into its 75th year that a section of its citizenry is seeking the removal of a force that has sacrificed so much for Manipur. Radicalisation of the kind that Arambai Tenggol symbolises has to be nipped in the bud. The Indian republic cannot afford to stand by and watch such absurd abandonment of authority.

**QUICK CROSSWORD**

**ACROSS**  
1 Pope (7)  
4 Entice to do wrong (5)  
7 Actual (4)  
8 Volcanic disaster 1883 (8)  
10 Directly and frankly (2,4,4)  
12 A forge (6)  
13 Speak ill of (6)  
15 Something demanding redress (6,4)  
18 Clearly defined (8)  
19 Broad smile (4)  
20 Immature (5)  
21 Rumour (7)

**DOWN**  
1 Crucial member of team (5)  
2 Drug inducing sleep (8)  
3 Remote (3,3)  
4 Assume command (4,6)  
5 Ship's officer (4)  
6 Exchange in part payment (5,2)  
9 Misleading clue (3,7)  
11 Painting, sculpture etc. (4,4)  
12 Be enough for (7)  
14 Conclude (6)  
16 Pop (5)  
17 Bill of fare (4)

**SATURDAY'S SOLUTION**  
**Across:** 1 Make off with, 9 Optical, 10 Tenor, 11 Dire, 12 Highbrow, 14 Nerves, 16 Wealth, 18 Superior, 19 Opal, 22 Waive, 23 Shotgun, 24 Case in point.  
**Down:** 2 Alter, 3 Each, 4 Fulfill, 5 Watchmen, 6 Tendril, 7 Hold one's own, 8 Draw the line, 13 Reprieve, 15 Replica, 17 Poison, 20 Pagan, 21 Polo.

**SU DO KU**

**SATURDAY'S SOLUTION**

7	4				
	2	9	8		3
1				9	
4			9	7	
	7	5	6	1	9
				5	8
			3		4
3				2	5
				7	8

MEDIUM

**CALENDAR**

**FEBRUARY 5, 2024, MONDAY**

- Shaka Samvat 1945
- Magha Shaka 16
- Magha Parvishite 23
- Hijari 1445
- Krishna Paksha Tithi 10, up to 5.25 pm
- Dhruva Yoga up to 10.52 am
- Anuradha Nakshatra up to 7.54 am
- Moon in Scorpio sign
- Gandmoola start 7.54 am

**FORECAST**

SUNSET	MONDAY	18-02 HRS
SUNRISE	TUESDAY	07:10 HRS
CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	18	09
New Delhi	22	09
Amritsar	15	08
Bathinda	18	08
Jalandhar	17	09
Ludhiana	18	09
Bhiani	19	09
Hisar	18	10
Sirsa	18	10
Dharamsala	15	03
Manali	08	-05
Shimla	12	-01
Srinagar	06	-02
Jammu	19	08
Kargil	04	-06
Leh	03	-11
Dehradun	18	09
Mussoorie	10	02

TEMPERATURE IN °C



**The Statesman**  
Incorporating and directly descended  
from THE FRIEND OF INDIA - Founded 1818

## The other India

In the vast tapestry of India's economic narrative, there exists a stark duality that often evades the spotlight - the tale of two Indias, where urban prosperity dances to a different rhythm than the rural heartland's struggle for survival. The recent insights into the challenges faced by the rural majority paint a poignant portrait of economic disparity that demands our attention and contemplation. As the statistics trumpet India's forecasted annual growth of 7.3 per cent, a closer inspection reveals a divergence in fortunes that transcends mere numbers. For millions in rural India, an economic slowdown has become an oppressive reality, contrary to the nation's overall economic triumph. The crux of the issue lies in the fraying fabric of rural employment. Fewer jobs, intensified competition, and dwindling farm output conspire to erode the financial stability of those living in the agricultural hinterland. A growth rate in farm output that has dwindled from 4 per cent to 1.8 per cent in the current fiscal year accentuates the challenges faced by a sector that employs over 40 per cent of the country's workforce. While the government projects an image of robust economic health, indicative data points suggest a slow recovery in rural areas. The demand for the government's minimum job guarantee scheme is on the rise, and agriculture growth in the September quarter remains lacklustre. It prompts a critical examination of the claimed "inclusive growth" narrative, especially when the daily struggles of families in states like Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, and Odisha starkly contradict the buoyant economic projections. The upcoming elections cast a looming shadow over this economic dissonance. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, seeking a third term, might find it imperative to bolster rural subsidies in response to the palpable distress. The expected victory for the Bharatiya Janata Party would be propelled not so much by rural economic rectification but by a lacklustre opposition.

The crux of the matter extends beyond electoral politics. It is a tale of diminishing rural incomes, heightened inflation, and an unyielding cycle of debt for those grappling with hardships. The rural economy's decline is further exacerbated by environmental factors, with a drop in key crop outputs due to erratic weather patterns and falling reservoir levels. The narrative of rural India's struggles contrasts sharply with the urban success story, where median salaries have seen a robust 10 per cent increase in 2023. The sales of high-ticket items like smartphones and SUVs in urban areas underscore a thriving consumer market. Yet, this urban affluence appears as a mere echo in the vast rural landscapes, where two-wheeler sales, considered a barometer of rural consumption, are below pre-pandemic levels. Bridging the urban-rural economic gap necessitates a holistic approach that addresses structural issues, bolsters agricultural sustainability, and ensures that the economic renaissance touted on global platforms permeates every corner of the nation. The time is ripe for introspection and action, not just for political expediency but for the very essence of inclusive growth India aspires to achieve.

## Strategic gaps

In a rapidly evolving geopolitical landscape, the United States finds itself recalibrating its military readiness, particularly in the Pacific, as concerns intensify over a potential conflict involving Taiwan. Recent joint exercises with Australia, notably the Talisman Sabre drills, not only showcased the deepening defence cooperation between the two nations but also revealed a discreet yet critical aspect - the creation of new stockpiles of military equipment left behind in Australia. The significance of this move lies in the US military's recognition of the vulnerabilities within its logistics network, a pivotal factor often overshadowed by discussions of fire-power and technological prowess. The aftermath of Talisman Sabre saw approximately 330 vehicles, 130 containers, and assorted equipment strategically positioned in southeastern Australia. This cache, previously undisclosed, can sustain up to three logistics companies comprising 500 or more soldiers - an essential resource for ensuring timely and efficient supply lines to fighters in potential conflicts. The looming spectre of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan has prompted a re-evaluation of the US military's logistical capabilities. Interviews with current and former officials underscore a consensus that American military logistics in the Pacific represent a vulnerable point, one that adversaries might exploit to cripple US air and sea power. The fear is that China, in a hypothetical conflict, could target jet fuel supplies or refuelling ships, thus circumventing direct engagements with heavily armed fighter jets or the sinking of the US fleet. In response, the US military is strategically spreading its logistical hubs across the Pacific region, including establishing warehouses in Australia. This move is not merely about addressing immediate concerns but is part of a broader strategy aimed at enhancing the mobility and distribution of US forces in the region. The US Department of Defense emphasises collaboration with allies to achieve this goal, reflecting a commitment to shared security interests. However, critics argue that the current pace and allocation of resources are insufficient to address the urgency of the situation. While the US military acknowledges the need for a more dispersed and agile logistics network, some voices, such as Congressman Mike Waltz, caution against extended timelines.

In the face of intelligence warnings blinking red for the next five years, Mr Waltz points to the disparity in timelines to address these risks, with some projections stretching to 10, 15, or even 20 years. The crux of the matter lies in finding a delicate balance between strategic foresight and immediate action. The Talisman Sabre exercises and the subsequent stockpiling of military equipment in Australia demonstrate a proactive approach to mitigating logistical vulnerabilities. Yet, the critique underscores the broader challenge the US faces: how to reconcile the pressing need for security measures with the bureaucratic timelines inherent in large-scale military planning and implementation. The road ahead demands not just strategic foresight but an unwavering commitment to timely action to safeguard regional stability and security.

# Red Sea Turmoil

The Suez Canal Authority has reported that navigation traffic in the Suez Canal has not so far been affected by what is happening in the Red Sea. However, on 10 January 2024, the UN Security Council adopted a resolution demanding a cessation of Houthi attacks on merchant vessels. Undaunted by the resolution, the Houthis continued to launch drone and missile attacks on international ships and warships in the Red Sea. In retaliation, on 12 January, the coalition launched its first airstrikes against Houthi targets in Yemen. Houthis have pledged to retaliate



The Red Sea is a narrow inland sea corridor between the Arabian Peninsula and Africa. It extends southeast from Suez at Egypt for about 2,000 km to the Strait of Mandeb which connects with the Gulf of Aden and then with the Arabian Sea.

It separates the coasts of Egypt, Sudan and Eritrea in Africa from those of Saudi Arabia and Yemen in West Asia. According to Encyclopaedia Britannica, the name Red Sea is derived from the colour changes observed in its waters. The Red Sea, at present, is under great turmoil.

The crisis began in October 2023 when Yemen's Houthi movement initiated a series of attacks targeting southern Israel and ships in the Red Sea that it claimed were linked to Israel.

The Houthi movement, aligned with Hamas, launched attacks on Israel employing missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles. However, ships with no apparent links to Israel were also targeted.

Indian merchant vessels have also not been spared. Houthi militants had fired on merchant vessels of various countries in the Red Sea off the coast of Yemen, in the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, a chokepoint of the global economy.

According to reports, the blockade and attack have resulted in hundreds of cargo ships and tankers being rerouted around the Cape of Good Hope, the southern tip of Africa to avoid attacks in the Red Sea.

This has the inevitable effect of rise in transportation costs and insurance liability for ships, adversely affecting international trade and commerce and causing destination delays.

According to the Global Trade Research Institute (GTRI), the Red Sea crisis may push shipping costs by 60 per cent, insurance premium by 20 per cent and delay due to rerouting by 20 days. The delay may also cause potential cargo loss from piracy and attacks. Piracy attacks have also increased in recent months.

It is reported in the press that the disruption of the Red Sea shipping lanes due to the Houthi conflict has significantly impacted Indian trade with the Middle East, Africa and Europe. India is heavily reliant on the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait for crude

oil and LNG imports.

Overall merchandise trade with these key regions has faced substantial economic and security risks from disruption in the Red Sea corridor. It is also reported that the Red Sea route accounts for 50 per cent of the country's exports and 30 per cent of imports.

