New Delhi, May 5, 2024

# the pioneer

"Disease is an experience of a sofear made manifest on the body"



Amid mounting concerns regarding Covishield's safety and the acknowledgment of potential adverse effects by its maker UK giant AstraZeneca, public unease is on the rise, with calls for accountability, says ARCHANA JYOTI

# CUVISHIELD'S SHIELD IN QUESTION

CT scan result showed that they (doctors) had never seen anything like this before. Numerous blood clots were removed through surgery from my legs and lower abdomen, Alex Mitchell, a key litigant in the legal proceedings in the UK against British pharma giant AstraZeneca told a news channel in India about the side effects that he suffered after receiving the COVID

Mitchell is not the only one who has been reeling under the side effects due to the COVID jab and taken up a legal battle against AstraZeneca over allegations linking its vaccine to fatalities and severe adverse

The firm is facing at least 51 such cases and has recently conceded that its vaccine could, albeit exceedingly rarely, induce Thrombosis with Thrombocytopenia Syndrome (TTS), a medical condition characterized by abnormally low levels of platelets and the formation of blood clots.

With this admission by the UK pharma giant, in India, the Serum Institute of India (SII), headquartered in Pune, which was a licensee to AstraZeneca's vaccine formula may too find itself mired in potential legal ramifications with the parents of a young woman who died purportedly due to complications arising ten days post her inoculation with the vaccine in 2021 said that they are contemplating legal action against both SII and AstraZeneca. Though a section of legal experts say that

### **Symptoms of TTS**

A rare condition associated with Covishield, include severe headaches, abdominal pain, leg swelling, or shortness of breath, usually



appearing two weeks post-vaccination. Timely identification and intervention are crucial in mitigating severe consequences.

SII may get clean chit in the case given it was a mere manufacturer of the jab Venugopalan Govindan, bereaved father of the deceased Karunya has expressed profound dissatisfaction with AstraZeneca's belated admission, lamenting its timing visà-vis the lives already lost. He also castigated SII for its failure to suspend vaccine distribution following the restriction imposed by 15 European nations due to reported incidents of blood clot-related fatalities in March 2021.

Govindan has also implicated governmental agencies, regulatory bodies, and other stakeholders in the unfortunate demise of his daughter and numerous others postvaccination. His sentiments have reverberated across social media platforms following AstraZeneca's acknowledgment of its COVID jab's potential to precipitate blood clotting.

Govindan spearheaded a petition titled 'Post-vaccination side effects - Blood clots, MIS-A, etc. Awareness was required' shortly after his daughter's tragic demise in 2021. As the petition gained traction, it served as a platform for individuals to share their own experiences, concerns, and opinions

regarding COVID-19 vaccines. For instance, one Shikha Bhalla, a netizen, has given her account of losing vision in her left eye due to a rare side effect underscoring the importance of thorough



#### **BIG NUMBER**

India's vaccination campaign began on January 13, 2021, administering Covaxin and Covishield. Covishield received approval for use in 49 other countries. As of April 29, 2024, India has administered 1,749,417,978 doses of Covishield, making it the world's largest vaccination program. India's vaccine arsenal during the pandemic included Covaxin, Covishield, Sputnik-V, Covovax, Corbevax, and ZyCoV-D, among others. Worldwide, 13.5 billion COVID-19 vaccines have been administered since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to science research organization Our World in Data. Around 71% of the world's population has received at least one dose of a Covid

### **GLOBAL INSIGHT**

According to global data on TTS available in the public domain, as of January 5, 2024, Canada had reported 89 cases of TTS, of which 56 cases were reported following vaccination with AstraZeneca's Vaxzevria/Covishield COVID-19 vaccine, and 24 cases were reported following vaccination with Pfizer-BioNTech's Comirnaty COVID-19 vaccine. Eight cases were also reported following vaccination with Moderna's Spikevax COVID-19 vaccine. In the U.K., 122 instances of TTS following the administration of the AstraZeneca vaccine have been reported as of November 2023.

### **OPP MAKES A GIBE**

Where is the Thank You Modi ji banner now? Why are the PM and Health Ministry silent? Is this the reason why deaths due to heart attack at young age occur? Was this the reason why BJP took electoral bonds worth Rs 50 crore from Serum Institute? This issue is not a matter of politics but of safeguarding people's lives, Srinivas Bhadravathi Venkata, the National President of the Indian Youth Congress in a post on X.

monitoring and reporting of adverse events Another netizen Parikshit Suri has emphasized on the rigorous testing and transparency in vaccine development and echoed widespread calls for accountability and scrutiny in the approval process.

Dr. A Rajkumar Sreenivasan's plea for informed consent highlighted the ethical dimensions of healthcare decision-making, emphasizing the need for individuals to have agency and autonomy in vaccination choices. Michelle Zeh's skepticism about vaccine necessity and safety shed light on broader concerns surrounding pharmaceutical influence and the importance of evidence-based decision-

Manish Kumar's observation of increased heart attacks post-vaccination prompted calls for comprehensive investigation and surveillance to ensure the ongoing safety and efficacy of vaccination programs. While many doctors have said that benefits outweighs the downsides Dr Sankha Shubhra Chakrabarti, Head-Geriatrics, IMS-BHU posted on X, @these genius Indian doctors who are self consoling by saying it occurs within few weeks and cannot after 3 years probably do not know how the AdenoV delivery system is designed to work.@

Amidst these concerns and controversy over the safety aspects of the Covishield vaccine, the matter has now reached the Supreme Court on May 1, 2024, with a petition led by advocate Vishal Tiwari adding a layer of complexity and urgency to the discourse. Tiwari has sought the constitution of an expert medical panel to study the risk factors.

"More than 175 crore doses of Covishield have been administered in India. After Covid 19 there has been an increase in deaths due to heart attacks and sudden collapse of persons. There have been several cases of heart attack even in youngsters. Now after the document filed in UK court by the developer of Covishield, we are compelled to think on the risk and hazardous consequences of Covishield vaccine which have been administered to the citizens at a large number," the petition filed by advocate Tiwari says

The plea points out that AstraZeneca, the company that developed the vaccine, has said that its AZD1222 vaccine against Covid-19, which was made under license in India as Covishield, could cause low platelet counts and the formation of blood clots in rare cases.

The petition says the medical panel should

be headed by an expert from AIIMS and supervised by a retired Supreme Court judge. Tiwari has further sought directions to the

Centre to establish a 'Vaccine Damage Payment System' for citizens or families who have suffered debilitating health setbacks or even deaths after taking the

The plea has also called for strict action against the circulation of spurious Covishield, an offshoot of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine, which underwent extensive administration across India. However, SII, conspicuously headquartered in Pune, has remained reticent in response to the looming specter of legal action. Equally intriguing is the silence maintained by the Union Health Ministry, notwithstanding mounting apprehensions and criticisms voiced by recipients of Covishield on various social media

platforms. Delhi Health Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj has already raised the Centre's attention to these links, saying that it should work to urgently address the alleged side-effects of the Covidshield vaccine as millions of people in India were administered the shit during the Covid pandemic. Bharadwai expressed concern over the alleged link between the vaccine's side effects and a series of sudden deaths in India, claiming that Covidshield was banned in several European countries, including Germany, France, Spain, Finland, Norway, and

Denmark. Despite the government's formation of a national committee to probe such occurrences, the determination of insufficient evidence linking her demise to the vaccine underscores the intricate challenge of establishing causality in rare adverse events. However, the narrative shared by individuals such as Govindan underscores the exigency for robust surveillance, reporting mechanisms, and support infrastructure to address postvaccination complications comprehensively.

Against the backdrop of Covishield's legal conundrum, SII's competitor Hyderabadbased Bharat Biotech, has underscored the efficacy of its jab, Covaxin, saying that it was meticulously evaluated and efficacyefficacy.rials were held within

## **Study confirms higher** risk of very rare clot with AstraZeneca Jab

he Global Covid Vaccine Safety Project conducted an extensive analysis of adverse events associated with COVID-19 vaccines across multiple regions, including Argentina, Australia (New South Wales and Victoria), Canada (British Columbia and Ontario), Denmark, Finland, France, New Zealand, and Scotland. They employed a method called observed versus expected (OE) ratios to compare the number of adverse events reported with the expected baseline rates. In simple words, this means first healthcare providers have a baseline 'expectation' of how many adverse events are likely given a certain number of vaccinated people, and compare it with the number of events reported to health systems. Expectations are formed based on experience with the rates of vaccination, and reactions observed historically. However, COVID-19 vaccination was an outlier event that saw billions of vaccines administered over a relatively short span. OE ratios greater than 1.5, indicating 50% more adverse reactions than expected, were identified as potential safety signals requiring thorough investigation. Notable findings included elevated OE ratios for Guillain-Barré syndrome and cerebral venous sinus thrombosis following the first dose of the ChAdOx1 vaccine. Additionally, acute disseminated encephalomyelitis showed a high OE ratio following the first dose of the mRNA-1273 vaccine. Increased OE ratios for myocarditis and pericarditis were also observed following vaccination with BNT162b2 (Pfizer/BioNTech), mRNA-1273 (Moderna), and ChAdOx1 (AstraZeneca/Serum Institute of India) vaccines. In India, as of December 6, 2022, a total of 92,003 Adverse

Events Following Immunisation

accounting for approximately

vaccinated against COVID-19.

event reporting systems can vary

However, it's essential to note

that the strength of adverse

0.009% of the population

(AEFI) were reported,



in European

vaccines) is higher than Asia. This is a combination of both a better reporting system as well as physiological factors. Studies done in one country may not easily

-CHANDRAKANT LAHARIYA Physician and health policy expert

significantly between countries, influencing reported incidence

The study also highlighted differences in adverse event reporting rates between regions. For example, the affidavit submitted by the Indian government to the Supreme Court cited higher AEFI rates in the United States (0.2%) and the United Kingdom (0.7%) compared to India. These variations may be influenced by reporting system robustness and physiological factors. Despite confirming previously identified rare safety signals associated with COVID-19 vaccination, the study emphasized the need for further investigation to confirm associations and evaluate clinical significance. An affidavit by the government to the Supreme Court claimed that compared with India, nearly 0.2% of the people in the United States who received COVID-19 vaccines showed AEFI, as did 0.7% in the

This can significantly vary among countries. While our study confirmed previously identified rare safety signals following COVID-19 vaccination and contributed evidence on several other important outcomes, further investigation is warranted to confirm associations and assess

clinical significance," the study

by the Global Covid Vaccine

Safety Project said.

These ratios are, however,

significantly influenced by the

strength of the adverse event

reporting system in countries.

## DOCTORS SPEAK

TTS is a very rare condition resulting from an abnormal immune response. While it has several causes, it has also been linked with adenovirus vector vaccines. The WHO has deemed the vaccine safe and effective for all individuals aged 18 and above. ... We are yet to fully understand the impact of coronavirus on

people, also called long

Covid. The difficulty is to distinguish between the complications that are caused by Covid itself or the vaccine. That remains debatable. People who are

vaccinated have an overall lower risk of complications such as post-Covid heart attacks and strokes among

DR RAVI WANKEDEKAR, Former national president of the IMA

"Like many things in medicine, the exact mechanism for this is also unknown. It is an unusual immune reaction to a particular

vaccine genre which is called as adenovirus vector vaccine. Adenovirus vectors are not diseasecausing viruses but these are artificially fitted with the spike of the virus that

our immune system needs to fight. In the case of AstraZeneca's adenovirus vector vaccine, a chimpanzee adenovirus -ChAdOx1 - has

been modified to enable it to carry the Covid-19 (SARS-CoV-2) spike protein injected into the muscles of humans." — **DR RAJEEV JAYADEVAN**, Co-

Chairman, IMA Covid-19 task force

# A NIGHT IN OSTELLO BELL SHARED STORIES, SHARED SPACES



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BY **PAWAN SONI** 

fter watching Kangana Ranaut's film, Queen which includes a scene where she stays in a hostel, I was intrigued and mentally noted to experience it at least once. This opportunity arose when I was traveling alone for work in Milan for a few days. Since my wife is not keen on such experiences, I could only do it while traveling solo. I myself was a bit hesitant and booked the hostel room for only one night post which I booked a luxury hotel room.

Staying in a hostel room with

bunk beds shared by eight tourists from different countries and continents was an eye-opening experience. As someone accustomed to the privacy of hotels, the idea of sharing a room with strangers was initially daunting. However, the warmth and friendliness of my fellow travelers quickly put me at ease. Additionally, in India, we would never think of sharing a room with both guys and girls. Here, we were six guys and two girls sharing the dormitory

One of the most memorable aspects of my stay was the interactions with my roommates. Despite our diverse backgrounds, we found common ground in our love for travel and adventure. Each person had a unique story to share, from their reasons for travelling to their favourite destinations. I learned about different



the phone charging, individual reading lights provided convenience without disturbing others. The common bathroom, although shared, was always clean and well-maintained, a testament to the hostel staff's commitment to guest comfort and roommates ensuring to leave the washroom with the same hygiene level they expected from others. The common kitchen was a hub of

activity, with guests preparing meals and sharing recipes from their home countries. It was a delightful experience to taste dishes from around the world, each one infused with the flavours and spices of a different culture. The complimentary



fruits and groceries added a thoughtful touch, making us feel at home in this foreign environment.

Beyond the practical amenities, the hostel's vibrant atmosphere made it a memorable stay. It served as a meeting point for young travellers, where friendships were formed over shared meals and late-night conversations. The hostel also organised social events, such as pub crawls and city tours, allowing guests to explore the city together and create lasting memories.

(Author is a food critic and founder of the Big F Awards. He can be reached at Pawan.Soni@indianfoodfreak.com)

# **EXPERIENCING CULTURE ONE COURSE AT A TIME**

The industry's evolving nature is fostering a culture of shared knowledge, with chefs and restaurants collaborating more than ever. While the permanence of specific formats, like pop-ups, remains uncertain, the spirit of collaboration is undoubtedly a mainstay. It's a dynamic era where working together isn't just a trend; it's a fundamental shift shaping the future of the culinary landscape.



#### BY RUPALI DEAN

broadening my perspective and

igniting my curiosity about the world.

The hostel's facilities played a

significant role in fostering a sense of community among guests. The small

locked storage below the beds ensured

the charging points were necessary for

that our belongings were safe, while

Pop-up restaurants are like culinary jazz performances, where chefs create impromptu meals in unconventional settings, such as dining rooms or even courtvards. These temporary dining courtyards. These temporary dining experiences allow chefs to experiment freely with their cooking skills within a confined timeframe and for a select Mukhin recently hosted famous Chef Joan Roca from El Celler De Can Roca at Krasota restaurant in Dubai. They worked together to create a unique culinary experience, exploring the deep stories behind well-known dishes. By combining different textures, ingredients, and flavours, they presented a special event in Dubai that highlighted the perfect blend of artistry in both appearance and taste. Roca's 'Memories of a Neighbourhood Bar' paired with Deyneka's 'The Light of The Past' set the scene. This dish, from El Celler de the scene. This dish, from El Celler de Can Roca's cookbook, honours the family's legacy. The three brothers learned cooking early at Can Roca, perfecting their skills. Inspired by Roerich's 'Himalayas,' Mukhin's Artichoke Curry and Coconut Rice Artichoke Curry and Coconut Rice reflect the painting's colours. The Black Cod with Plum and Fig drew from Aivazovsky's art, symbolizing a shipwreck survival. Five Senses Bon Bons by Jordi Roca at Casa Cacao concluded the feast magically, blurring reality and fantasy.

THE WORLD IS GETTING SMALLER AND MORE INCLUSIVE Engaging in pop-up events presents chefs with a valuable chance to acquire new skills and engage in the exchange of culinary knowledge amongst peers in the industry. "Popups are a great platform of exchanging ideas and sharing our cooking philosophies and techniques. It's a true example of how the world is getting smaller and more inclusive. It's a sense of pride when I get an opportunity to cook Indian food for an audience that may not be well educated about Indian Cuisine, or when Chefs of the most restaurants renowned around the world join us at Trèsind Studio to share their cooking philosophy with our guests. in the end it's a celebration of culture and creating friendships. The ideas and brainstorming

pop

that

create

eventually



CHEF JOAN ROCA WITH CHEF VLADIMIR MUKHIN AND HIS TEAM AT KRASOTA, DUBAI



CHEF HIMANSHU SAINI AND CHEF JITIN JOSHI



new possibilities. We've been fortunate to have the opportunity to

travel overseas and meet fantastic people, learning and experiencing entirely new cultures, cuisines and ingredients. I always try to bring a few of my team with me on these trips, I believe that travel helps to widen

one's perspective and encourage accelerated growth. It's fulfilling for me to groom and provide opportunities for my team to learn", says Julien Royer Chef Owner- Odette

(3 Michelin stars), Singapore. These modern chefs charge for their dinners, yet none are earning vast fortunes from them. They often promote their events on Instagram and sell tickets digitally. Regardless of the practical details, pop-up dining enables them to innovate and test ideas with a small group of guests, fostering a fleeting sense of community. In a time where personal narratives hold greater significance in art and conversations, pop-ups provide chefs with a platform to express, through cuisine, "This is my heritage. This is my identity."



and unique ingredients. "As a

chef, it's important

to never stop learning.

from various backgrounds into

We love inviting chefs

New Delhi, May 5, 2024

The Japanese celebrate the Hanami, the festival of Spring, with as much gusto as we Indians do. SHOBORI GANGULI participates in the gastronomical delights accompanying this ancient ritual at Guppy right here in Delhi

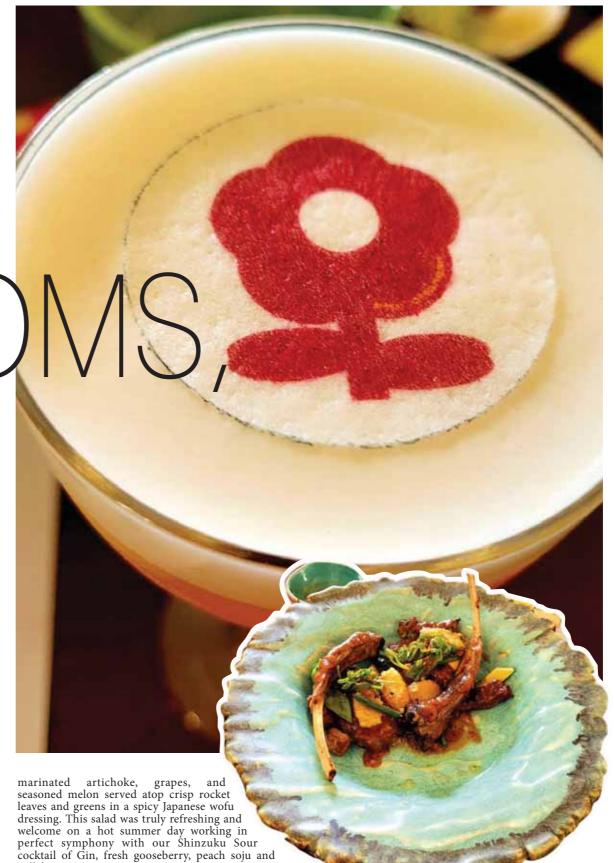
the pioneer

**CHEER AND** CAMARADERIE

> his week I had the great fortune to partake of the Hanami festival at one of Delhi's finest Japanese restaurants Guppy (part of the Olive Chain). This is cherry blossom season of spring in Japan, a time to mark the Hanami festival — a unique cultural tradition of viewing flowers in full bloom, an ancient ritual which serves as a Japanese reminder of the transcience of nature, the blossoms a metaphor for life, draped in the immortal philosophy of hope and And no festival in the world is

> complete without its attendant share of feasts and festivities. Guppy, in an earnest attempt to keep this old Japanese heritage alive and robust in a faraway land from Japan, in the very heart of India in Delhi, laid out a sumptuous fare of what would typically be a part of a Hanami dining spread.
>
> Among the salads on offer — Artichoke &

Melon, Acvocado, Beet & Edamame and Chicken, Avocado & Greens — my friend and I settled for the first one which was a refreshing mix of



Skipping the Sushi selection, which we Indians are now quite familiar with, we opted for the translucent Tobanjan-spiced Chicken Steamed Dumplings, the filling a burst of minced chicken in a Japanese spicy tobanjan chili paste served with a ponzú dip.

Perhaps it is me and my changed taste buds over the years or a conscious attempt by Japanese kitchens based out of India, the element of spiciness has notched up a bit from what was often termed as a "bland" taste emanating from traditional kitchens, which may suit the Japanese palate even today, in Japan and elsewhere in the most department of the most department. the world, but were not embraced with the same degree of enthusiasm one has watched with Italian, Spanish, Chinese, West Asian and Mediterranean spreads across

The fact that Guppy was brimming with people, almost all tables occupied, on a busy working week day, is perhaps testimony to the fact that Japanese cuisine has certainly found an innovative way to work around the Indian palate and its natural inclination for well-spiced

From their Small Plates offering we went past the vegetarian Stuffed Tofu Katsu to the Crisp Chicken Parcel, an oven-baked phyllo parcel with ginger flavoured chicken accompanied by soy apple salsa and a vuzu miso sauce.

For the Mains, while my friend settled for the undoubtedly healthy and delicious Grilled Yuzu Khoso Fish, marinated in Jaanese yuzu khoso and herb salsa, grilled and served with lemon butter soy, I ventured into the now universally forbidden territory of red meat. The Grilled Marinated Lamb Chop came with seasonal vegetables and was served with red wine miso. I must admit that while the flavours of the grill settled rather smoothly on my palate, the meat itself was on the rare side and a tad stringy. Red meat requires adequate time to be rested in its marination for it to step delicately away from the bone. In my opinion, the Lamb Chop needed some more attention.

That said, the experience was a rather cheerful one, given that the Japanese dedicate as much time to the aesthetics of the inanimate as to the animate. Guppy is that cheerful, pretty, comfortable Japanese place one would like to hang around at, with friends or family. Here's wishing everyone a happy Hanami, the Japanese spring festival so similar to our own spring festival of Basant Panchami.

# Gurugram's latest Culinary Contender















BY **PAWAN SONI** 

estled between two established dining spots at Two Horizon, Marieta emerges as Gurgaon's newest culinary contender, overtaking the space vacated by well-regarded Italian eatery Artusi. Although the name "Marieta' which is a popular female name hails from Greece, the restaurant's global menu lacks prominent Greek offer-

The start was a bit of a let down. Not being served a hard copy of the menu and asking diner to scan a barcode for the digital menu at a finedine restaurant with an excuse that they are new doesn't go well with me. May be I am an old timer who doesn't like reading the menu on mobile's small screen. The manager quickly impro-

vised and offered to share a b&w printed menu with which I was okay but it never came. However he later shared his laptop with me to read the menu. For a classy looking restaurant they can easily do with few Ipads if even after a month of their opening they are finding it difficult to get the printed menu.