The country's overall merchandise trade was about Rs 100 lakh crore in 2022-23, last fiscal, with 70 per cent in value and 95 per cent in volume being seaborne. The conflict has necessitated India to consider the alternative longer route of Cape of Good Hope which would lead to increased energy costs and of other commodities creating an adverse fall out on India's international trade. The Houthi movement is a Shi'ite militant organisation that controls a large part of northern Yemen along with the Red Sea littoral. It is supported and funded by Iran. The state of Yemen has been embroiled in civil war for more than a decade and the Houthis have an important role to play in the escalation of civil war in this West Asian country.

Following the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war, Iranian supported militant groups across West Asia including the Houthis, expressed support for the Palestinians. In order to end attacks in the Red Sea, the Houthis demanded a ceasefire in Gaza and an end to Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip.

In political and diplomatic circles, the Red Sea crisis is also known as the United States-Iran proxy war. The Houthis are in alliance with the Axis of Resistance, an informal anti-Israel and anti-Western political and military coalition led by the Iranian government.

It includes the Syrian Arab Republic, Lebanese Shia militant group Hezbollah, Hamas of Gaza and various other militant groups in Palestine. Hamas, the Islamic Resistance movement, is the largest and most capable militant group in the Palestine territories.

The Red Sea connects the Indian Ocean with the Mediterranean Sea through the Suez

Canal. It is one of the most heavily travelled waterways in the world carrying traffic between Europe and Asia. Before the Suez Canal was opened for traffic in 1869, merchant and commercial vessels had to travel between Europe and Asia

through the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa. The Suez Canal reduced the distance, cost and time to a considerable extent for the shipping industry. In a year, some 30,000 vessels use the canal, with the tanker trade, specially very large and ultra large crude carriers (VLCC and ULCC) being the most lucrative for Egypt's economy.

The income from the canal is the major source of revenue after tourism for the government of Egypt. To accommodate these large carriers, the canal has been widened, deepened and furnished with every modern aid to safety and speed. When it was opened, the canal had a draught of 26 ft. Today it is more than 70 ft. This is a stupendous development. Savings in distance, time and transport cost have a major influence in planning the shipping world.

Access to the Suez Canal remains very important because it is a transit route and a super-highway for oil from the Persian Gulf. For naval ships cruising between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean, the highway is of great strategic importance.

The present geo-political scene around the Suez is unstable due to uninterrupted piracy in Somali waters near the Gulf of Aden and the situation in West Asia caused by the Israel-Hamas war. The crisis has adversely affected world trade and commerce. Prosperity Garden is a US-led international military operation by a multinational coalition formed in December 2023 to respond to Houthi-led attacks on shipping in the Red Sea. The coalition currently has more than twenty members of which ten are anonymously involved. The known members are Britain, Bahrain, Canada and Norway. France, Italy and Spain have declined to participate.

Egypt and Saudi Arabia,

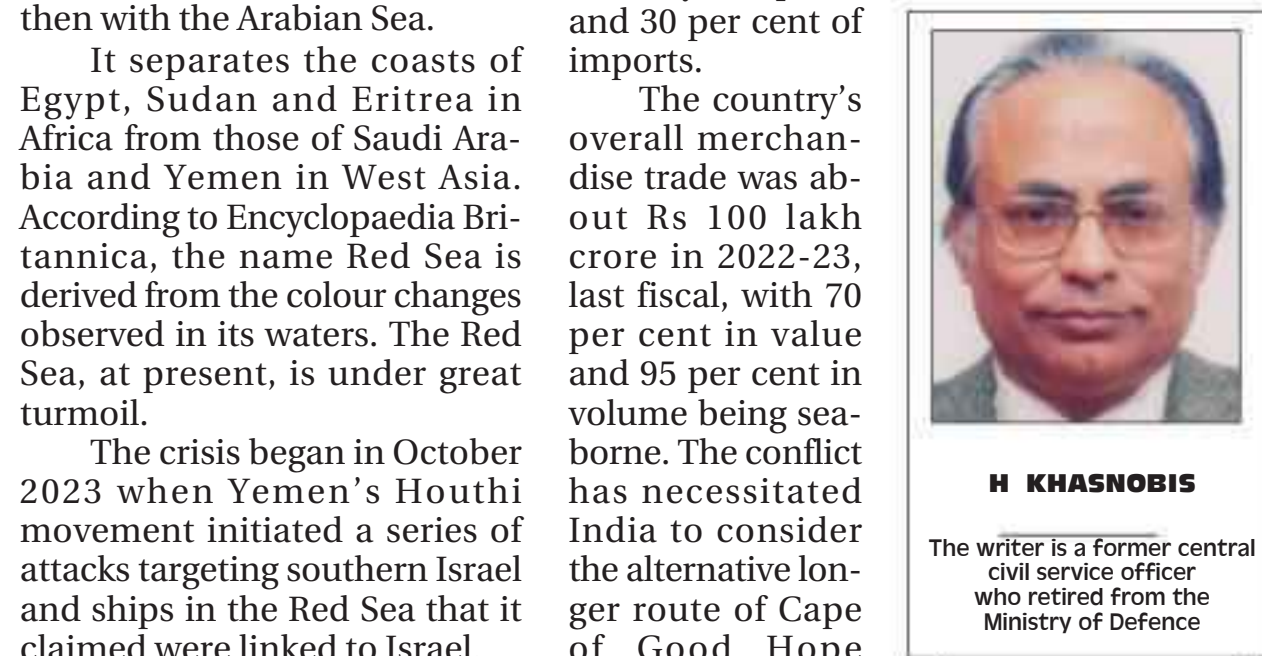
both economically reliant on unhindered commercial shipping in the Red Sea-Suez corridor are absent from the listed participants. The new military alliance is not free of problems. As Yemen is an Arab state, no other Arabian country will like to attack it. Many of these new alliance partners will not like to join a conflict posturing as supporters of Israel. They will also like to refrain from serious conflict in West Asia that is funded, supported, assisted and strategized covertly or overtly by Iran. The Suez Canal Authority has reported that navigation traffic in the Suez Canal has not so far been affected by what is happening in the Red Sea.

However, on 10 January 2024, the UN Security Council adopted a resolution demanding a cessation of Houthi attacks on merchant vessels.

Undaunted by the resolution, the Houthis continued to launch drone and missile attacks on international ships and warships in the Red Sea. In retaliation, on 12 January, the coalition launched its first airstrikes against Houthi targets in Yemen. Houthis have pledged to retaliate. The Israel-Hamas War and the Houthi onslaught on the Red Sea-Suez corridor have brought a dangerous turmoil in the geo-political scenario at the beginning of 2024.

It is not only West Asia that is affected. The geo-political scenario has wider repercussions. Globalisation has brought the world closer and made nations interdependent. Commerce and international trade has to flow to its destinations in a short time. The Suez Canal is a point in the global sea route between the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean. The access to the canal cannot be compromised at any cost.

The Red Sea will remain a veritable and inevitable geopolitical hot spot for the world for 2024. It may trigger larger confrontation and conflict. It is, accordingly, necessary to create and put in operation under the UN initiative a dedicated international maritime structure under a naval power for coordinating movement of ships up to Aden or Bab-el-Mandeb for their entry to the Red Sea and smooth passage to the Suez Canal. The Israel-Hamas war and the Houthi onslaught in the Red Sea are a cause of global apprehension.



**H. KHASNOBIS**  
The writer is a former central civil service officer who retired from the Ministry of Defence

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

editor@thestatesman.com

## Arrogance

SIR, The middle-class people in



the country are terribly shocked to hear that Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman did not deem it necessary to reduce the tax burden on them, which was

the need of the hour. Even the standard deduction remains unchanged.

The Finance Minister's interim budget for 2024-25 reflects the ruling party's insensitive attitude towards the common people due to its near certainty to come back to power.

This sort of arrogance does not augur well and the people are bound to react at the appropriate time in a befitting manner.

Yours, etc.,  
Arun Gupta,  
Kolkata, 2 February.

## UNCOUTH

SIR, Apropos Debaprasad Bhattacharya's letter to the editor 'Keep it civil' published in the 2 February 2024 edition of your esteemed paper, it is abominable to civil society that some politicians use the language of the gutter. One's healthy upbringing sows the seeds of one's refined tongue.

Many politicians of our country have overstepped the bounds of civility in recent times. The poll watchdog should deny electoral contests to politicians who do not hesitate to barter away their dignity for an uncouth tongue.

Yours, etc.,  
Anindya Ghosal,  
Burdwan, 2 February.

A MEMBER OF THE **ANN** ASIA NEWS NETWORK

ASIAN VOICES

## Focus on mental health

Mental health is a basic human right. It emphasises the right to be protected from mental health risks by having accessible, acceptable and quality care and being included in society. Mental health is more than the absence of mental disorders as it is the ability to live with financial and emotional stability and integrity.

The World Health Organisation describes mental health as a "state of well-being in which the individual realises his or her capabilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and can contribute to his or her community."

Globally, 1 in 7 adolescents experiences mental health conditions, and most remain undiagnosed and untreated. Seventy-one percent of people with psychosis do not receive mental health services and are vulnerable to social exclusion, discrimination, stigma, risk-taking behaviours, ill health and human rights violence.

Mental health systems worldwide have major gaps in governance, resources, services, information and technologies. The fulfilment of such gaps is crucial as they affect the country's mental health response.

A 2022 WHO report titled "World Mental Health Report: Transforming Mental Health for All" revealed the estimation that the loss of productivity across the life course attributed to mental health conditions will cost the global economy \$6 trillion by 2030. The report draws attention to poor

## THE KATHMANDU POST

mental health services globally and the need for mental health change. This serves as a landmark to guide renewed efforts in mental health, address the needs and bridge the gaps.

Nepal's mental health needs are high, but we are only taking baby steps in interventions. Nonetheless, the shift from seeking help from traditional healers to professional health specialists is gradually increasing. There are three main reasons to invest in mental health: Public health, human rights and socioeconomic development.

We have increased multisector intervention in mental health, including the National Mental Health Strategy and Action Plan 2020. The action plan focuses on integrating mental health services across all public health care system tiers.