I am here with my wife and like most men opt for 'The Second Date'. Don't get me wrong. It is a tequila and sake based cocktail with a bit of lychee and Jasmine tea. Its delightful aroma and soothing taste set a pleasant tone for the evening. As I perused the drinks menu, I noticed a variety of tequila and mezcal cocktails, signaling an interesting trend. Just as gin has surpassed vodka in popularity for cocktails, it seems tequila-based cocktails might be the

next big trend. While the food initially took some time to arrive, once it did, the dishes came out in quick succession. Most of the dishes we ordered were impressive. The Mushroom and Cream Cheese (Rs495), encased in crispy kataifi on a cauliflower sauce base, was particularly exciting. Similarly, the Habanero Butter Shrimp (Rs750), served with airy sourdough bread, was noteworthy, although I

habanero, making the dish's name somewhat misleading. The Avocado Cream Cheese Uramaki (Rs750) sushi roll was

expected a bit more heat from the

Sector 43, Gurgaon Phone: 8800186953 Cuisine: Global with focus on Mexican

> **RATINGS** Food: 3.5/5 **Drinks**: 4.0/5 **Service** : 3.75/5 Ambience: 3.5/5 **Overall:** 3.5/5

Shell Taco lacked the necessary spiciness to balance the sweetness of the potato. Adding a bit of spicy sauce on the side made it more enjoyable for me. The only disappointment was the Neapolitan Margherita pizza, which fell short on the dough, kneading, and rolling. The edges didn't rise properly, the center wasn't thin enough, and the sauce was mediocre. However, the chef acknowledged the issue without making excuses, which in my view was commendable. Since we had no room for a main course, we opted for desserts directly. The Vanilla Bean Panna Cotta (Rs595) was exceptional, perfectly set and delicious. Topped with figs and caramel sauce, this dessert, an Artusi recipe, is reason enough to visit

enjoyable, with the added crunch of

fried sweet potato crisps on top. However, the Spicy Sweet Potato Soft

We arrived early for a Monday dinner and found the music to be too loud for an empty restaurant. However, as more guests arrived, the sound was absorbed, creating a more enjoyable ambiance. The tables in alfresco settings are a bit small for four people; fitting more than two people would be a challenge. Despite minor initial hiccups, the service was good and well-informed. Overall, Marieta is worth a try, especially for the panna cotta.

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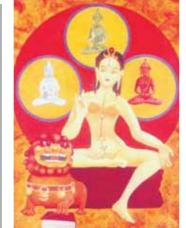




ARIES March 21-April 19

This week may fall short of your expectations, particularly regarding financial aspects. You may find yourself unable to make decisive choices at work, leaving tasks incomplete and your workspace disorganized. You might even delay important activities or travel due to uncertainty. However, as the week progresses, you'll discover a more stable approach to managing your responsibilities. Connections from distant locations could prove advantageous. Your team will look to you for more active involvement, and you'll rise to the occasion, regaining confidence and engaging more with your social circle. Despite these improvements, the week might conclude on a challenging note, with domestic tensions or significant health issues within your family demanding both your time and financial resources, which could indirectly affect your professional commitments.

Lucky number 7 | Lucky colour Teal



#### **LEO** July 23-Aug 22

This week presents a challenging phase marked by a strong drive and assertive demeanor. Your focus is solely on your professional commitments, often at the expense of your emotional well-being. The overwhelming workload might lead to frustration as you struggle to see tangible outcomes in the distance. Midweek, expect a significant change in your social or professional circle, either through an unexpected arrival or a departure. This may cause a temporary spike in your temper, urging you to make impulsive decisions amidst confusion. While travel might be forthcoming, it's crucial to take moments for reflection to maintain your composure and gain clarity. Despite these testing times, your ability to remain objective during tough decisions shines through, though caution is advised to avoid rushed judgments.

Lucky number 17 | Lucky colour Indigo Lucky day Sunday



#### **SAGITTARIUS** Nov 22-Dec 21

This week emphasizes the need for organization, focus, and self-discipline. A sense of uncertainty pervades, creating misunderstandings between partners. A situation arises where clarity and honesty are available, yet you may find yourself turning away from these truths due to a fear of worsening circumstances. Around midweek, expect challenges related to legal matters or external inquiries that could lead to disappointment. It's a good time to monitor your health and manage how you express yourself; resisting the urge to engage in conflicts with those who challenge you can be beneficial. Consider this period an opportunity for solitude, allowing for reflection and reassessment of your objectives. Healing and rejuvenating yourself during this time will prepare you to tackle upcoming challenges with renewed vigor. Patience is key, as the difficulties you face are only temporary.

Lucky number 121 Lucky colour Fuchsia Lucky day Saturday



#### **TAURUS** April 20-May 20

This week is set to be filled with abundant blessings. Your long-standing projects are likely to come to a successful conclusion, and there could be exciting developments regarding your living situation, such as moving into a new home through a fortunate opportunity. Expect heartwarming gatherings with family and friends that enhance your sense of community. You'll find yourself surrounded by a positive energy that boosts your confidence and inspires others. With your strong communication skills and magnetic personality, you naturally attract people who seek deeper, cooperative connections with you. Your leadership qualities shine brightly this week. As the week winds down, you'll be drawn towards spiritual practices. Engaging in these reflective activities will deepen your connection to the spiritual realm and spark your creativity. Enjoy every moment of this enriching week.

Lucky number 8 | Lucky colour Olive Lucky day Tuesday



#### VIRGO Aug 23-Sep 22

This week promises significant growth in your financial status, accompanied by joy and fulfillment. At work, you exhibit remarkable expertise and apply your vast knowledge in practical ways. Your approach is disciplined, with a keen adherence to schedules and procedures, which contributes to a strong financial foundation, security, and comfort. Additionally, there's potential for receiving substantial financial gains, possibly from unexpected sources. Opportunities for advancements and salary increases might arise, boosting your self-confidence. You may encounter new opportunities such as a job offer, project, or assignment. Utilize your resources judiciously and nurture a keen interest in acquiring and implementing new knowledge professionally. The vibrant energy of youthful colleagues at work also plays a crucial role in driving successful outcomes and bringing joy to your life.

Lucky number 9 | Lucky colour Coral Lucky day Thursday



#### CAPRICORN Dec 22-Jan 19

This week marks a period of significant achievement following your persistent efforts and meticulous attention to detail. As the days unfold, you'll find yourself immersed in challenging tasks that require your full concentration and commitment. Your dedication to enhancing both your professional skills and personal growth will be evident. Despite the obstacles, the hard work will enrich your experience and knowledge, paving the way for notable successes. By the week's end, you will have every reason to feel proud and fulfilled. Additionally, this is an ideal time for deep spiritual rejuvenation and strengthening your connection with the divine. The week concludes with powerful transformative energies, fostering personal healing and possibly leading to meaningful relationship advancements, including new commitments or deepening existing bonds.

Lucky number 13 | Lucky colour Maroon Lucky day Monday



#### **GEMINI** May 21-June 20

This week ushers in a spectrum of experiences encompassing deep emotions and spiritual growth, as well as an aggressive pursuit of prosperity. As the week begins, your financial endeavors start to bear fruit, leading to an increase in profits as the days progress. Your caring nature allows you to live lavishly, and your balanced, generous approach at work fosters a harmonious environment. Travel may be on your agenda, possibly including international journeys or leisure cruises with loved ones. Midweek brings a focus on home life, where you adeptly manage the demands of both your professional and personal spheres. As the week draws to a close, you will savor the rewards of your hard work, enjoying robust health and a burst of

Lucky number 19 | Lucky colour Golden



#### LIBRA Sep 23-Oct 22

As the week begins, you embark on a journey of discovery, seeking paths to resolve final challenges effectively. You are on the verge of completing a significant chapter, facing hurdles that you will navigate through successfully. Midweek brings a wave of affection and quality moments with your significant other. As the week draws to a close. conditions become favorable for making investments in real estate or similar significant acquisitions. This period marks a fortunate phase with exceptional opportunities enhancing your overall well-being. You are energized, spirited, and buoyant, surrounded by the warmth of family support that uplifts your confidence. The weekend is perfect for enjoying memorable times with your family and friends, celebrating the joys of togetherness.

Lucky number 2 | Lucky colour Beige Lucky day Tuesday



#### **AQUARIUS** Jan 20-Feb 18

This week heralds a time of fulfillment and joy, as an abundance of blessings enriches your life across multiple fronts. Expect a surge of positivity that enhances your capacity for organization and sharpens your intuition. Harness this vibrant energy to boost your cognitive abilities. It's a rewarding period, both financially and emotionally, offering deep spiritual growth and emotional satisfaction. Relationships take center stage, enhancing connections and aligning closely with your aspirations. Opportunities in your professional life, such as new roles or ventures, are likely to materialize, positioning you favorably in your career path. Your overall vitality is robust, complemented by effective communication and leadership skills, setting the stage for a successful and harmonious week.

Lucky number 131 Lucky colour Turquoise Lucky day Friday



#### **CANCER** June 21-July 22

This week brings surprising shifts that may leave you feeling both proud and empowered to face the world's challenges. You find yourself unexpectedly stepping into a realm of success, particularly in areas you once thought were beyond your reach. Recognition and envy from others mark your newfound status, though those who truly support you will celebrate your accomplishments. This is a time of significant progress, aligning closely with your true interests. You've surpassed difficult obstacles, and your achievements are now publicly recognized and applauded. A sense of joy emerges, rooted in past experiences. As the week closes, you'll find comfort in cherished memories, reconnecting with the joys of childhood and enjoying moments with younger companions

Lucky number 11 | Lucky colour Lavender Lucky day Wednesday



#### SCORPIO Oct 23-Nov 21

This week, your focus is primarily on professional endeavors. Embracing risk now may lead to significant financial gains due to your exceptional performance. You possess an abundance of creative energy, enabling you to challenge has captured your attention, but you have the capacity to master it with flair. Midweek, anticipate a period of stringent guidance from a senior female relative Heeding her wisdom and suggestions will prove advantageous. Enhance your cognitive abilities by engaging with intellectually stimulating activities like reading substantive literature and tackling challenging puzzles. Such pursuits might also lead you to profound revelations in your spiritual journey

Lucky number 18 | Lucky colour Amber Lucky day Sunday



### PISCES Feb 19-March 20

Success this week seems highly linked to collaboration and teamwork, enhancing both productivity and rapport in your professional environment. You're stepping into a phase where self-respect becomes a cornerstone, fueling both your horizon appears promising, with current ventures showing signs of prosperity and the potential for exciting job opportunities on the near horizon. Effective communication and mutual support are crucial right now, paving the way for fruitful negotiations. A sense of spirituality infuses your endeavors, adding a layer of depth to your pursuits. Joyous amily developments, such as the anticipation of a new child, bring happiness and a sense of fulfillment. Your visionary outlook and proactive confidence empower you to explore new territories fearlessly.

ucky number 1 | Lucky colour Ivory Lucky day Wednesday

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arrying over from the previous issue, it is important to note that ✓ negative memory implants in our minds and the preconditioning thereof, can act a great devil for the self and those around. So, they will also come under the category of demonic forces. Such negative tendencies often foray into uncontrolled and fanciful inconsequential thoughts. They overtake our mind and distract our attention from priority preferences. We, thus, often misdirect our energies towards unproductive ends. In the process, our creative potential gets restricted from blooming out in full. Trapped into such unproductive voluminous thoughts, we are hardly left with mind-space necessary to invoke our faculty of discrimination. We, thus, loose our sense of reasons and direction, and thereby objectivity. Therefore, it becomes imperative upon us to consciously strike upon such unbecoming tendencies, for which we are very much capable. Otherwise, they will keep chasing us from within to our detriment.