This strategic plan describes the provision of free primary mental health services nationwide. The Community Mental Health Care Package 2074 intends to facilitate the implementation of the National Mental Health Policy. Even though community mental health programmes have been scaled up, there is a lack of clinical supervision of trained non-specialist service providers and a regular supply of psychotropic medications. These are essential for effectively implementing mental health services in primary care settings. WHO Quality Rights is a global initiative to improve care in mental health and related services and to promote the rights of people with psychosocial, intellectual and cognitive disabilities. It is a new approach to mental health that is right-based and recovery-oriented. There has been a paradigm shift in providing mental health services from the treatment, focusing on pathology and medications, to a holistic approach to recovery, social functioning and quality of life. This initiative focuses on capacity building to combat stigma and discrimination, creating community-based, person-centred and recovery-oriented services that respect and promote human rights, improve the quality of care and reform laws and policies in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and other international standards. The moral transformation in the treatment of mental health problems is a must to protect people's rights.

ARATI MITRA (d. 05-02-2010) — Aatima and Aapiya to all, fondly remembered by Jayanta, Sharmistha and Indrajit Mitra as well as Saheb and @mittirbariarchives.

## PERSONAL

ARATI MITRA (d. 05-02-2010) — Aatima and Aapiya to all, fondly remembered by Jayanta, Sharmistha and Indrajit Mitra as well as Saheb and @mittirbariarchives.



# Non-violence the best path for Palestine

BHARAT DOGRA

A path of non-violent struggle can often be the best forward when the cause is deeply rooted in justice and there is widespread recognition of this being so.

The Palestinian cause can be described, within the framework of the two-state solution, as the yearning of the Palestinian people for a state of their own for achieving a life of peace, dignity and justice without being hampered by others.

Framed in this way, without any threat to Israel or anyone else, the Palestinian cause can get widespread support in the international community, as well as overwhelming support among all those people who stand for peace and justice. While the support of the Arab countries may be the strongest, in addition there will be support also from distant places.

Such causes are best pursued in non-violent, open and transparent ways, not in violent and secretive ways. Truth is on their side, justice is on their side, reason is on their side. Hence open movements which are pursued in non-violent ways with continuity and can be sustained for a long enough time are the most suited in such conditions. If in the process people can acquire a much deeper and wider commitment to non-violence, this will be even better for the future of the people and their country.

Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela are only some of the great persons of the previous century who showed the way ahead with their non-violent struggles, whether in the form of civil disobedience or peaceful mass protest movements or in other ways. Their inspiring struggles should not be seen as merely a part of history but instead should inspire many more non-violent struggles in this century, whether for the cause of democracy, or environment protection, or for a life based on justice and dignity. The struggle of



the Palestinian people involves all these components, as issues relating to water, farming, fishing, livelihoods, and the growing problems relating to all of these in times of climate change are also involved.

In fact, the region is very vulnerable to climate change-related problems with its coastal areas, deserts and water scarcity. Hence if a two-state solution can be worked out peacefully then both Palestine and Israel will be freed from the burden of excessive militarization and will also be able to cooperate with each other for resolving the new problems arising from climate change.

Imagine a scene in which the struggle instead of being led by the battle cries of the likes of Hamas is instead led by peaceful processions of Palestinians who declare openly and loudly - their voice amplified by

increasingly sympathetic world media - that they also desire the welfare of all people of Israel and their only yearning and struggle is for a state of their own where they can live with peace and dignity. While it is likely that such a struggle will get the support of most countries as well as the UN, at the same time efforts can be made to make the change more acceptable to Israel by, for instance, several Western countries arranging a finance package to ensure that the settlers in the West Bank can return home to Israel in acceptable conditions without burdening the Israeli economy.

At the same time, of course, the international community should also arrange substantial relief for all those Palestinians who have been victimized and deprived in such horrible ways. Hence a non-violent struggle of

the Palestinians supported by the international community in such a way that the hostility of Israel is steadily reduced can give good results within a relatively short period of time and can provide a very inspirational chapter for the 21st century.

It must be realized that when the weaker and wronged side is preparing for a non-violent struggle, it is important also to work on the stronger adversary to increase the chances of an early settlement and to minimize the chances of any repressive actions. Hence the role of the international community, the United Nations, and of the peace movement in various parts of the world will be very important for ensuring a happy ending for such a non-violent struggle. In the process of making such an effort, the peace movements in various parts of the world can achieve

greater unity and increasing strength which will be useful for other peace initiatives as well. Reputed diplomats can also help in this.

In the present conditions, however, so much serious harm has been caused to the people of Gaza that any hope in the distressing situation can be brought about first and foremost only by a ceasefire followed by a big rehabilitation effort. This is the biggest need for these times. After this as the post-war situation is sought to be stabilized in a peaceful way, the path of non-violence should get much more importance in any efforts that are taken up to achieve a two-state solution and other justified demands of the Palestinians.

(The writer is Honorary Convener, Campaign to Save Earth Now. His recent books include Planet in Peril, Protecting Earth for Children and A Day in 2071.)

100 YEARS AGO

OCCASIONAL NOTE

If additional testimony were needed to the benefits of agricultural research it might be found in the latest report of the Department of Agriculture in the Central Provinces and Berar. As the result of the distribution of improved varieties of seeds, the Department can claim, at a conservative estimate, that the produce of the Province has been increased in value to an extent represented by at least Rs. 46 and half lakhs; and it appears that the odd Rs. 6 and half lakhs is more than enough to cover the cost of the departmental work. This is no more than a sample of the benefits within the reach of research. There can be no doubt, as the report says, that only the fringe of the vast subject of agricultural improvement has been touched hitherto, and unlimited possibilities of advance remain to be explored. Crores have been added to the agricultural wealth of Berar by the introduction of an improved variety of cotton some eighteen years ago; and it is anticipated that this achievement will be surpassed in future. It is only one chapter in the history of agricultural research in India - an illustration of the work carried on by the provincial agricultural departments and especially by the Pusa Institute which, it will not be forgotten, owes a good deal to the munificence of an American visitor, Mr. Phipps, during Lord Curzon's Viceroyalty.

NEWS ITEMS

INDIA'S MONEY POWER

LONDON, FEB. 4

The Times pays a tribute to the remarkable improvements recently effected by the Government of India in its financial mechanism as the result of merging the Presidency Banks into the Imperial Bank of India. The paper says that in no respect is this more beneficial than in the development of India's money power, particularly through the medium of the Imperial Bank. The Times further says that it is authoritative unofficial testimony to the fact that the Government has been enabled to make remittances to London of exceptional magnitude without disturbing the exchange market, and the Indian currency position may now be regarded as impregnable. Without remittances made this year the Government of India can pay its way abroad without coming into the exchange market for two years.

KIDNAPPER SENTENCED

RANGOON, FEB. 4

Mr. Satzler, District Magistrate, in sentencing a Burman to four months' rigorous imprisonment for abducting a Burmese girl from the care of a Buddhist monk, remarked that these kidnapping cases were becoming far too frequent, and judging from the crowd in Court the public were far too interested. In connection with the girl being in care of a Buddhist monk the magistrate held that she was not actually living in the monastery but in quarters in the garden. It had been quoted that monks on taking the cloth were supposed to take no more interest in women, but he knew the monks looked after relations, and he did not see that there was any difference in this case.

RELIGIOUS APATHY

Cardinal Mercier, in a pastoral letter from Brussels on the subject of the conversations regarding Anglican and Roman Catholic reunion, after emphasising that the meetings were private and did not amount to actual negotiations, explains the origin of the movement as due to the distress of ecclesiastical authorities at Liege at the alarming spread of religious apathy. The Cardinal says the decay of faith leads to a denial of all religion. This latter tendency is widespread, though its manifestations are more flagrant in Protestant than in Catholic countries. The conversations were conducted in a very loyal manner and were inspired by a desire to arrive at some satisfactory solution of the difficult questions at issue.

BRITISH POLICY IN INDIA

LONDON, FEB. 4

Mr. George Lansbury, M.P., writing in the Daily Herald suggests that the Government of India should send a "message of hope" to India, and he appeals to Sir Sydney Olivier to hold a consultation with the Viceroy in regard to the unconditional release of Mr. Gandhi and all other political prisoners. He urged that a Royal Commission should be set up in England to examine and report on the present position in India and the future relationship with Britain and the dominions. Mr. Lansbury suggests that Mr. Gandhi, Mr. Srinivasa Sastri, Mrs. Annie Besant and the Ali brothers should be invited to visit England in order to give evidence.

SOUTHERN COMMAND

It is officially announced that Lieutenant-General Sir Harold Walker has been selected to succeed Lieutenant-General Sir William Marshall as the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Southern Command, and is expected to arrive in India at the end of February.

IT CAME TO MIND | MANISH NANDY

## A walk on the beach

I walk. Every Saturday I walk with a bunch of friends on tracks and trails, in parks and promenades, alongside lakes and rivers. We vary the turf and trajectory every time, so we get to have a different view of the city. Because it is luckily a port city, we are walking today on the beach.

I am new to this town. I have been here less than six months and feel like a voyager scanning a new planet. Driving around is one way of getting to know the town. It embeds a map of the place in my mind. But it gives me a macro-view; I miss a lot of the micro-charms as I must focus on the tricky corners and trickier traffic. So, I have started to walk around quite a bit. And I have joined a gregarious group that explores different parts of the city every weekend. I get to meet new people as I discover new parts of the city.

It is early morning and I feel lucky to find a parking space right next to the beach. I walk over to join the group of hikers.

As I trudge through the sand, in my path is a small child crawling toward the water. Behind him sit his young parents on a bench, talking and laughing. Presently the mother notices her runaway child and runs to pick him up and bring him back. The child fidgets frantically and, the moment his mother places him on



Illustration by : Debabrata Chakrabarty

the ground, tries crawling away again.

There are not yet too many people on the beach, and I spot our group readily. A motley group of fifteen men and women, many in shorts and all in caps. The luminous sun justifies the headgear and presages the warmth to come. A high tide earlier must have moistened the shore, for the ground

feels packed and firm, easier to walk on than drier sand.

We walk briskly on the beach, a row of large and small beach houses on our left and the sea on the right. The water is calm, the tiniest waves undulating, glinting in the sun. I am not good at identifying birds, but I spot some herons and egrets and, further down, flocks of sparrows and

waterfowls.

The sun is rising but a brisk sea breeze is keeping us cool as we march on. Depending on our walking ardor, we tend to fragment into smaller clusters, talking of our weekend plans, last dinner fiasco or culinary triumph, future travel or vacation dreams.

Since it is a weekend and the weather is congenial, more beachgoers start trickling in. They spread blankets and place folding chairs on the beach. Many have come with children and promptly start opening picnic baskets. Kids are the eternal scroungers and scavengers, collecting shells and stones. Some have come with dogs that are happily romping next to the water; others are taking their adolescent children knee-deep into the sea.