The question now is: how to figure out

true intent and character of varied demonic presences in disguise, well in time? And then, identify the most appropriate weapon to checkmate their assault? Evidently, it calls for being on full mental alert all the time. That alone can facilitate identifying right weapon for the right occasion. Mother's 10 arms also correspond to the positive and negative implications of man's sensory organs - 5 of perception and 5 of action. Experience suggests that in our usual flow of life, more often our sensory perceptions get stuck to the illusionary glare and glitter of the seeming world. Ego, further driving one's mind, makes one believe that what is apparent is to be taken as absolute truth. In the process, one forgets the necessity of invoking the indwelling faculty of discrimination necessary to figure out the underlying truths. True picture thus missing, one may inadvertently respond unintelligently on instinctive judgment. By the time one realises, the danger would have caught us unaware. It, therefore, becomes incumbent upon us to be on full

## Mother teaches how to make life better



mental alert to figure out one's own limitations of mind in time, work upon them aggressively, and ensure being in full control of the self. Now, why a Lion as Mother's mount? Remember, a lion is known to be a

the king of jungles. When a lion goes for a hunt in search of its feed, it moves strategically, carefully, cautiously, without wasting much of its energy, but with its eyes fixed on its

very intelligent animal and supposedly

prospective kill. It ensures not being noticed by the kill, till it is ready for its final assault. However, once the prey comes within its reach, it extols all its energy and pounces upon it. But then the lion does not go for its next kill till it has become hungry once again after exhausting its feed. The killing too is, therefore, need based and not out of greed. In fact, in nature's scheme of things, there exists a food chain. It is so made out as that there exists a predator to check the outgrowth of any creature. Bacteria in a drain treats the night soil. But its excessive presence will make living inhabitable. So, to keep their outgrowth in check, there exist other creatures. This way nature's biodiversity is kept in equitable balance.

Here again, the animals, unlike human beings, invariably live in their present moment. They do not dwell on their past nor do they care for future. They are not tempted to encroach upon other's share to secure their future concerns either. Human beings, on the contrary, recalling their unpleasant memories of the past invite sense of fear. They also keep dreaming about

making a better future. In the process they dissipate their energies and mind space towards unproductive ends. Consequently, they are hardly left with enough to do justice to the callings of the present. What we forget that the seed planted today will turn into a fruit bearing tree tomorrow. Accordingly, we need to shed the past that has become history and forget about future that is uncertain. Following which we can put in our whole into present, which alone will prepare the ground for a better tomorrow.

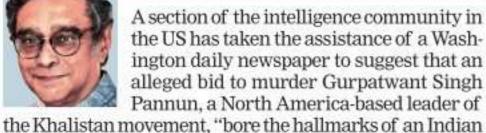
If the above inputs are made to sink in deep in one's mind through continued reflection, it will induce a person to act accordingly, which one could carry on effortlessly. Following which, one may be able to successfully steer life with ease and comfort, despite all oddities and hazards coming in the way. Life will then turn into a beautiful experience.

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# Pannun: Western outrage shouldn't touch RAW nerve

**RIGHT & WRONG** 





state-sanctioned, state-sponsored assassination on US soil".

Having joined Canada's Justin Trudeau government in accusing India's external intelligence agency R&AW of violating copybook procedures in its war against Khalistani separatists, the CIA has gone a step further and made public the identity of Vikram Yaday, the officer it claims was the operational head of the mission. It has also been asserted that the then R&AW chief was fully in the loop. The disclosures followed a belief in US official circles that New Delhi was not serious about investigating the apparently roguish conduct of operatives in North America.

The feigned outrage in Washington over India's "murder plot" on US soil has given a handle to Narendra Modi's domestic critics to argue that it was inconceivable that a major undercover operation of this nature didn't have the endorsement of both National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and the Prime Minister. There is also the veiled threat that unless India took a few steps back and abandoned its aggressive campaign against separatists, the future of India-US relations would be jeopardised.

Since much of the US dossier against R&AW operations is based on assumptions, it is worthwhile exploring what would have happened if the hired killer contracted by one Nikhil Gupta—himself apparently subcontracted by R&AW to deal with Pannun—hadn't turned out to be an undercover US agent. Had the Khalistani leader indeed been neutralised, there would have been a momentary fuss. However, given that Pannun's menacing public utterances hardly stood the test of responsible US citizenship, it is likely that the matter would have been filed and forgotten. Unlike Canada where pro-Khalistan Sikhs have become a vote bank and are courted by the three mainstream parties, they are relatively insignificant in the US. Barring some state-level representatives, the Democratic and Republican establishments don't feel obliged to support the Khalistani cause. They would rather court successful professionals and moneybags among US citizens of Indian origin.

Yet, it is undeniable that Operation Pannun failed. It encountered what every undercover operation dreads: bad luck. Had the hapless Gupta, now in a Prague jail awaiting extradition to US, chosen a different contract killer, the results would probably have been quite different.



DIFFERENT STORY: Had Operation Pannun not failed, the matter would have been forgotten in the US since pro-Khalistan Sikhs are relatively insignificant there

In the aftermath of failure, messy professional rivalries inside R&AW have taken centre-stage. The responsibility for sullying its reputation has been pinned on Vikram Yadav and former R&AW chief Samant Goel. Both have been accused of being flat-footed policemen, incapable of distinguishing between operations in New York and Punjab. The critics seem to suggest that the Mossad-like approach of R&AW should be abandoned in favour of the agency's pre-Modi approach to fighting separatism: supplying the villains with suitcases of cash.

That the US offensive is against an inept R&AW operative with suspect tradecraft who also overstepped his limits is partially correct. Whether Pannun, as has been suspected in some quarters, doubled up as a US intelligence asset and is therefore precious, isn't known. However, what is significant is the way US has reacted to this supposed murder plot.

To believe the US regards its soil as sacred and values all its citizens equally is hogwash. Pannun has come in handy to mobilise the Five Eyes alliance comprising the US, UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand to put pressure on New Delhi to tone down its aggressive opposition to the diaspora Khalistanis. There is an awareness that the formidable reputation India's intelligence agencies have acquired in the neighbourhood, particularly inside Pakistan, has helped India shed its pushover, soft state status. India's opponents are running scared.

That this has happened in pursuance of a doctrine that upholds muscularity is also well known. Coming in the wake of the political support for retaliatory surgical strikes and assertions of strategic autonomy, there is a feeling in sections of western establishments that the Modi dispensation should be brought down a notch or two. Maybe it is wrong to over-read the significance of the timing of the media campaign against Modi and Doval, but it can't be separated altogether. The political leadership in the West may not be as invested in this project, but intelligence agencies are known to exercise their own operational autonomy.

What is important is that India should not resile from its determination to uphold national interests uncompromisingly. The skills upgradation of R&AW can happen without the country's strategic doctrines being diluted to accommodate the sensitivities of nations that have long lost the ability to distinguish between friends and enemies.

# What is vikas, and at what cost do we want it, asks 'Green Nobel' winner

For over a decade, 43-year-old environmentalist **Alok Shukla** has led a movement to save the lungs of Chhattisgarh, the Hasdeo forests. It resulted in the cancellation of proposed coal mines in the region and was held up as a model for grassroots campaigns. The Goldman Environmental Prize awardee speaks to Shruti Sonal about his green crusade

Congratulations on getting the Goldman and mobilising people from different villages Environmental Prize (also known as the 'Green Nobel'). Did you ever think the Hasdeo campaign would become so big?

We have been fighting for 'jal, jangal, zameen' in Chhattisgarh for two decades. I never thought I would get such a big recognition for it. I am happy

and proud, but also aware that the responsibility only increases from here on. More than anything, I see it as a recognition of the adivasi community's struggle. This award belongs to all the tribals, villagers and citizens who are part of the campaign. I hope it encourages more and more people to read about it. Hasdeo can become a model for fights in Jharkhand, Odisha, Maharashtra, and everywhere else.

■ The prize citation states how the #SaveHasdeo trended with couples even using it in their wedding invites. How did you involve villagers in the campaign? What were the challenges?

but visited Hasdeo only in 2011, invited by one of the local leaders. I was taken aback by the beauty of the sal forests and the Hasdeo river. Then, I got to know that 21 coal blocks had already been identified there, which would put almost one lakh hectares at risk of deforestation. The people had only one question in mind: how can they fight the government and a big corporation? They were not even aware of their constitutional rights. Hasdeo is spread over a massive area,

and involving gram panchayats was crucial. We told them about the rights they have over

their land and resources. Gradually, they became enthused to fight together. We decided this fight would be for the whole of Hasdeo, not just for a single forest or river, using legal rights, democratic models, and peaceful ways of mobilisation.

There was a backlash, with many attempts at intimidation or buying out people.

#### But the movement became much bigger, going beyond Hasdeo.

Many movements in India in the last two decades have a common pattern — the fight for resources usually becomes limited to the lives of those directly affected by it. I understood that unless the Hasdeo cause got support from the masses outside, it would be difficult to strengthen the fight. It wasn't only a fight for constitutional and cultural rights of adivasis. Hasdeo forests are the lungs of Chhattisgarh — its future will have a wider I had been working in Chhattisgarh since 2004 environmental impact, especially on the

> country's monsoon cycle. We talked about how it might affect farmers' access to water in nearby states, wildlife conservation efforts, and increase man-animal conflict. This brought together a wide cross-section of people, including students, lawyers, and activists from urban areas. On social media, we said this was a fight for everyone's right to breathe. It became a plat-

voices and made

After a long time, a movement managed to break geographical and linguistic borders. It became a jan andolan across multiple cities.

#### Development and ecology are often pitted against each other. Is there a way to balance both in India?

Our fight to save Hasdeo is still on. There are six coal blocks remaining, and protests are ongoing at the site. But the campaign has managed to raise an important question: what is vikas, and at what cost do we want it? In 2010, the Hasdeo forests had been declared a no-go zone by the ministry of environment and forests. The Wildlife Institute of India had also called for it in 2021, saying there would be widespread ecological destruction and human-wildlife conflict otherwise. We asked a simple question — can we destroy such a forest to get coal? People and MLAs in Rajasthan, who were beneficiaries of this coal, said they don't want coal at such a massive cost. Meanwhile, people in Chhattisgarh asked another question: if India has set targets to push renewables, phase out coal and become net-zero by 2070, why do they need coal at all costs? One of the biggest wins was when the Chhattisgarh assembly passed a resolution in July 2022 to cancel all the coal blocks in Hasdeo.

#### What can be done to make green concerns more central to political discourse today?

We must increase awareness both in society and within parties. There's a long way to go in India, but if citizens bring it up strongly, politicians cannot ignore it. It's sad that currently, such issues are hardly mentioned in election manifestos even though they directly impact the lives of millions of people. Having a safe environment to live in is a part of the constitutional right to life. Yet, at a policy level, environmental laws are weakening, and paving way for more pro-corporate laws and faster environmental clearances, as seen in the Forest Conservation Act amendments. Activists on ground and those who write about form to amplify local the environment will have to step up. Including these issues in school curricula to sensitise children from a young age is the dia take note. need of the hour.

# Behenji's fightback: Mayawati tries to retrieve lost relevance in national politics

BY INVITATION



leader Mayawati.

**BADRI NARAYAN** 

While travelling around Dalit bastis and hamlets in villages and in urban slums, one hears two popular narratives — first, jo free ration dewe, vote wohi ke jaye (the party

second, party ke bachayib, hathi ke jhumayib (we will save our party and make the elephant stronger). One is clearly in favour of BJP, which implemented the free ration scheme for poor, Dalit, subalterns and marginals. Another represents support for Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and its

While BSP does face an existential crisis, it would be premature to write off Mayawati who still has the capacity to mobilise her base. There are two reasons. First, her cadre seems to have been

activated at the grassroots this time. Secondly Mayawati, her nephew Akash Anand and other leaders of the party are constantly and aggressively attacking the welfare approach that emerged among the poor because of BJP-initiated schemes. Through this strategy, BSP is working hard to retrieve its base vote from the growing influence of BJP among Dalits, marginals and the poor.

Mayawati has seemingly reinvented her political diction in this election, from a macro-discourse to a more detailed one. Previously, she used to critique BJP and other parties for their developmental model in an abstract way. Now, that critique has evolved into a more granular attack. She is weaving in narratives of developmental schemes and their impact on the everyday problems of common people. She seems to be constantly shifting her electoral appeal to respond to issues raised by competing political parties. It shows BSP has strengthened its feedback system in this election.

She and her party are also campaigning aggres-

sively in this election, in virtual and physical modes, compared to the last few elections. Her party is organising rallies, door-to-door programmes and finding other ways to forge direct contact with people. Party leaders are active on social media platforms like Facebook, X and also interacting with the media. Earlier, Mayawati and BSP ignored or gave less importance to the media for the purposes of electoral mobilisation. This time, she has shifted to a fast mode of electioneering. Another factor that strengthens her campaign is the support she is getting from Akash Anand. It is observed on the ground that Akash is being accepted among BSP voters as the party's second rank of leadership. Being a foreign-returned youth from the Dalit community, and the heir to Mayawati, provides a symbolic base to his leadership bid. BSP is also trying to regain political space in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Maharashtra by choosing strong candidates and organising systematic campaigns.

Mayawati is constantly deconstructing stereotypical perceptions created by a section of media and opinion-makers. She takes on accusations of being BJP's B-team, of striking underhand deals with BJP to cut votes and hurt the prospects of opposition parties. She attacks both BJP and the INDIA alliance very sharply. She has put up candidates from the same castes and communities against the BJP in many UP constituencies. She has played a similar strategy against INDIA bloc candidates of Samajwadi Party and Congress. The perception is being built that BSP is not going to give a walkover to any of its competitors.

Mayawati is trying to constitute a third pole in the real sense, by creating equal distance with NDA and INDIA bloc. To create a triangular fight in many constituencies in Uttar Pradesh, her strategy is to give tickets to candidates from the numerically dominant caste and community in that particular constituency.

She has used this method to evolve a local,

constituency-wise plan. Her social engineering strategy is to bring a certain percentage of these dominant-community votes and add this to her base. To energise its base, BSP is telling its cadre to save the party that is crucial for their social existence and their future generations.

How will this third pole fare in the parliamentary election? They may not necessarily get an impressive number of seats, but they will still have a big impact on the results. First, it may determine the victory and defeat of NDA and INDIA candidates in many UP constituencies. Second, it may decrease the margin of victory of both sides. Third, BSP may retrieve some of its lost relevance in national politics, which is its main goal in this election. We need to wait and see the results of Mayawati's efforts in this door-die election for BSP and Dalit-led independent politics in India.

> Narayan is director of the GB Pant Social Science Institute, Prayagraj

# Song ka jawab, ban se denge? Stop censoring poll ditties

**SWAMINOMICS** 



**SWAMINATHAN S ANKLESARIA AIYAR** 

this the most unfair election ever. So does Trinamool Congress. The foreign media have uttered similar sentiments. BJP will disagree. But the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) will agree passionately. It says the party seeks to win by jailing opponents and threatening those still free.

The charges against top AAP leaders are based on confessions from some parties in a liquor scam. And AAP has some serious questions to answer. But this should mean quick trials with the accused out on bail. It should not mean endless jail without bail. "The process is the punishment," to quote the Supreme Court.

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal is in jail. So are deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia and former health minister Satyendra Jain. So too, for months was Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh. The most prominent AAP leader left, Atishi, alleges—so far without any proof—the BJP and enforcement agencies are targeting her and three others, and that she has been told to join BJP to avoid arrest.

Corruption charges are common in politics. These are sometimes followed by arrests, but the accused stay out on bail and remain in active politics for decades. Hundreds escape conviction thanks to a gentleman's agreement (you could call it honour among thieves) between most parties to ensure weak prosecutions to keep politi-

cians of all stripes out of jail. The difference today is that draconian laws, notably on money laundering and unlawful activities, are being used to jail foes without bail. BJP calls this effective enforcement. Opposition parties call it vendetta.

Many of those targeted have defected. According to a report in The Indian Express, since 2014, no less than 23 of the 25 top politicians who, in recent years, defected to the BJP had cases against them dropped or prosecutions halted. Doesn't this have some similarities to the standard offer made by Central American cartels to those who came in their way—'Join us and become rich, or oppose us and die'?

Institutional independence has eroded deeply. Consider last week's attempt by the Chief Electoral Officer of Delhi to stop AAP from using election songs to protest Kejriwal's jailing. 'Jail ka jawab hum vote se denge' (we will respond to jailing through the ballot box) is how the lyrics went. What's wrong with winning through the ballot?

The CEO says the slogan casts aspersions on the judiciary, something forbidden in the cable TV network rules. Fiddlesticks. The song casts aspersions not on the judiciary but on the misuse of draconian laws meant to be used against terrorists and big gangsters. AAP's slogan, that it accusations will grow about an unfair election. ■



CHANGE THE TUNE: AAP's slogan, that it will respond through the ballot box, is a democratic approach that EC should applaud, not curb

will respond through the ballot box, is a non-violent, democratic approach that the Election Commission should applaud, not censor.

The CEO objects that the phrase 'Tanashahi party ko hum chot denge' (We will hurt the party of autocracy) incites violence. Sorry but election slogans against 'tanashahi' are as old as the hills, made in election after election since Independence. They are more likely to incite yawns than violence. Censoring an election ditty on this ground is senseless.

The third objection is to the phrase 'gundagardi ke khilaf vote denge' (we will vote against hooliganism). This in the AAP song is accompanied by the 'tanashahi' phrase and a clip showing former Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia being escorted by the police. The CEO claims, "The words and the clip tend to present the picture of police in bad taste. It thus casts aspersions on their working and has defamatory and slanderous remarks for the police."

Preposterous! The words and clips are clearly directed at the BJP, not the police. Besides, voters do not merely "cast aspersions" on the police but lambast them with a hundred curses. The judiciary has often castigated the police too. Yet the CEO wants to ban criticism of the police.

'Awazein khilaf thi jo sabko jail me daal dia, bas unko hi bahar rakha jisne inko maal dia. Itna lalach, itna nafrat, bhrashtachari se mohabbat. This is a poetic way of saying "Opposing voices are jailed, only those escape who pay up. So much greed and hate speech. They are in love with corruption." This, says the CEO is "slanderous", and "a criticism of the ruling party on the basis of unverified facts and also casts aspersions on the judiciary." Such phrases have been common in elections so why the sudden expression of horror?

The Election Commission is supposed to be independent. Will it override its Delhi CEO? If not,



**INBOX** 

## **Don't rob Peter** to pay Paul

Apropos the column 'Amiri hatao? Cong...' (ATM, Apr 28), the columnist's warning to the Congress not to hark back to old tax initiatives that yielded little dividend is worth heeding though the party itself is not a wee bit interested in reimposing inheritance tax and credit for handing over ammunition to PM Modi should go to Sam Pitroda. 'Robbing Peter to pay Paul' might not be a feasible idea in a free economy like India, but those in power could leave the wealthy to wallow in their riches while concentrating on making the poor richer.

- C V Aravind, Delhi

## Need for civility

This refers to Indraiit Hazra's column 'Zabaan sambhal ke...' (ATM, Apr 28). During poll battle, personal diatribes and vilification touch new heights, often overtaking real issues and voter concerns. Unpleasant phrases and distasteful monikers used for top leaders are not only derogatory but outrageous. There has to be some degree of decorum and civility, applicable uniformly to ruling and opposition parties. Watchdogs need to play nonpartisan roles.

- Taposh Bhattacharya, Bhopal

## Rushdie's spirit

Salman Rushdie's interview 'New pressure on...' (ATM, Apr 28) highlights that exchanging ideas without fear of reprisal is essential. Learning that he was horrendously attacked while discussing the issue of safe spaces for writers was appalling. However, what shines through is his faith in the miracles of science, humanity, as well as his willpower.

J K Srivastava, Noida

Email your letters to the editor at sunday.times@timesgroup.com with 'Sunday Mailbox' in the subject line. Please mention your name and city

# No BFFs in geopolitics. Spying on friends is a symbol of power

KEEP THEM CLOSE: US has spied on

several allies. In 2013, Edward

Snowden's revelations sparked

angry reactions from Europeans

BY INVITATION



**DHEERAJ PARAMESHA CHAYA** Over the last seven months, numerous articles in the western media have called on democracies to re-examine relations with India because of its alleged hand in the kill-

ing and attempted killing of Khalistani

terrorists in North America. In the last couple of days, charges have expanded to include espionage. Referring to recent revelations that the two diplomats expelled from Australia in 2020 were Indian, news outlet ABC said, "It does raise a lot of questions about Australia's trust and relationship with India". This begs the question: do friendly countries spy on each other? Answering this question reveals that the right to spy is not tied to 'values' as is currently espoused, but to the question of 'power'.

Contemporary history has witnessed the US spying on its European and Asian allies while the list of allies that have spied on the US include France, Germany, Japan, Israel, and South Korea. In 2013, Edward Snowden, a contract employee of the US National Security Agency, publicly revealed the US' spying activities, which kicked off angry reactions from several European countries. At a political level, a normative disapproval of the US' spying activities was understandable. At an intellectual level, however, western analysts and commentators were candid in making a case for spying on allies. Former CIA officer Peter Earnest deemed the European reaction hypocritical. Charles Kupchan, professor of international affairs at Georgetown University, pointed out that friends today may not be friends tomorrow. Similarly, Washington analyst James Lewis focused

on the policy differences between the US and Germany and argued that spying was essential to align the direction of Berlin's policies with the US. The bottomline in Lewis' argument is that, for friends to re-

main friends, spying on each other is inevitable. This applies even more so to regions with complex geopolitical interactions. For instance, in 2014, Germany faced an angry reaction from Turkey after media reports that Berlin was spying on its NATO ally. In its defence, it argued that Turkey's terrorism problem had implications for Europe. Also, it pitched it as an attempt to comprehend Erdogan's complicated foreign policies with neighbours such as Saudi, Syria, Iraq and Iran. Therefore, to accommodate this policy, the Germans came up with a tactic that Josef Joffe of the Hoover Institution termed "a Talmudic distinction between friends and mere partners". Accordingly, Britain and America were friends that could not be spied on whereas Turkey was 'fair game'.