We have done about four miles and we stop for coffee at a small bistro close to the beach. I order a croissant and a latté while others order muffins and coffee. It is a pleasant respite in affable company. Then it is time to turn back. Kim, our guide, says, "Let's do another couple of miles before we stop for the day."

It is warmer now but the cool breeze across the sea is a solace. A thousand tiny waves are glittering in the sun. A green beach house on the other side has a party about to start, with visible trays of soda and

beer bottles on an oblong table. The yellow mansion next to it has three people on its second-floor deck, smoking, tobacco or weed I wonder.

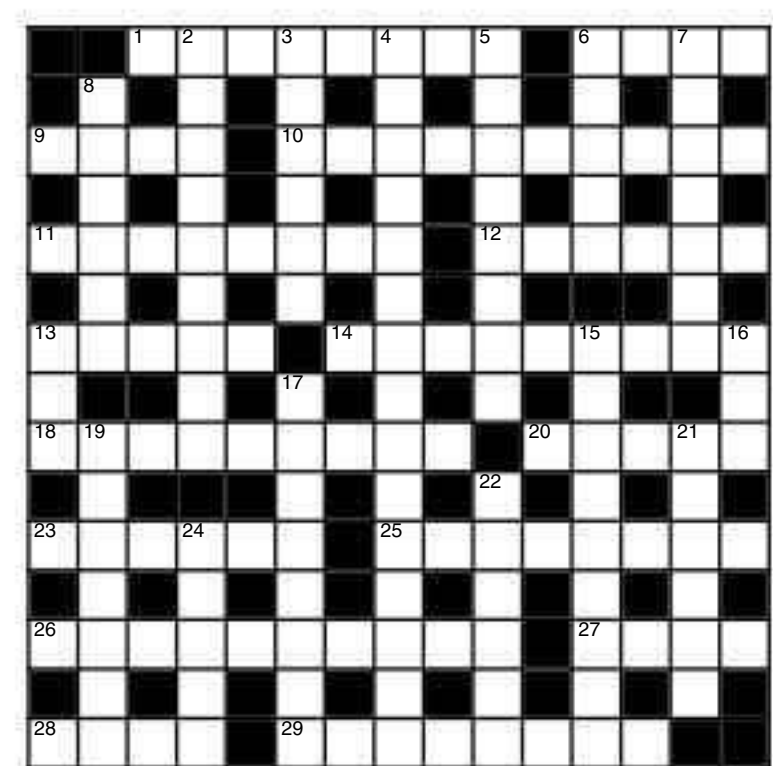
The sky is pale blue with only a few tufts of cloud floating by. There are many more people on the beach now. A distinct touch of a festive air. People talking and laughing. Women lounging and sunbathing. Dogs sniffing at the edge of the water. An elderly woman carrying a kitten.

We have now returned to the starting point. I am saying goodbye to my hiking friends before walking to the car, parked at the far end of the beach, when I notice the same child I had seen before crawling on the ground near her parents and playing with sand. Now I am surprised to see the child on its legs. It is tottering, teetering left and right, but still moving, making it slowly to the water's edge under the watchful eyes of its mother. The child finally lurches its way right to the water and then, in a classic boyish gesture, kicks the shallow water. Its mother throws back her head and laughs. The kick was a gesture of triumph. The child can now walk - and walk back.

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

CROSSWORD

NO-292684



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION



ACROSS

- 1 Good-natured question politician once asked himself (8)
- 6 Drink when drinking party returns (4)
- 9 Reporter's egotistical passage that's essential for circulation (4)
- 10 Style having fewer frills could be rubbish (10)
- 11 More disorderly reforms united leaders of Irish

DOWN

- 8 Republic (8)
- 12 Outspoken French satire without the letter 'e' (6)
- 13 She accommodates solicitors either way (5)
- 14 Is Head of Eton stopping lesson being broadcast still? (9)
- 18 Integrity of conviction leads to criminal record being overturned (9)
- 20 What generates much interest as a rule needs everything to be right (5)

- 23 Travelling into work introduces an alternative (6)
- 25 Show four people holding hands with actors (8)
- 26 Disagree with senior policeman blocking agreement (10)
- 27 Snug Lycra trousers lacking appealing features (4)
- 28 Legal documents about axing women's prison (4)
- 29 Bull gored leg badly (8)
- 2 Doctor obtaining new social worker for charity case (9)

- 3 BBC matinee regularly broadcast Taxi Driver (6)
- 4 Opportunity grasped by heartless lad in evening up for social whirl? (8,7)
- 5 Work out tax cut with head of state (8)
- 6 Witnessed animal bearing litter (5)
- 7 Refuse to consider statement of Norfolk woman (7)
- 8 Medical condition affected hearing mostly (6)
- 13/16 Start replacing second half of trading area like Slough (6)

- 15 Spooner's interpretation of penalty regulations in hopeless case (4,5)
- 16 See 13 Down
- 17 Average level of quality that may be raised (8)
- 19 Plan no longer includes current use (7)
- 21 Take stock of regulation covering terms of onerous contract (6)
- 22 Cover up man supporting strike action (6)
- 24 Football team's place in ground (5)

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



# Opinion

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2024

## Paytm in the dock

The management of the payments bank has to pay the price for being reckless in its actions

**FTHE CATCHY** tune of the ad jingle "Paytm karo" has been sounding more like a cacophony these days, the blame lies squarely on the management of One97 Communications, the parent of Paytm Payments Bank (PPB). In a blogpost on Friday, One97, which holds 49% in PPB, cited a post by its founder and CEO Vijay Shekhar Sharma on X, "To every Paytm, Your favourite app is working, will keep working beyond 29 February as usual." Unfortunately for the millions of Paytmers, this might sound like bravado of an individual who seems to have forgotten the basic governance principles while running a business. Nothing else can explain the persistent non-compliances and continued supervisory concerns about PPB, which was put on notice by the banking regulator in March last year and directed not to onboard new customers.

Inexplicably, the management did nothing despite repeated warnings on falsified compliances, irregularities in KYC norms, and rules pertaining to related-party transactions. That left the regulator with little option but to bar PPB from key operations. What will be a crippling blow to the bank, which has 50 million account holders, and for a group which has 300 million wallets and a leader in the FASTag units segment, is the dictat that it will have to terminate the nodal accounts of the parent firm and Paytm Payment Services. Nearly a quarter of all Unified Payments Interface (UPI) transactions on Paytm end up credited to a PPB account. But now, all that would have to change as the regulator felt that there was no wall between Paytm and the bank — money and data flowed easily even when they shouldn't have.

Paytm's biggest challenge will be to tie up with other banks for UPI transactions, necessitating a sea change in its business model. That's easier said than done. Lending partnerships are based on trust and few banks would be willing to enter into a partnership with an entity which is not only under the strict lens of the regulator but also of the government. Revenue secretary Sanjay Malhotra told a news agency on Saturday that PPB would be probed if any fresh charges of fund siphoning are found. Global brokerages Jefferies and Macquarie are both worried that these dark clouds over the group could end up spooking some of Paytm's lending partners, and they might even limit the business they do with the fintech. One feels sorry for Paytm's investors. Last November, Paytm completed a year as a publicly traded company and its performance has been an embarrassment. The latest episode would only add salt to investors' injuries.

There has been criticism in some quarters over the RBI's "harsh" action against PPB. Payment banks are justifiably concerned over their steep profitability path because of the restrictions on their operations by the RBI and have been arguing for permission to start lending, albeit in a small way. The regulator must consider this in view of the contributions made by the differentiated banks and fintechs to a segment outside of mainstream banking. But there is absolutely no basis for the accusation against the regulator of killing them through aggressive actions. Nothing can come in the way of a credibility test when millions of depositors' money is concerned. The fintech industry should rather relook its own internal systems to ensure the highest compliance standards. Entities such as Paytm have to pay the price for being reckless in their actions.

## Musk must be more transparent on Neuralink

When researchers with Elon Musk's company Neuralink implanted a chip in someone's brain, they were working under a Food and Drug Administration clearance. But that doesn't mean this experiment was safe or ethical.

The FDA's permission only extended to willing volunteers with severe paralysis, like quadriplegia or ALS. But when Musk announced in a post on X last week that they had carried out the procedure on the first subject, he didn't specify which condition the person suffered, how severe it was, how this patient gave consent, what benefit the doctors hoped to achieve or whether the implant helped the patient.

This cloud of secrecy creates an ethical problem. To advance, medical science must take some risks, but society and the scientific community limit those risks with rules and ethical standards. Are Neuralink's experiments within those bounds? Ethicists can't say. Musk's vague post didn't give enough information.

Musk has said that his ultimate goal is to equip the public with brain implants that enhance our cognitive abilities and help humans keep up with AI. It's possible that the road toward these grandiose visions will channel money and expertise to technology that can help the most severely disabled members of society.

It's also possible someone will be harmed or killed. In 1999, researchers at the University of Pennsylvania had secured FDA clearance when they began human experiments with early gene therapy. They accidentally killed one of their volunteers, an 18-year-old named Jesse Gelsinger. That experiment was vastly more transparent than Musk's endeavour. There also has been more transparency behind other experiments to restore function and communication to the profoundly paralysed with implants.

The chip Neuralink developed is radically different from existing designs. As described in detail last year in a *Bloomberg* feature by Ashlee Vance, the quarter-sized implant has hundreds of tiny electrodes strung along a series of flexible threads, and replaces cumbersome wired connections to implanted batteries with wireless ones. It can be inserted using a specially designed robot. But its innovative features doesn't necessarily mean it will work better than existing designs when implanted in humans.

In a column I wrote last year on the non-invasive brain imaging studies, researchers told me they were hoping to help people with a terrifying condition known as locked-in syndrome, which can happen from the degenerative disease ALS or after an injury or stroke. A few people have recovered enough to recount what it was like being treated like a vegetable for years, or, for one man, listening to his wife and a doctor discuss whether to end his life. People suffering from such devastating conditions deserve to benefit from new technology, but they also deserve safe, ethical and transparent experiments. After the patient died in the 1999 gene therapy trial, investigators found that the researchers had ignored warning signs of unexpected inflammation and rushed ahead. They were in a race for scientific fame and fortune.

Musk seems to be in a race not only to beat rivals developing other implants, but to stay ahead of potentially hostile AI. But at this point, the nature of any threat posed by AI is not understood. It's also not clear there would be a benefit to implanting chips in thousands or even millions of healthy people's brains.