It is against this perspective that one should view India's

reported spying on friends. Fundamentally speaking, the notion of friendship in international politics is itself inconsistent for India. When observing the intelligence relationships of Pakistan, they are mostly alliance-based or ideology-driven. The cooperation between the ISI and Anglo-American agencies during the Cold War and the War on Terror is an example of alliance-based relationship whereas ties with the Gulf intelligence services since the late 1970s are ideological. India is neither part of any formal alliance formation nor is it ideologically placed to find natural friends in the world. As a civilisational state that is finding its place back in the international system, friendships are most likely to be purely transactional. In such a scenario, the above arguments made by western analysts advocating

espionage on friends apply equally, if not more, to India. Public discussions in India are mostly focused on acquiring power in the military and economic sense. Not readily evident to the casual observer is an intelligence

> hierarchy that is dominated by powerful countries. Moving ahead, India will need to understand this hierarchy and develop mechanisms to navigate through it. After Independence, India neither had the capability for independent intelligence operations nor the political vision to guide the development of a robust intelligence apparatus. Consequently, for core intelligence requirements such as China, Delhi had to rely on London and Washington. The latter utilised the relationship to their own advantage, occasionally using the liaison channels to spy on India.

> Intelligence scholars Robert Dover and Richard Aldrich say such intelligence hierarchies "opened up sensitive information of the Global South to an elite group of nations", which is instructive of "global information inequality".

As India grows, its intelligence system will require a cultural transformation to overcome reliance on foreign agencies for tradecraft and technology. Innovative operational methods and indigenous tech-

nology development should support espionage operations and information security. This is not to suggest that spying operations will be failproof. Even US intelligence had two of its officers expelled from Spain in December 2023 after being caught spying. That the world does not make much noise about it reflects the power the US wields.

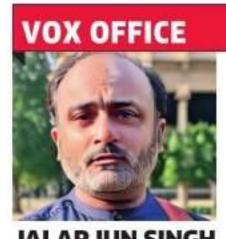
After the Snowden leaks, French politician Bernard Kouchner had commented that the European outrage was due to "jealousy" over "the extent of the US' intelligence dominance", not over morality. When the US Congress inquired if American intelligence spies on its allies, director of National Intelligence James Clapper replied confidently that it was "a fundamental given". As India grows and projects its power, there will surely be such jealousies. But Indian intelligence should focus on gaining dominance.

Chaya is a lecturer at University of Hull, UK, and author of 'India's Intelligence Culture and Strategic Surprises: Spying for South Block



# FILMED THEATRE - TO BE OR NOT TO BE? IN THIS CASE, 'TO BE' IS NOT IN QUESTION

A new play about John Gielgud directing Richard Burton in a 1964 stage production of Hamlet not only offers ways of looking at Shakespeare's play, but is also a reflection on theatre, film, stardom and posterity



JAI ARJUN SINGH

Filmed theatre - the recording and subsequent screening of a live stage production – isn't to many tastes. it usually has neither the immediacy of a good play nor the visual brio of a good film. I've been wary of the form ever since my school showed us an astonishingly dull 'film' of The Merchant of Venice, which felt like it was created by having a stationary camera placed in the first row at a theatre.

And yet, I loved a recent screening of The Motive and the Cue, Jack Thorne's play about the inter-generational clashes be-

tween two major British actors, John Gielgud and Richard Burton, during a 1964 Hamlet production in which the former directed the latter.

One reason for this is that I'm a Hamlet nut, and have some interest in the real-life figures depicted here (especially Gielgud, superbly played by Mark Gatiss, but also Burton and Elizabeth Taylor, who were newly-weds at the time). To appreciate this play, you need that interest. But even otherwise, M&C didn't feel static.

Cinematically, you'd never mistake this for an Oppenheimer. But it was thoughtfully put together. Some of the establishing scenes were long shots where you could see not just the entire stage but also part of the original theatre audience sitting in the dark. Once a scene proper got underway and the camera zoomed in to the action, there were cuts and close-ups.

It was a strange, compelling experiencenot 'cinema' as one thinks of it, and yet a reminder that there have been so many different types of films, including the anti-narrative ones, or the Brechtian ones that draw attention to their construction.



ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE ON CAMERA

up of labelled outlines of furniture.)

plumbing Shakespeare's verse for meaning and insight – an inflection here, a pause there, how one performer's emphasis can be different from another's. What

(I caught myself thinking of Lars von Gielgud tells Burton about the difference Trier's Dogville, with its set design made between the motive (intellect or spine) and the cue (passion, which ignites the Many of this play's scenes are about heart) is a version of what Hamlet tells the players while setting his 'mouse-trap' for the king.

here which make a case for the filmed-the-

## Jack Thorne's The Motive and the Cue felt to me like a lament for the unrecorded theatre of ages past

atre form, in terms of preserving an im- stars at this point. And yet, she and Burton me like a lament for the unrecorded theatre of ages past, Gatiss's Gielgud mentions that his great rival Laurence Olivier only played Hamlet on stage once, but will forever be remembered in the role because of his Oscar-winning film version (whereas Gielgud's legendary performances of the 1920s can no longer be revisited and exist only in imagination and anecdote).

the insecurities of artists, worrying about posterity. In one scene, Gielgud and Liz Taylor are chatting. 'Can you imagine doing your best work at age 25?' he says ruefully, an allusion to the reputation he built, very young, as the greatest actor of his generation.

'Can you imagine doing it at age 12?' Taylor replies - a reference to her perform-Most of all, there are poignant moments ance as a child in the film, National Velvet. She is one of the world's biggest movie

One evening, I call a journalist

talking about unemployment, rozi-

roti and farming conditions. One

thing's for sure is there is no 'wave' in

Speaking to another friend who

studies political trends, in what one

could call the 'central/south', yields

more predictive fog. He, too, isn't sure.

But something doesn't seem to be in

consonance with most surveys and

I finish hanging with my Southy

friends and acquaintances and head back from the periphery of the heat

wave to the eye of the blast furnace.

As usual, my phone seems to know

what I'm doing before I do. No sooner

have I landed in the Calferno, my feed

lights up with a feisty Haryanvi farm-

these parts.

predictions.

er lady.

portant stage performance. M&C felt to seem aware that something valuable has been lost in terms of their integrity. That they need to be more than a media circus. Maybe they need to do some Shakespeare together-The Taming of the Shrew?

That film, made by Franco Zeffirelli a few years later, holds up well. But it's widely agreed that the bulk of the other Taylor-Burton films were misfires. (The Leonard Maltin movie guide once re-Among other things, this play is about viewed their movie Boom! with the single word 'Thud'.) In that sense, it feels like a cosmic joke that while many mock-worthy films are around forever, most great theatre is gone.

> Who is the sympathetic figure in that interaction between Gielgud and Taylor, one can wonder. The stage legend depressed that there are few who remember his finest work? Or the film star, concerned that the limelight is too harsh and

## JUGULAR VEIN



**JUG SURAIYA** 

# Drats, There's a Rat **Problem! But Hold** On to Your Hats

With NYC facing a rodent infestation, could contra-t-ception be a solution?

'Rats! They fought the dogs and killed the cats/ And bit the babies in their cradles/ And ate the cheese out of the vats/ And licked the soup from the cooks' own ladles.' Had he been around today, Robert Browning might have penned those lines to describe not medieval Hamelin, but present-day New York City.

NYC has been plagued by an infestation of rodents, which has left it, known for a different kind of rat race, in dire straits. While it is no stranger to rats, there's been a Malthusian population explosion of the varmints who lurk in abandoned tenements and vacant lots.

To confound the pestiferous problem, civic authorities must contend with animal rights advocacy, which disapproves of the eradication methods, involving employment of specially trained hunting dogs, painful glue traps, or the use of poisons, which lead to a lingering demise.

A recent plan to curb the menace humanely is to adopt birth control measures, based on contraceptives of the oral kind. Called ContraPest, the formulation is contained in salty pellets designed to prove temptingly toothsome to fastidious furry critters scattered in the favoured stomping grounds of the targeted consumers. The pills supposedly impair the ovarian function of females and disrupt production of sperm cells in males.

It remains to be seen if NYC's riff on India's programme, as summarised in cautionary slogans like 'Hum Do, Hamare Do' and 'Do Ya Teen, Bas', will achieve its objective.

According to the Chinese zodiac, people born in the Year of the Rat possess acute powers of observation, alertness to the physical and social environment, and a capacity to adapt to change and overcome vicissitudes.

Should these survival-enhancing traits be transmutable across species and manifest themselves in the animal symbolised in that section of the zodiac, the wily rodent might well sniff out the con in the contraception and give the pills a wide birth, there-

empirical endorsement of the poet's prophecy in paraphrase: The best-laid plans of rats and men gang aft agley.

by providing an

Moreover, Peta, or some like-minded organisation might raise moral objections to the saying that it infringes on Whisker Willy's constitutional

rights, as represent-



ed by life, liberty, and the pursuit of rattiness. In such an eventuality, the impasse might be best resolved by resorting to the preferred fallback of the liberal sensibility, the compromise, which could be mass deportation. This solution, in turn, would raise the inevitable question: to where?

For old times' sake, and letting bygones, such as the Boston Tea Party and the Shot Heard Around the World, be bygones, could the erstwhile Mother Country be importuned for the required accommodation? A point of indubitable mootness.

Apart from anything else, the MC seems to be having some deporting problems, which has got its PM into what, across the pond, they call a tizz. Calling in an itinerant Pied Piper might work, but the profession is known to attract dodgy customers and is best kept a safe distance from children.

The solution to NYC's problem might be found in the desert town of Deshnoke, near Bikaner in Rajasthan. The place is famous for its Karni Mata Temple, which is home to thousands of rats, known as 'kabbas', or little children. These rats are believed to be descendants of the son of the resident deity, and are tended and kept well-fed by the priests and the many pilgrims who flock to the site in the hope of spotting a white specimen, said to be a sign of great good fortune.

Safe and secure in this sanctuary, where coots have never been more bandi, NYC's refugee rodents could well live the life of Riley.

The only fly in the ointment, or anointment, might be a swadeshi outfit that could disallow the induction of videshi migrants into a sanctum made more sanctorum for being a haven for only the homegrown variety.

That's the problem with members of order 'rodentia'. No matter what you propose to do about them, someone or another is bound to smell a rat.

# Polling Punches in a Southern State of Mind

Down South, they discuss, argue and predict so differently that things can get destablising for a visiting 'outsider'



**RUCHIR JOSHI** 

election time and things seem to be a little different here in Chennai from other parts of the country. Unlike in the East-West-North, I don't have any language to speak to people on the street, and my narrow sampling is from the educated, English-speaking class with which I come into contact.

But even here, people are calmer, their disagreements articulate. Various kinds of psephological nerdiness are on full display, but without the accompanying rancour one is used to when arguing with say Bengalis, Punjabis or Hindi-belt folks. There's an almost destabilising absence of kinship and/or genitalic cuss words. People down here argue. But they also let the other person actually speak. Like totally weird, da.