Law professor and ethicist Henry Greely, director of the Stanford program in neuroscience and society, said it's common for private industry to be secretive about drugs and medical devices, but that secrecy is not in the best interest of patients. He considers Neuralink's invasive brain procedure particularly worrisome. The Silicon Valley ethos of move fast and break things has generally failed in health care, he said. He told me he has visited the Neuralink headquarters and found it a chaotic place. He also is doubtful about Musk's visions for endowing humans with the capacity to communicate directly through brain activity.

Musk may dream of a day when people are directly wired into the internet and each other, but most of us of don't—and for good reason. The future of brain implants isn't one of super-productive cyborgs, but of restoring basic functions to people who've lost them.



FD FLAM

Bloomberg



## INDIA'S TECH PROWESS

MoS for electronics and IT Rajeev Chandrasekhar

We continue to support global companies and enterprises with our talent, while also taking the lead in developing technologies, intellectual properties, and solutions for ourselves and the world

## FROM PLATE TO PLOUGH

REORIENT FOOD &amp; FERTILISER SUBSIDIES TOWARDS NUTRITION SECURITY, CLIMATE-SMART FARMING

# Towards sustainable growth

**AS INDIA GEARS** up for parliamentary elections in April-May 2024, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's major development plan is "Viksit Bharat Sankalp by 2047" (developed India by 2047). He has also carefully crafted a new caste system comprising the poor, farmers, women, and youth. While the opposition parties are stuck with caste census promises, PM Modi is riding on the promise of *Ram Rajya*, an inclusive and sustainable growth model. More confident than ever, PM Modi has set a goal of winning even a larger number of seats in this election than the last one. His confidence stems from the performance of his government over the last 10 years, and the vision that he has for *Viksit Bharat* by 2047.

There is no doubt that the Modi government has done quite well in the post-Covid period. The Economic Review by the department of economic affairs points out that for three years in a row (FY22-FY24), India has registered more than 7% growth in GDP. This is much higher than the global average as well as that of most G20 countries. But, for inclusive growth, we need to dive a little deeper and see what has happened in the agriculture sector, which engages the largest segment of the working population (45.8% in 2022-23, per PLFS). In this context, let us compare the 10 years of the Modi government with 10 years of the UPA government on certain key parameters.

On the macroeconomic front, India's real GDP grew by 5.9% per annum between FY15 and FY24 vis-à-vis 6.8% during FY05-FY14. On CPI inflation, the Modi government wins hands down with 5.1% versus 8.1% during the UPA period.

## ASHOK GULATI RITIKA JUNEJA

Respectively, distinguished professor, and fellow, ICRIER. Views are personal



Multidimensional poverty fell from 29.2% in FY14 to 11.3% in FY23, per Niti Aayog. Further, the Economic Review states that unemployment rate has declined drastically from 6% in FY18 to 3.2% in FY23 (PLFS, MoSPI), although ILO data still shows unemployment at more than 7%. The two differ due to differences in definition. The agri sector, contributing about 18% of India's GVA in FY24, is likely to register a growth rate of just 1.8% in FY24 per first advance estimates—a major drop from 4% in FY23. If we count this, the decadal growth in agri-GDP under the Modi government is likely to be roughly the same (3.5%) as under the UPA government. It reminds us of the proverbial Hindu rate of growth of 3.5% for 20 years!

The reverse migration during Covid-19 has increased the share of agriculture in the labour force, up from 42.5% in 2018-19 to 45.8% in 2022-23 (PLFS data), which is not a good sign. It is no wonder that during the Modi 2.0 period, real wages in farming as well as in non-farm rural operations have marginally come down. This raises questions about efficacy of the inclusive growth model and the promise of doubling farmers' real incomes by FY23.

The big question is what the strategy should be for *Amrit Kaal* to achieve inclusive and environmentally sustainable growth. The short answer is reorienting doles/subsidies towards sustainable development expenditure and fiscal consolidation. In the interim Union budget for FY25, the finance minister has provisioned an expenditure of ₹47.6 trillion, and aims at bringing down fiscal deficit from 5.8% of GDP in FY24 (RE) to 5.1% in FY24. This is a good move, although the FRBM Act asks for fiscal deficit to be 3% of GDP—there is still a long way to go for achieving optimal fiscal consolidation.

Within the agri-food-rural space, the government has pruned the fertiliser subsidy to ₹1.64 trillion for FY25 against RE of ₹1.88 trillion (FY24). Other three major welfare subsidies/doles are the food subsidy of ₹2.05 trillion, MGNREGA at ₹86,000 crore, and PM-Kisan at ₹60,000 crore. All these subsidies need major rationalisation and targeting with a view to divert more resources towards development expenditures and environmental sustainability, including agri-R&D, micro-irrigation, rural roads, agri-marketing infrastructure, and investments in building efficient value chains for high-value

The government should divert more resources towards agri-R&D, micro-irrigation, rural roads, and agri-marketing

# Setting India on the innovation journey



## RAMEESH KAILASAM JHARNA KAMDAR

Respectively, CEO and associate, public policy &amp; research, Indiatech.org (TSIA)

To achieve its vision of *Viksit Bharat* by 2047, India must step up on innovation. The interim Budget's ₹1 trillion corpus declaration is a good first step

Innovation has often been an important aspect that distinguishes entities across the world. A business that keeps innovating survives and thrives. A country that inculcates innovation in its society doesn't only keep the economy roaring but also empowers entrepreneurship and keeps its businesses growing. The developed block of countries and their businesses understood this advantage and continued their innovation journey by attracting the best global minds to their geographies.

India, in the past few years, has started this journey, and the trajectory of becoming a \$10 trillion economy and a developed nation hinges significantly on its transformation to a scientifically advanced country and a global leader in innovation. Government initiatives aimed at fostering creativity in education and incentivising careers in science underscore India's steadfast commitment towards nurturing its innovation ecosystem. India's ancient history is full of innovators and researchers who were constantly contributing to research and innovation that has withstood the test of time.

India's remarkable rise in the Global Innovation Index (GII), soaring to the 40th position out of 132 countries in 2023, reflects its resolute dedication to promoting innovation. The GI, complemented by the India Innovation Index published by Niti Aayog and the Institute for Competitiveness, also empowers states to measure their innovation-driven progress against global benchmarks.

In a landmark move, Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman outlined a bold vision for India's technological future as she presented the interim Budget 2024. Central to her announcement

was the allocation of a substantial ₹1 trillion corpus to bolster technology research, signalling a transformative leap towards fostering innovation and self-reliance. While the specifics are awaited, the announcement heralds a new era for India's tech landscape, highlighting the pivotal role of innovation as the cornerstone of national development.

This monumental corpus aims to catalyse private sector engagement in research and innovation across emerging sectors. Through long-term financing mechanisms and low or no interest rates, the government seeks to incentivise private enterprises to amplify their technological pursuits, particularly in burgeoning domains.

India's innovation journey is marked by remarkable progress intertwined with persistent challenges. Despite emerging as a global hub for research and development across diverse sectors such as aerospace, biotechnology, and computation, India's public spending on research has remained relatively low at around 0.8% of GDP. This is in stark contrast with countries like China and the US, where investment in research and development far exceeds India's. Strengthening infrastructure and enhancing the quality of education are imperative for fostering a sustainable innovation ecosystem. Moreover, bridging the gap between cutting-edge research and its commercialisation remains a significant challenge that demands attention. Innovative ideas must seamlessly translate into tangible products and services to drive real impact.

To unlock India's innovation poten-

tial and address these challenges, concerted efforts are required to invigorate scientific endeavors and cultivate an environment conducive to innovation. Recent government initiatives such as the establishment of innovation centers and the promotion of entrepreneurship through programs like Startup India and Make in India underscore a renewed commitment to fostering a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship.

India is now home to a significant number of innovation centres and a burgeoning entrepreneurial landscape. The country has emerged as a beacon of innovation in Asia, attracting foreign investment and spearheading groundbreaking research initiatives.

India's innovation agenda prioritises a steadfast commitment to leverage science and technology for economic growth and societal welfare. The last 10 years under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership have witnessed the prioritisation of science and technology as fundamental pillars of India's development strategy with a target to increase research and development spending to over 2% of GDP.

At the heart of India's innovation narrative lies its flourishing startup ecosystem, propelled by the resilience and ingenuity of its entrepreneurs. The surge of technology startups, harnessing innovative solutions to address diverse market needs, underscores India's prowess in digital innovation. With the rapid expansion of India's digital consumer market fueled by the accessibility of affordable

Despite emerging as a global R&D hub, India's public spending on research has remained relatively low at 0.8% of GDP

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Bharat Ratna for LK Advani

The awarding of Bharat Ratna to LK Advani by the Modi government seems to be its way of telling the nation that it recognizes the veteran's public service. There was a time when Advani was widely seen as the 'face of hardline Hindu nationalism'. While he could not fulfill his ambition of becoming the Prime Minister, he was no less

prominent and powerful than Atal Bihari Vajpayee and it was his support for Narendra Modi in the aftermath of the Gujarat riots that ensured his continuance as chief minister. Advani's claim to fame is that he played a significant role in the Ayodhya movement and his rath yatra marked a turning point in Indian politics. Whether India has changed for the better or the worse since then is a matter of opinion. His political career cannot

be thought of without his dedication to Hindutva. No wonder there is a mixed reaction to the conferment of the land's highest civilian award on the leader who contributed more than anyone else to the ascendancy of the Hindu Right in Indian politics.

### Learning from Bazball

Apropos of "Management lessons from Bazball", a few critical lessons

tech products, the nation witnesses the emergence of unicorns and a palpable surge in innovation capacity.

Various government endeavors like the Atal Innovation Mission (2016) exemplifies India's dedication to nurturing a vibrant innovation sector. This initiative aims to foster innovation hubs, tackle grand challenges, and catalyse startup ventures in technology-driven domains. Additionally, the Atal Tinkering Labs initiative, nurturing innovative startups at schools and incubation centers, plays a pivotal role in instilling a culture of innovation from a young age.

The government's call for startups and private sector firms to invest in burgeoning fields like AI, renewable energy, electric cars, defense, and semiconductor manufacturing underscores India's determination to embrace the transformative potential of cutting-edge technologies. The advent of new technologies and data-driven solutions holds immense promise for India, particularly in democratising access to high-quality services and economic opportunities. Sitharaman's assertion that these innovations can uplift even the most marginalised segments of society underscores the government's commitment to inclusive growth and equitable development.

The government's innovation stimulus holds immense promise for startups, offering a pathway towards sustainable growth, competitiveness, and global relevance. As India embarks on a journey towards becoming a power-house of innovation and entrepreneurship, startups stand to benefit from the unprecedented opportunities from such government's initiatives, paving the way for a future defined by creativity, ingenuity, and technological excellence.

from English Team's bazball tactics are that everyone in the organisation should be aligned, have a fearless approach, should not be unnecessarily burdened with fear, and have extreme self belief in their capabilities. Once each team member of the organisation has that kind of approach, more often than not, the organisation will succeed.

—Bal Govind, Noida

Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com





www.dailypioneer.com

facebook.com/dailypioneer | @TheDailyPioneer | instagram.com/dailypioneer/

PAPER WITH PASSION

## Dead, Undead!

Poonam Pandey's crude act, if anything, has belittled cervical cancer survivors and activists

Adult entertainer Poonam Pandey's latest antic has not entertained people one bit, rather it has left them shocked and angry. Hours after she posted steamy photos from Goa on her social media account, her PR manager claimed that Poonam has died of cervical cancer, only for her to disclose a day later that she was "here, alive". The pathetic excuse for the reprehensible 'death' hoax: It was to raise awareness about cervical cancer, to make people talk about it. Effectively, does she believe that all our brand ambassadors for polio eradication, menstrual safety and suchlike social awareness campaigns need to announce their deaths for the public to start talking about the cause close to their heart? But ye public hai, sab jaanti hai.... Everyone knows it for what it was – a cheap publicity stunt for another 15 minutes of fame! But this time, Poonam has crossed the line and ventured into uncharted territory. The incident has sparked outrage on social media, with users and celebrities severely condemning her action. On Friday, her team announced that Poonam had died on Thursday night due to cervical cancer. However, the very next day, the model-actor's posts announced that she was alive. In her videos, she said, "I am alive. I didn't die of cervical cancer. Unfortunately, I can't say that about those hundreds and thousands of women who have lost their lives because of cervical cancer." She went on to discuss the disease, expressing concern about the lack of knowledge surrounding it and emphasising the need for awareness. The 'news', which initially prompted messages of condolence and mourning, quickly gave rise to a storm of criticism on social media. Users



started slamming Poonam for what they considered a tasteless and insensitive publicity stunt. Celebrities, including her industry friends, expressed disappointment and disbelief, with some accusing her of crossing ethical boundaries. This is not the first time Poonam, whose claim to fame is showing skin and indulging in theatrics, has courted controversy for publicity. She gained attention for her promise to strip if the Indian cricket team won the 2011 Cricket World Cup.

Reckless publicity stunts, especially those involving fake deaths or serious health issues, must be unequivocally condemned due to their inherent unethical nature. Breaking the law of the land (and this one in particular is a criminal offence), causing public nuisance, manipulating emotions, spreading false information and exploiting sensitive topics for personal gain demonstrate a lack of moral integrity and a disregard for the potential harm caused to society. Individuals engaging in such behaviour not only compromise their credibility but also harm the cause. Public figures have a responsibility to act with integrity and authenticity as their actions influence and shape public perception. Admonishing those who resort to deceptive publicity stunts sends out a clear message that ethical boundaries must be upheld, fostering a more honest and transparent media approach. Encouraging genuine efforts for awareness and social causes ensures that the public remains informed and engaged without falling victim to any manipulation. Even if we are to assume that she had a genuine desire to raise awareness about cervical cancer, how did she achieve that? In a way, her act ridiculed cancer survivors and used their plight to garner likes and increase her online following. If one is serious about cancer patients, one could do it many ways; this was certainly not one of them. While Poonam has gained attention for various reasons, it is henceforth important to approach any information about her with reinforced scepticism. She has been a controversial figure, often making headlines for her bold and provocative statements or actions. In the past, she gained attention for her association with the Kingfisher Calendar, which propelled her into the limelight. She later ventured into acting and appeared in a few forgettable Bollywood films. Poonam has often used her social media presence to grab attention and boost her career. This incident also has lessons for those who blindly believe in media posts. They would do well to cross-check facts rather than believe every news that comes their way, especially through social media. Poonam's fake death stunt has undeniably backfired; it sheds light on the lengths some individuals may go to hog the limelight in the age of social media. Even if it be a rap on the knuckles, Poonam must face legal consequences. Time alone will tell how the public and the entertainment industry she belongs to, make her pay. Ideally, she ought to! We demand legal action.

## West Asia crisis: A threat to global peace

The spectre of escalating tensions in West Asia casts a shadow that extends far beyond; if steps are not taken now, it would be a catastrophe on global scale



SUDHIR HINDWAN

The recent series of Houthi attacks, ongoing skirmishes between Israel and Hamas, and mounting tensions over the UNRWA's involvement in the October 7, 2023, attack on Israel have reignited concerns about the prospects for peace and negotiation in the volatile region of West Asia. As Israel continues to deny accusations, the coming days are poised to present defining moments for the peace prospects in the area.

**Efforts to Resolve the Conflict:** Various initiatives have been undertaken to quell the long-standing regional conflict. The President of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), Mr. Joan E. Donoghue, called on Israel to halt its strikes across Gaza, offering a glimmer of hope. However, the situation remains dire, with the West Asian Conflict having already claimed over 26,000 lives and caused substantial devastation in recent months. Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh has urged an immediate end to Israel's offences and called for an expedited relief operation to save lives. The Houthis' increasing support for the Palestinian cause, coupled with their recent attacks on Israel in the Red Sea, has further heightened tensions. The backing from Hamas and Hezbollah for the Houthis raises concerns about the expanding web of terror and conflict in the Red Sea, affecting trade, commercial interests, and maritime security in the Indian Ocean Area.

**India's Stance:** India, expressing concern for regional peace, has consistently called for the de-escalation of violence and emphasized the importance of negotiations. India advocates for peaceful coexistence by respecting Israel's security needs while fostering an international environment for Palestine to exist independently and securely. The United States is also apprehensive about the rising tensions in the region. However, recent trends indicate the difficulty in persuading Hamas to abandon its plans for further strikes on Israel, considering its history of attacks, including the ruthless assault on October 7, 2023, which claimed



over 1,200 Israeli lives.

**Challenges Faced by Israel:** Israel's preparedness to counter new and unexpected forms of attacks, such as kidnappings and chemical assaults, relies heavily on gathering comprehensive intelligence daily. Both the U.S. and Israel have designated Hamas as a terrorist organization, complicating the situation further, given Hamas's refusal to recognize Israel's right as a state and its territorial claims.

**The Struggle for Peace:** Hamas enjoys a significant advantage due to political, military, and local factors. The Palestinians' desire for Israel's withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza Strip, coupled with Hamas's military capabilities and ideological mobilization at the grassroots level, poses a formidable challenge.

**The Historical Context:** The conflict between Israel and Palestine has deep historical roots, with both sides gradually realizing the necessity of a two-state solution for survival. While initial agreements, such as the Oslo Peace Accord in 2007, provided a ray of hope, subsequent developments, including ongoing Israeli attacks, have jeopardized the peace process. The existence of separate governments in the West Bank and Gaza Strip has complicated matters.



AS THE WORLD WATCHES THESE CRITICAL DEVELOPMENTS, THE NEED FOR COMPREHENSIVE AND NUANCED APPROACHES TO PEACE REMAINS PARAMOUNT

**Challenges to Mediation:** Efforts towards negotiations must address complex issues, including settlement disputes, security concerns, education, water, refugees, and other vital aspects. The international community, especially Islamic nations, must carefully navigate the delicate situation to prevent the region from turning into a battlefield.

Peter T. Coleman's perspective on polarized conflicts suggests that understanding the system as a whole is crucial for finding a resolution. Awareness of the context and detailed considerations of the stakeholders' positions can pave the way for more effective mediation efforts. The current escalation of tensions in West Asia demands careful handling and diplomatic efforts to navigate the intricate landscape. As the world watches these critical developments, the need for comprehensive and nuanced approaches to peace remains paramount. The global community must work towards establishing a permanent link between Israel and Palestine, fostering an environment where negotiations can address underlying issues. In the face of extreme circumstances and the seeming absence of hope for reconciliation, addressing the root causes of the conflict becomes

paramount. The ongoing violence necessitates a comprehensive approach, delving into minute details to understand and resolve the multifaceted challenges at play. As efforts for mediation intensify on a global scale, a nuanced and all-encompassing strategy is required to address the intricacies of the Israel-Palestine crisis.

Key issues such as resolving settlement disputes, ensuring security, providing essential services like food and education, addressing water concerns, handling the refugee problem, and seeking amicable solutions through peaceful negotiations must be central to any diplomatic initiatives. International support, particularly from Islamic countries, can play a pivotal role in guiding the region toward a more stable and secure future. Despite past agreements and hopeful moments, the persistent challenges have made the situation increasingly complex. Yet, as the region grapples with the aftermath of recent events, there is an opportunity for the global community to reevaluate and reinvestigate efforts towards lasting peace in West Asia.

(The writer is a recipient of the Bharat Gaurav award and is a professor and expert on strategic affairs; views are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### TELEPATHIC REVOLUTION

Sir — In a twist reminiscent of our favourite childhood sci-fi movies, Elon Musk's Neuralink is turning Professor X's telepathic dreams into reality. Musk recently announced the successful implantation of the first telepathy chip in a human brain, marking a pivotal moment in the convergence of science fiction and reality.

This telepathy chip will revolutionize human communication by allowing individuals to control electronic devices with their thoughts. Neuralink's surgical robot, implants the chip, enabling wireless communication between the brain and Neuralink. With Alexa and Google AI nestled inside our heads, the implications are profound, ranging from aiding the disabled to transforming how we interact with technology.

Yet, this technological leap comes at a cost. The potential invasion of privacy is staggering. The chip's ability to read thoughts and record memories poses a threat to personal information, passwords, and the very essence of human cognition. The imaginary scenario of humanity succumbing to artificial intelligence looms large, with the risk of widespread hacking and manipulation.

While the telepathy chip offers unparalleled benefits, enhancing the lives of those with disabilities and neurological disorders, its dark side raises alarms. Are we on the edge of a utopian future or hurtling towards a dystopian nightmare where humanity is assimilated into a robotic existence?