Everyone agrees that in the behemoth state of Tamil Nadu, things are going to go just as they have in the past. 'They can come and do as many rallies as they want. People will go to see also, because they are crudely entertaining. But as for votes, forget it. Their nonsense has never worked in

Neither is anyone expecting sur- lot of people will go for that.' prises in the adjacent, narrow- Another person bursts out laugh- friend whose current beat is in the shaped state of Kerala. 'As usual it's ing. 'What world power? We can't dark heartland of the furthest southbetween the two traditional rivals, even send hit men who are physically ern areas of the non-south. What khathe other guys don't have much trac-fit! You know, you read no, how that fat bar? My friend can't say what the final tion. People are having too much edu-

cation, you see. The third big-bruiser state of Karnataka, though, is harder to call. Education? Yes. But not like its neighbours. third nerd. Different language? Yes. But they're also shading into the speech-system prevalent immediately north. Also, dum-dum-diga-diga, different castes I've never been in the South during and ethnicities pulling in different directions, you see. 'Now state elections are one thing, but with the Lok Sabha things will be different. These local vision of India being a mega-power-a to 1985. Wishful thinking!'

fellow got out of breath when run- results will be, but people are mainly ning away? Only we can do this!' The group laughs, but only briefly. The first speaker is now in a debate with a

'So, how many out of, what, 28? State government or not, I think they will only get 2-3 seats, no more.' The Nerd has a different take: 'No. I've been helping make mathematical models, and according to our calculations the split will be more like may be they will retain only 16, but a full 12 will go the leaders are good with local issues. But other way.' The first man laughs, 'I the other guys are selling their grand think these calculations take us back

## Voters are talking about jobs, rozi-roti and farm distress. There is no wave in these parts for sure



TIME OUT IN CHENNAI

port Israel in its current war

against Palestinians, means

essarily agree – with these peo-

ple. There are people in this

country who dislike, say, Mus-

not Hindus. It is important for

rational, kind people to try and

figure out why anti-Muslimists

dislike Muslims, before trying

But as cognitive science schol-

ar Fritz Alwin Breithaupt

writes in his 2017 book, Die dun-

klen Seiten der Empathie (The

Dark Sides of Empathy), 'Some-

times we commit atrocities not

out of a failure of empathy, but

rather as a direct consequence

of successful, even overly suc-

cessful, empathy.' After Jan-

Erik Olsson released four hos-

to demolish their case.

these parts.'

# Go On Then, Put Yourself In Someone Else's Shoes

Empathy - imagining to be what we're not - is something we could practise for a kinder world



INDRAJIT HAZRA

think of are people who like people who they (think) they are like. There are people who like poli-

ticians, writers, artists, actors, sportspersons that they look up to, because the latter provide them some pleasure, joy, purpose. Some of these people are even Indian White supremacists, who genuinely believe that the pavements would be smoother under British governance.

Then there are the same people who don't like people who they are not like. Or rather, people who are not like them. The reason for their antipathy could be a difference in faith, dietary habits, regional residency, way he or she behaves in a gathering, or the way one dresses. But this kind of antipathy, even detestation, can be a defining feature of such a person.

Politicians, deft in psychology, play both these cards of relata-

bility and unakin-ness. The fact that one can hold one's own 'territory' without having to invade another person's space, is something that is losing popular appeal. It starts innocuously enough. If I like, say, punk rock and you write it off as 'threechord noise', you cluck your teeth and roll your eyes to suggest I have bad taste. If you aren't bowled over by the prime minister, then I could get riled up enough to think that you are rather 'anti-na- tional' (as if being anti-national is as horrible as, say, being cruel to

animals). Which is where empathy - and the lack of it - enters the pic-

ture. The ability to take on an- lar reasons for someone else acother's perspective to under- tually liking Rocky Aur Rani stand and feel others' experi- Kii Prem Kahaani, or this thing ences-to be in another person's that you're reading right now. shoes – is something that is not So, to find it very hard to actaught to us. Not in school, not cept that some folks may supat home, except by example. Perhaps, understanding, without necessarily agreeing with you need to empathise-not necanother (person's) view or position, can be on the 'moral science' syllabus in schools.

A child's software comes with- lims simply because they are out being 'loaded' with -isms. It's election time. And all I can Notions of differentiations on gender, caste, racial, regional, ideological lines are grafted into them over time by adults who were themselves infused into these notional differences.

In psychology, 'theory of mind' includes the knowledge that other people's beliefs, desires, thoughts and intentions could be different from yours. The particular reasons for you disliking Karan Johar movies, or strangely pointless quasiphilosophical Sunday columns,

could be the very same particutages during a failed bank robbery in Stockholm, Sweden, not Let the act of only did none of the hostages testify against him, but they acimagining what tually raised money for his defence. This kind of empathy we're not, along shown by victims towards their captor became known as 'Stockwith instilling what holm syndrome', something that has examples in cases as diwe are, be taught verse as the way many Indians reacted to the trauma of demonvery early

THE ET READER

UNDERSTANDS

As Breithaupt writes - in the context of the Stockholm hostages, not the victims of demonetisation - '[They] saw the world through the eyes of the hostage-takers and adopted their imagined self-interest - a classic scenario of empathy. But it isn't so much the excess of 'bad empathy' as much as the shortage of 'good empathy' that blinds human kindness, and behaviour that rewards it. Let the act of imagining what we're not, along with instilling what we are, be taught to us from a tender, formative,

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informative age.





## China's Gen Z Goes **For Gold Beans**

Gold beans sounds suspiciously like

No, these are not like the magic beans Jack bought in the fairytale. It's actually the latest investment fad in China, particularly among Gen Z.

What is it though - real beans of gold?

Something like that. They weigh as little as one gram and are often sold in small clear glass bottles, which, of course, makes for an attractive post on social media, to boot. On Weibo, which is basically China's version of X (earlier Twitter), the hashtag 'why are young people getting into buying gold' racked up over 90 mn hits.

#### But why are young people there suddenly buying gold - are they influenced by Malayalis?



haven investment in times of uncertainty. In China, stock haven't been buoyant after the pandemic and the real estate sector is going through a

crisis. There's also youth unemployment and deflation to contend with. So gold's now back in fashion - and it's not just beans, they are also buying small items of jewellery, both to wear and as an investment. All of this made Gen Z buyers among the top consumers of gold accessories, according to a 2023 report.

### What do wealth managers make of this shift?

One consultant told Bloomberg that while youngsters are skipping 'pleasurable consumption' for these investments, it didn't really make a lot of sense to invest in gold beans because the price could be up to 30% higher than the metal's spot price.

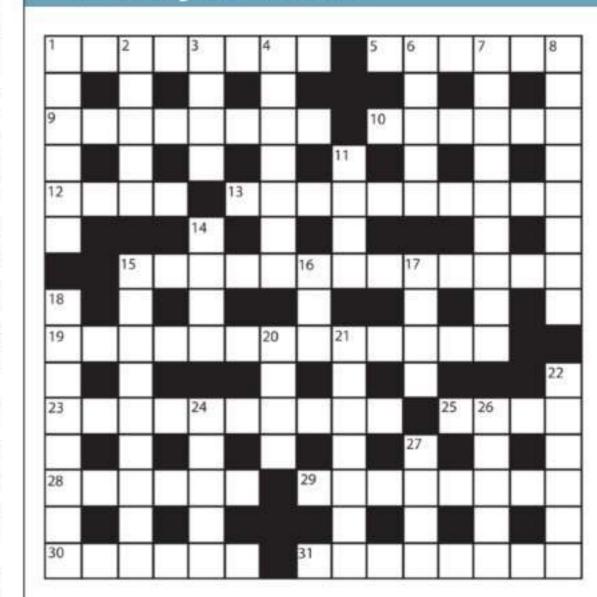
#### Do such views have an impact on the trend?

Nah. Stores are still selling these and customers are buying them. The skyrocketing prices of gold have only bolstered the perception of a low-risk investment. It was a popular gift item during the Chinese lunar new year and banks, too, have joined the trend.

Grandmothers in Kerala would approve!

Text: Indulekha Aravind

## ET Sunday Crossword



Pinched euros during top deck

5 Loved a party with communist (6) 9 Old boy fills untidy drawer – he

keeps suits in it (8) 10 Old car's a breeze (6) 12 Orchestrate a symphony? It's sim-

ple at heart (4) 13 Absorbed nuts while eating a new

vegetable (5,5) 15 Chance to see furniture he displays to passers-by (6-7) 19 Leo lent chapel cracked bell (9,4)
1 The German followed Colditz

and Queen (5-5) 25 Nearly frighten Mark (4) 28 Smells that are not common indoors

23 Inscrutable and solemn hiding King

somehow (6) 29 Element Ivan stirred with mud adult

gathered (8) 30 Generous relatives dally in odd

places (6) 31 Mary's working with chap in

prisoner in loose snow (6) 2 Military group almost burst out giggling on stage (5) 3 Each service shows gain (4) 4 Ban English medic on old ship

0062

7 Going over organ in Lehar's 8 Is duck in NI city ridiculous? 11 Girl produced broadcast (4)

introduced to girl coming out (5)

6 Boring guy you and I

14 Faces up to period of cold weather (4) 15 Familiar watering hole today

in suburbs of Kingston (4-5) 16 Came first climbing part of 15 Down (3)

17 Former partner's in the morning paper (4)

18 Old computer in stock used to control flow (8) 20 Piece of Episcopalian stone (4) 21 Top of elm tree has broken? Nonsense (7)

22 How proper person acts leaves (6)

map of, the country? (5) 26 Knock out a country (5) 27 Blonde's loud song (4) 26 China, 27 Fair.

21 Eyewash, 22 Primly, 24 Rural.

17 Exam. 18 Stopcock. 20 Opal. 12 Mell-known, 16 Won, 8 Derisory, 11 Maid, 14 Snap. ◆ Embargo. 6 Dweeb. 7 Rehearsal. DOWN: 1 Powder, 2 Corps, 3 Earn, 30 Kindly, 31 Pharmacy. Z8 Odours, 29 Vanadium 23 Poker-faced, 25 Scar.

12 Window-dresser. 9 Wardrobe, 10 Zephyr, 12 Easy. ACROSS: 1 Pocketed. 5 Adored.

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**FE SUNDAY** WWW.FINANCIALEXPRESS.COM

# SUNDAY, MAY 5, 2024

Muzamil Jaleel: This is the first major election after August 5, 2019. What is the situation on the ground?

We had the District Development Committee meeting elections a few years ago, but this is the first major election and its significance is also heightened with the announcement by the Supreme Court that Assembly elections must be concluded by September 30 this year. There was some suspicion that the Government of India would find some reason to delay them, but from the recent speeches by the PM, home minister and others, it's clear that these Parliament elections will be followed immediately by Assembly elections. So that adds to the pressure of these elections.

The situation is evolving. Our five seats are in five separate phases. So the first seat, which is Udhampur, goes to polls as we speak. I had the opportunity to travel to some of the Assembly segments of that Parliament seat in the hills of Jammu. I was pleasantly surprised that people were cutting across religious divide because the BJP in these areas has often tried to divide voters, particularly on religious lines.

It's not quite the cakewalk even from the Jammu Parliament seat that the BJP would expect. There are issues that the mainstream media, barring some sections, haven't really focused on. Farmers are concerned about the price of urea and other inputs. Families that have traditionally contributed to recruitment in the Indian army are unhappy about the new system of recruitment. There is also dissatisfaction post the writing down of Article 370 in terms of protection of jobs, land, basic identity...

Muzamil Jaleel: After August 5, 2019, the National Conference (NC) was waiting for the Supreme Court verdict. Now that it has come, is Article 370 still a poll issue?

Of course, it's an issue. It's an issue that resonates with people in all three areas of erstwhile J&K. It's an issue in Jammu, in the three seats in the Valley, and more of an issue in Ladakh than perhaps anyone would have imagined. There is a lot of simmering discontent and unhappiness about the

post August 5, 2019, situation. Kargil never accepted what happened. You find voices in Leh that want to stand up and be counted in terms of what they lost and what they had been promised and not given. Yes, we had a setback in the Supreme

Court, but this is not the first time the SC has passed judgment on the special status of J&K. In the past, you have SC judgments that have actually upheld J&K's special status but that didn't stop the BJP from making a political issue out of 370 and their desire to abrogate it.