Preetiyukta Mohakud | Bhubaneswar

### THE DROP BOX IS DISAPPEARING

Sir — The drop box facility which was hitherto available 24x7 is now dispensed with in all banks purportedly due to new instructions from the RBI. The drop box is available now but with a rider. The customer has to visit the bank during working hours to drop the cheques. To my surprise, today when I wanted to drop a cheque in the early hours before going to

### Snow leopard count falling



The presence of the elusive and enigmatic snow leopard is a vital indicator of the Himalayan ecosystem, especially the region's rivers. The Snow Leopard Population Assessment in India (SLPAI), under the Global Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Protection Programme (GSLESP), has put the number of snow leopards in India at 718. The study that covered 1,20,000 km of the trans-Himalayan region has recommended the setting up of a dedicated snow leopard cell at the Wildlife Institute of India.

Appropriate, considering India's 5 per cent share of the global snow leopard population. One of the most lovely big cats, snow leopards are seen predominantly in six Himalayan states—Ladakh, Uttarakhand, Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh. Their anatomy is perfect for high altitude because they possess a large nasal cavity and an abundant number of Red Blood Corpuscles (RBC), that help them breathe oxygen well unlike other animals. The large and thick fur, along with the long and girthy tail, help the snow leopard to wrap itself up in the biting cold of the Himalayas. No wonder, it is a 12-country-range animal. Sadly, habitat loss, poaching for its skull, climate and infrastructural change, and man-animal conflict have reduced the snow leopard number. Among these, the last mentioned factor is avoidable since the big cat's favourite feast, the white sheep (argalis), is the livestock of the locals.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

work, I could not do so as banks were accordingly instructed to give access to the drop box only during working hours of the bank. When enquired, the officials contend quoting RBI that the cheques are safer when the drop box is accessible only during working hours. How did RBI reach this conclusion? Was there large-scale misuse of stealing drop boxes or pouring water etc and if so to what percentage, more so when security is provided round the clock? Why should a customer lose a day just because he/she cannot drop the cheques at their convenience? I request RBI to reconsider this decision.

D Nagarjuna | Kushaiguda

### IMRAN KHAN ON A STICKY WICKET

Sir — Imran Khan getting two separate jail terms for 10 & 14 years in just two days for revealing some official secrets and for illegally selling state gifts respectively, comes as a severe blow to the cricketer-turned-politician, and the verdicts

seem to have totally annihilated his political career. Pathetically, Khan, who was hailed as one of the most popular politicians in Pakistan, has already been knocked out of the general elections contest scheduled to be held in the country on February 8.

A wily cricket captain during his international playing days, Imran Khan was always on a sticky wicket on the political field. The two latest verdicts should foment Khan to introspect, to understand the mistakes that he committed, and to take corrective measures. The story of Imran Khan teaches an important lesson that charisma and popularity alone will not be enough to govern a country. Rather it underscores the need for efficiency, transparency, accountability, and above all sense of responsibility.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## India fast emerging as ultra luxury destination

High-end real estate rates soar in the country as global demand attracts high networth investors

There has been a definite turnaround in the real estate market. After the Covid-19 pandemic, homebuyers are increasingly opting for larger and more luxurious homes. This surge in demand for luxury housing, defined as projects priced above Rs 1.5 crore in most Indian cities, has led to a substantial increase in the launch of new projects in this category. According to a report from real estate consultancy Anarock in October, out of the 116,220 units launched in Q3 2023 across various price brackets in India's top seven cities, approximately 27 per cent were in the luxury category. This represents a significant rise from Q3 2018 when luxury housing comprised only 9 per cent of the total units launched. Anuj Puri, Chairman of Anarock Group says "This quarter's luxury supply is the highest in the past five years. Moreover, ultra-high-net-worth individuals (UHNIs), with a net worth of \$30 million or more, have have interest in the luxury real estate market. Popular destinations for Indian real estate investments abroad include London,



Dubai, Singapore, Australia, and New York. Dubai, in particular, is a favoured location due to its tax-friendly environment, business opportunities, and the benefits of golden visas. In Q1 2023, Indian investors contributed 20 per cent to all property transactions in Dubai, totalling close to \$2 billion. London is also attractive for its potential for capital growth, strong rental yields, and an easy purchase process. But interestingly enough India is also emerging as a chosen destination for UHNIs across the world. Now it ranks just below the UK, UAE, and USA and is at par with Canada. In terms of regional trends, Hyderabad led in new luxury supply in Q3 2023 among India's top seven cities, followed by the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR). The demand

for luxury homes is notably driven by high-net-worth individuals, including corporate C-suite executives and startup entrepreneurs, residing in these cities. The desire for expansive luxury properties as alternative living destinations, particularly those offering a second home in green surroundings, has become a significant aspect of the Indian ethos post-pandemic.

The future of commercial real estate in the United States is undergoing significant changes, marked by uncertainties in the economy, shifts in technology, and transformations in how and where people work. The industry's tectonic changes, including inflation, interest rate increases, and technological shifts, impacting the demand for various types of properties is the reason new destinations are emerging. To fill in the supply side many new ventures are coming up. Godrej properties, Mahindra Lifespaces, Oberoi realty were already there and are now upbeat Many new ones are joining them. For instance, Forbes Property, a JV of media house Forbes has ven-

tured into properties its Indian arm is already in the business. In India's 14 Tier 1 cities, including Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Bengaluru and Chennai, there have been 4.13 lakh new launches, out of which there were 14,754 luxury projects (per unit more than INR 5 crore) and almost all, 14,654 had immediate takers. It is noteworthy that luxury projects make up nearly 4% of the total launches. Michael W. Jalbert, CEO, of Forbes Global Properties, is optimistic about the India story. "Our expansion into India is particularly meaningful. The nation's burgeoning markets present unlimited opportunities for discerning buyers and investors seeking ultra-luxurious homes, coveted estates, and premium developments," he said. Their first offering will be in New Delhi. It has tied up with the JV of Orange Smart City in Navi Mumbai for the development of 1200 acres of land. Indeed, after a short lull due to the pandemic, the Indian property market is all set to reach dizzy heights! (The writer is a market consultant; views are personal)



MANOJ SHARMA





## FIRST COLUMN

## THE POWER OF BEEJ MANTRAS

Harnessing natural vibrations for spiritual growth



SWAMI CHARANASHRIT

Beej mantras, also known as seed mantras, are ancient and powerful sound vibrations deeply rooted in the spiritual traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism. These sacred syllables are believed to carry a unique resonance that connects the practitioner to higher states of consciousness, facilitating spiritual growth and well-being. The term "Beej" is derived from the Sanskrit word for "seed," emphasizing the potential for profound transformation inherent in these primal sounds.

**Origins of Beej Mantras:**

The origins of 'beej' mantras can be traced back to ancient Vedic texts, where the power of sound was recognized as a fundamental force in the universe. According to Vedic philosophy, everything in existence has a vibrational frequency, and by chanting specific sounds, individuals can harmonize with these frequencies to invoke positive energies.

**How Beej Mantras Work:**

The efficacy of 'beej' mantras is believed to lie in the vibrational quality of the sounds. Each syllable is considered to resonate with a particular frequency that corresponds to a specific chakra or energy centre in the body. Chanting these mantras is thought to activate and balance these energy centres, promoting physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. For example, the mantra "Om" is a universal beej mantra that is said to represent the primordial sound of the universe.

**Popular Beej Mantras and Their Significance:**

**Om (Aum):** Significance: Represents the sound of the universe, symbolizing the essence of ultimate reality. Associated with the crown chakra, promoting spiritual awakening and connection to the divine.

**Shrim:** Significance: Linked to the goddess Lakshmi, the embodiment of wealth, prosperity, and abundance. Aligns with the heart and solar plexus chakras, fostering love, compassion, and abundance.

**Hrim:** Significance: Connected to the goddess Durga, symbolizing strength,



courage, and protection. Activates the solar plexus chakra, enhancing inner strength and confidence.

**Kleem:** Significance: Associated with the goddess Kali, representing transformation and the fierce aspect of the divine feminine. Influences the root chakra, aiding in grounding and overcoming obstacles.

**Chanting and Meditation with Beej Mantras:**

The practice of chanting beej mantras is often incorporated into meditation and spiritual rituals. Devotees may repeat the chosen mantra either verbally or internally, focusing on the vibrations and the intended qualities associated with the mantra. Repeat the chosen beej mantra with sincerity and intention. Allow the vibrations to permeate your being, fostering a deep connection with the divine energy.

**Benefits of Beej Mantra Meditation:**

**Stress Reduction:** Regular practice of beej mantra meditation has been shown to reduce stress and promote relaxation.

**Enhanced Concentration:** It helps improve focus and concentration, making it an effective tool for those seeking mental clarity.

**Spiritual Growth:** The transformative power of beej mantras facilitates spiritual growth, awakening a deeper connection to the self and the divine.

**Balanced Energy Centers:** By activating and balancing the chakras, beej mantra meditation promotes holistic well-being, both physically and energetically. Beej mantras serve as potent tools for spiritual seekers, offering a pathway to connect with the divine within and without. The profound impact of these sacred sounds lies in their ability to resonate with the universal energy that permeates all of creation. Whether seeking inner peace, abundance, strength, or transformation, the practice of beej mantra meditation provides a time-honoured and accessible approach to spiritual growth.

*(The writer is a spiritual guide; views are personal)*

## Interim Budget is a harmony in harvest

Budget 2024-25 allocates ₹1.27 lakh crore to agriculture, aligning with Sanatan Dharma principles



ANIL AGRAWAL

In the Interim Budget, the allocation for the Agriculture Ministry for the fiscal year 2024-25 has been earmarked at Rs1.27 lakh crore, marking an increase from the revised estimates of Rs1.16 lakh crore in 2023-24 and the budget estimates of Rs 1.15 lakh crore for the same period. The budget reaffirms a commitment to enhance various initiatives aimed at value addition in the agricultural sector, empowering women, and augmenting the incomes of farmers. Over the past decade, the government has provided direct financial assistance to 118 million farmers through the PM-Kisan Samman Yojana, a cash handout programme for every landholding agricultural family. These advancements are a result of farmer-centric policies, income support, risk coverage through price and insurance support, and the promotion of technologies and innovations facilitated by start-ups. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the agriculture sector has witnessed nearly 4% growth, reflecting a positive trajectory for inclusive development and increased productivity. The increase in the agricultural budget can be symbolically connected to the principles of Sanatan Dharma, the eternal and universal values inherent in Hinduism. Sanatan Dharma emphasises the interconnectedness of all living beings and the environment, fostering an attitude of reverence and responsibility towards nature. Increasing the allocation for agriculture reflects a commitment to supporting farmers, who are integral to the cycle of life and contribute significantly to the well-being of society. The budgetary focus on agriculture acknowledges the importance of nurturing the land, providing a livelihood for farmers, and fostering a harmonious relationship with the environment—an embodiment of the principles embedded in Sanatan Dharma.

In the vast tapestry of Bharat's cultural heritage, the philosophical connection between Sanatan Dharma and agriculture emerges as a thread that weaves through centuries, nurturing not just crops but a way of life deeply rooted in harmony, sustainability and spiritual understanding. Sanatan Dharma, often referred to as Hinduism, is not just a religious system; it is a way of life that encompasses diverse facets, including the intimate relationship with nature and agriculture. Sanatan Dharma and agriculture share a timeless bond, exploring the spiritual, cultural and ecological dimensions that have shaped this symbiotic relationship.

**A Timeless Bond Nurturing Harmony**  
At the core of Sanatan Dharma lies a deep respect for nature, considering it not merely as a resource but as a manifestation of the divine. The reverence for the Earth as "Bhudevi" and the acknowledgement of plants, animals and natural elements as integral parts of the cosmic order emphasises the spiritual significance attributed to agriculture. The concept of "Yajna," a ritualistic offering with roots in Vedic literature, symbolises the sacred reciprocity between humans and nature. Agriculture, viewed as a form of Yajna, becomes a spiritual act where farmers are considered custodians entrusted with the responsibility of nurturing the earth.

**Cultural Festivals Mirroring Agrarian Cycles**

The cultural landscape of Bharat is adorned with festivals and rituals intricately tied to agriculture, mirroring the agrarian cycles and seasons. Festivals like Makar Sankranti, Pongal, and Baisakhi mark the harvesting



THE PHILOSOPHICAL CONNECTION BETWEEN SANATAN DHARMA AND AGRICULTURE EMERGES AS A THREAD THAT WEAVES THROUGH CENTURIES, NURTURING NOT JUST CROPS BUT A WAY OF LIFE DEEPLY ROOTED IN HARMONY, SUSTAINABILITY AND SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING

season, celebrating the abundance of nature and expressing gratitude through rituals and festivities. Epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata incorporate narratives of agricultural practices, with Lord Rama cultivating the barren land and Arjuna spending years in disguise as a farmer. These stories not only embed agricultural wisdom but also highlight the humility and dedication associated with the act of farming. Traditional agricultural practices, such as organic farming and crop rotation, align with ecological sustainability principles that were deeply ingrained in ancient agricultural wisdom.

**Government Initiatives in Harmony with Sanatan Dharma**

In recent years, the Government of India has embarked on a transformative journey to promote organic farming, drawing inspiration from the timeless principles embedded in Sanatan Dharma. This paradigm shift reflects a commitment to sustainability, environmental stewardship and a holistic understanding of agriculture deeply rooted in the country's cultural and spiritual heritage.

The government has been promoting organic farming as a priority in the country since 2015-16 through the schemes of Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY) and Mission Organic Value Chain Development for the North Eastern Region (MOVCDNER). Both schemes stress providing end-to-end support to farmers engaged in organic farming, i.e., from production to processing, certification, and marketing and post-harvest management training and capacity building, which are integral parts of the scheme.

Under PKVY, states and UTs of the country are provided financial assistance of Rs 50,000/ha for 3 years, out of which Rs 31,000/ha for 3 years is provided directly to farmers through DBT for on-farm and off-farm organic inputs. Financial assistance of Rs. 8,800/ha for 3 years is provided for marketing, packaging,

branding, value addition and other marketing initiatives. Apart from this, Rs 2,700/ha for 3 years is provided for certification and residual analysis. Under the scheme, assistance is also provided at Rs. 7,500/ha for 3 years for training and capacity building.

Under MOVCDNER, the assistance of Rs 46,575/ha for 3 years is provided for the creation of FPO, support to farmers for organic inputs, quality seeds and planting material, training, handholding, and certification. Financial assistance of Rs 32,500/ha for 3 years is provided to farmers for off-farm or on-farm organic inputs under the scheme. The government has also developed a web portal, www.Jaivikkheti.in/, as an online marketing platform for the direct sale of organic produce by farmers to consumers to help them achieve better price realisation. A total of over 6.09 lakh farmers have been registered under the Jaivik Kheti portal.

The National Centre for Organic and Natural Farming (NCONF), a subordinate office of the Department of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare (DA&FW), has been organising various training and capacity-building programmes, namely a 30-day certificate course, field demonstration and training, an extension officer training programme, and a 7-day online or offline training course on various aspects of organic farming.

A multidisciplinary team of scientists from the Indian Council of Agriculture (ICAR) is involved in providing need-based training to farmers and extension agents and giving technical support to state agencies for the promotion of organic farming. Scientists at Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) organise regular training programmes for farmers and extension personnel on organic agriculture, including the production and use of organic inputs. Under Soil Health Card (SHC) schemes, the government is

also promoting Integrated Nutrient Management (INM) through the judicious use of chemical fertilisers in conjunction with bio-fertilisers and organic manures for improving soil health, fertility, and productivity.

**Prioritising Farmer Welfare**

Traditional agricultural practices, often found in ancient texts like the Vedas and Puranas, emphasised the importance of working in harmony with nature. The use of natural fertilisers, crop rotation, and the avoidance of synthetic chemicals were integral to these practices, fostering a sustainable approach that resonates with the principles of organic farming. Farmers are encouraged to view their work as a service to the environment, promoting a sense of responsibility and reverence for the land.

Sanatan Dharma places significant emphasis on the welfare of all individuals, and the government's push for organic farming aligns with this principle by prioritising the well-being of farmers. By integrating cultural and spiritual values into agricultural practices, Bharat aims to not only secure a healthier and more sustainable future but also to honour the timeless wisdom embedded in its cultural heritage.

This timeless bond between Sanatan Dharma and agriculture exemplifies a holistic worldview where spirituality, culture, and ecology converge harmoniously. As we navigate the challenges of modern agriculture and environmental concerns, revisiting the principles embedded in our cultural heritage can offer valuable insights into sustainable and ethical farming practices. In preserving and promoting this profound connection, we not only safeguard our agricultural traditions but also contribute to a more harmonious coexistence with the Earth—a timeless legacy that transcends generations.

*(The author is a member of Rajya Sabha; views are personal)*

## Collaborative innovation: Reshaping climate technology for a sustainable future

Collaborative spirit is now indispensable in the urgent realm of climate technology, where the need to combat global warming races against time

Complex problems require a collective intelligence system to conjure creative solutions. Just about a decade ago when Google was finding it difficult to make its machines learn to clearly distinguish between the pictures of a cat and a dog; the company felt that to meet the desired levels of accuracy in face recognition systems, it might require a substantial scale-up of its processing capacities. But then its engineers stumbled upon the NVIDIA GPU (Graphics Processing Unit) which is quite popular in enabling high-quality video gaming environments and is powered with better chipsets and algorithms. Google partnered with NVIDIA and the collabora-



ISHOO RATNA SRIVASTAV

tion now delivers crucial breakthroughs in AI. It is widely acknowledged that the intersection of various disciplines is perhaps the most fertile space leading to path-breaking innovations; the Neuralink brain chip is one such very recent example. Such interdisciplinary collaborations become indispensable particularly in the realm of climate technology,

when there is a race against time to contain warming to 1.5 to 2 degree celsius limit. Key Challenges to a Collaborative Paradigm: The intellectual property regime is built upon the philosophical foundations where it is believed that healthy competition among the entities serves the greatest common good. However, for addressing an existential crisis like climate change, collective efforts too must be incentivised by the regulatory framework.

**Consortium-based Innovation Model:**

An innovation model developed through integrating the industry, academia, and policymakers, can fast-track the technological maturity, augment efficiencies and nudge

consumer behaviour towards sustainability. In high-velocity industries such as biotech, computers and electronics, an institutional consortium can create collaborative innovation wherein learning occurs through network relationships and institutions are both actors and the recipients of the skills and expertise that the learning brings. Moreover, the convergence of the key stakeholders also elevates the Research-Practice integration. Such accelerated learning mechanisms are much needed for climate change management and adaptation. As we explore its application in climate technology, let's delve into specific areas where collaborative efforts can reshape our approach to environ-

mental challenges: **Renewables and Storage:** Unpredictability in solar and wind resources necessitates storage solutions in any reliable clean energy scheme. Thus, solar and wind developers getting formally networked with battery or other storage solution providers and grid managers could help towards building a more resilient energy ecosystem. On similar lines auto manufacturers too can be brought under the collaborative umbrella. Imagine a scenario where the power grid has a demand surge, and one gets paid for supplying electricity to the grid through the battery in the electric vehicle. Time of Use tariffs and Device-Tagged Electricity Bills:

Electricity during lean demand periods can be cheaper. Think of a washing machine in your house running only when the electricity is the cheapest during the day or night. The collaboration of the device/appliances manufacturers, digital technology players and the power distribution companies can enhance transparency, and efficiency and cut down the peak demand requirements of the power generation units; notably such peaks are often met by coal-based plants. A power distribution network incentivised by time-of-use tariffs facilitates more sustainable consumer behaviour.

**Augmenting Forecasting through AI:**

Let's envision a scheme where satellite imagery of the cloud cover, projections on wind velocities and weather data get analysed by an AI model that predicts good sunshine and wind hours well in advance. Such early knowledge of the resource pattern would cut on wasteful spinning reserves that run as a backup to meet any sudden surge in power demand.

**End-of-Life Planning and Sharing of Resources:** A consortium-based system would inherently have a cradle-to-grave approach as the optimal end-use utilisation would be a natural spin-off. A re-purposing scheme of degraded batteries could be one such example. Also, cloud and web-based services could scale down the

personal device hardware requirements, and blockchain may edge out inefficient intermediaries thus contributing to sustainability. The recent union budget announcement on the creation of a corpus of rupees one lakh crore targeted towards interest-free long-term assistance to private entities for research and innovation could go a long way towards cultivating a culture of innovation.

A synergy of efforts could indeed be a catalyst, as timing is crucial for the deployment of climate-friendly technologies. *(The writer is an Indian Railway Service officer and a Commonwealth scholar; views are personal)*