Manoj CG: Are you disappointed that the manifestos of the Congress and other parties of the INDIA bloc, your allies, are completely silent on Article 370.

We do have friends who have talked about it — TMC, DMK, the Left. They have stuck their necks out for J&K and are against everything that happened on August 5, 2019. While the Congress is unable to find common cause with us on this particular issue, it is disappointing but I do understand. I understand that they have to trade off their commitment to J&K with the wider electoral arithmetic that they need to factor in.

We are working on the assumption that if not today, someday you will have a government at the Centre that will be happy to engage with us on these issues. Let's not forget, the BJP has been promising to abrogate Article 370 for decades. It's only now that they managed to do it. So I'm not suggesting that our struggle will be a short one. It may take long but it's a commitment we're willing to make.

Muzamil Jaleel: It seems the BJP is not contesting in the Valley. How do you read it?

The BJP symbol will not be on the machine but the BJP is very much part of the political electoral process. It's like the NC is not contesting in Jammu, Udhampur or Ladakh, but we are part of the electoral process. We are fighting together with the INDIA bloc. We are supporting Congress candidates in these seats. Similarly, the BJP this time has chosen not to field their own candidates but they are very much sort of there. They're actively supporting new formations or an older formation that had allied with them post the 2014 elections. The evidence of this is clearly visible on the ground when senior leaders of the BJP come to Srinagar, including their general secretary in-charge of J&K, Tarun Chugh. You know who he meets. When the PM or the Home Minister talk, they talk about defeating the INDIA bloc, defeating the Congress and the NC. They don't talk about defeating, let's say, the People's Conference or Apni Party.

Muzamil Jaleel: I read Sajad Lone's statement that they have nothing to do with the BJP.

They have everything to do with the BJP. What was he doing in that meeting with Tarun Chugh? You have a female leader of the BJP who currently has a ministerial rank in the Khadi and Village Board. In a statement, she said that we are sort of supporting, and the People's Conference and Apni party are allied with the BJP. Sajad, for his own electoral interests, will try to deny it but

**OMAR ABDULLAH** 

VICE-PRESIDENT, NATIONAL CONFERENCE

# BJP symbol won't be on the machine but it's very much part of Kashmir's electoral process

National Conference vice-president Omar Abdullah on fighting the Lok Sabha elections in J&K, the importance of the polls post the abrogation of Article 370, and what explains the calm in the Valley. This session was moderated by Muzamil Jaleel, deputy editor, *The Indian Express* 

The three MPs or We do have friends the five will lay the who have talked foundation for about it (Article 370) what is to follow in - TMC, DMK, the August-September. Left... The Congress You can't is unable to find disconnect this common cause with election from an us on this particular election that's issue; it is going to come disappointing but two months later I do understand ILLUSTRATION: SUVAJIT DEY

**T**ice-president of National Conference, Omar

for the polls, both parties will be contesting from three

seats each in Jammu, Ladakh and Kashmir. This is the

Article 370 on August 5, 2019. Chief minister of J&K

first major election in J&K after the abrogation of

from 2009 to 2015, Abdullah is also preparing for

Assembly elections in the Union Territory that are

expected to take place after the Parliament elections

Abdullah is contesting the Lok Sabha elections

from Baramulla. In an alliance with the Congress

we know the truth.

Muzamil Jaleel: What about the People's Democratic Party (PDP)? They said they were ready for an alliance with the NC.

Unfortunately, the PDP decided that they would try to damage the INDIA bloc and made a conscious decision to field candidates against the INDIA bloc.

The distribution of seats for this parliament election was to be done on a similar formula according to which seats were distributed for the District Development Board elections. When those elections were announced, initially the NC had wanted to share seats on the basis of the 2019 Parliament elections, because we felt those were the most recent elections. The PDP and the PC felt that this was unfair. They felt that to compare DDC with the Parliament was wrong. They suggested that we distribute seats on the basis of the 2014 assembly elections, even though the NC took a hammering because of that. My party colleagues went to the NC president, Dr Farooq Abdullah, and said the party is going to suffer on this account. He said it's more important that we unite and fight those elections and party interests will come second.

So if that formula was suitable for the DDC elections, then for a Parliament election it has to be like for like. Therefore, distribution of seats for the Parliament would be on the basis of the 2019 Parliament election. Three seats were with the NC. We retained those seats. Three seats were with the BJP. Those seats were up for discussion — Ladakh, Udhampur and Jammu. Unfortunately, the Congress couldn't find space for the PDP in those three seats. But if the aim of the PDP was to keep the BJP out, then it should have been willing to make the sacrifice.

**EXCHANGE** 

WHY **OMAR ABDULLAH** 

Muzamil Jaleel: The level of violence has come down. How do you interpret that?

Things are relatively calm, but you don't see the sort of peace that you want to. The areas that were hitherto peaceful are now more militancy-prone than they have been. In my time, areas like Rajouri, Poonch were completely clear of militancy and violence, but they now see regular attacks against security forces and attacks that claim lives at regular intervals. You've had encounters in South Kashmir. The targeted killing of

minorities happens with, unfortunately, regular frequency. So militancy still remains a problem on the ground in J&K.

As far as street protests are concerned, yes, you don't see them the way you used to. But, again, we've had periods of calm like this. I remember in my time, 2011-2012, right up to the middle of 2013, it was relatively peaceful. What is responsible for this? To what extent have you been able to win people over? To what extent have you been able to inject fear into people to stop them from coming out? This is a matter on which a lot of us will just have to agree to disagree.

My own sense is that you've made it so difficult for people to come out and make their voices heard. You pass such draconian orders that even the dependents of govern-

ment servants are not allowed to criticise the government. Let's not even go there as to how free the media is in J&K and how much the police pressurises people who are critical of the government.

Liz Mathew: You were one of the first leaders to raise apprehension or doubts about the INDIA alliance. What is your take on it now?

I'm actually heartened by how much we've been able to do in terms of seat sharing and narrowing the gaps that existed. I'm disappointed that we had to see the original architect of this bloc, Nitish Kumar, leave. Unfortunately, he's made a habit out of coming and going. But other than that, we've done better than I had expected. I didn't expect a meaningful seat-sharing understanding in Uttar Pradesh, but you have one. I thought that discussions with AAP would completely fall apart. While they've agreed to disagree in Punjab, I don't think many of us expected them to come together in Delhi and fight. They've sort of been able to agree on some seats in states other than Delhi and Punjab. Similarly, in Bihar you have a good working arrangement. In Maharashtra, you have a good understanding between Sharad Pawar, Uddhav Thackeray and the Congress. Similarly, in Tamil Nadu. The one area where I think we should have and could have done better, but ultimately weren't able to, is West Bengal.

Aanchal Magazine: A lot of the commentary against the next generations of leaders in Kashmir has been about how the political power centres have largely been concentrated to two-three families in Kashmir, historically. So is there a broader disconnect when it comes to connecting with Kashmiris on the ground?

How many elections do you want me to win before you put to bed this disconnect narrative? I won three Parliament elections on the trot. I won two Assembly elections. I've been chief minister for six years. I don't think I need to get into justifying my existence here. I'm contesting another election now.We'll let the voters decide. Social media, even in J&K, is a very small echo chamber. Look at the response we get on the ground in Srinagar, particularly in the rural areas. Anyway, which political party doesn't have a history or background of supporting people belonging to families? The only party that can take that credit are the Left ones.A newspaper said that one in five candidates in the BJP belong to political families.

Muzamil Jaleel: When you talked about the situation on the ground, you spoke about an enforced silence. What are the measures that the government has taken to ensure that?

Have you seen the regular frequency with which people are called to police stations and asked to explain very innocuous social media posts? Look at the way you dealt with politicians, children and grandchildren; you forced them to put advertisements in newspapers virtually disowning their families. Now, this is something that we saw in the dark days of militancy when

colleagues of mine were threatened by militants and told to disown the NC. Out of fear for their lives, they would put advertisements in local newspapers saying, I have nothing to do with the NC and nothing to do with mainstream politics. It's a different matter that in the evening those people would either call us or land up at our homes and say, please don't go by the advertisement, I have done it to save my life. Similar measures are now being taken by the administration. Young girls are being told to put advertisements in newspapers. I have never

seen a separatist or a political statement from them, but for some reason the government felt the need to make an example out of them.

Naveed Iqbal: This election particularly seems to be a lot about identity. How do three MPs or even five ensure the protection of identity from here on?

The three MPs or the five will lay the

foundation for what is to follow in August-September. You can't disconnect this election from an election that's going to come two months later. The issues that you're bringing forth in this election, all of them may not have a solution within the hands of the members of Parliament. We're not fighting these elections in isolation. We are fighting them as part of a bloc. That bloc is committed to certain protections for J&K.We are hoping that on June 5, when the results come out, you will have a government in the Centre that at least as far as we are concerned -the INDIA bloc constituents - will be able to sit down to evolve a mechanism or a system of identity protection. Plus, with amazing regularity, the Government of India hands out assurances to the people of Leh. First they promise them the Sixth Schedule and step back. Now there's talk of other models of protection. We are two territories that were born of the same womb. We have the same concerns. We had the same protections prior to August 5, 2019. Whatever you're giving them should also be given to this part of J&K. That's something that five members of Parliament can do a lot for.

Muzamil Jaleel: What is the situation in Ladakh?

At the border, contrary to what the government would like to tell us that there has been no Chinese incursion at all, we know that there have been (incursions). We know that there are parts of Ladakh that particularly the nomadic tribals, who rear animals, are not able to access. There are parts of Ladakh that our forces are no longer able to patrol. These are reports that one hears from people on the ground. That aside, politically, there's a lot of unease. Kargil was never in favour of what had happened on August 5. 2019, but large sections of Leh were. Today, you find street protests and hunger strikes. You have social leaders of Leh on hunger strike for 20-21 days at a stretch, demanding certain constitutional safeguards and protections. At this point, if the Congress plays its cards right, the BJP doesn't stand a chance of retaining the Ladakh seat.

Muzamil Jaleel: Ghulam Nabi Azad has been very active in J&K after leaving the Congress. How do you see it?

I would like to correct your assertion -Ghulam Nabi Azad has been active in one small region of Udhampur constituency and that region has been specifically chosen for him because dividing votes there is to the benefit of the BJP. His party, his candidate, he himself has not campaigned outside of four or five assembly constituencies in the Chenab Valley. He has not been to Udhampur or Kathua. They have made no attempt to contest or fight the seat in those Assembly constituencies. He has confined himself to Doda Kishtwar, Bhaderwah, Inderwal and Banihal.

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New Delhi

# REFLECTIONS

{ THE BIG PICTURE }

# Resetting India-China ties in an era of tensions

Bringing a modicum of normalcy will involve painstaking negotiations. To start with, Delhi and Beijing must keep their diplomatic ambitions modest and work towards the restoration of stability along the borders and incremental improvements

ndia's relations with its northern neighbour have been passing through an extremely difficult period since the summer of 2020. India has taken the position that the state of the border will determine the state of its relations with China; until normalcy is restored along the line of actual control (LAC), overall relations cannot return to the normal track.

China, on the other hand, would like us to accept the changed situation in the border areas as the "new normal", move on and resume normal interactions in other domains. Our interlocutors in the Chinese strategic community are suggesting that we strive for a "reset" in bilateral relations.

Is reset a feasible proposition? To begin with, the two sides no longer agree on the paradigm that governed the relationship over the past three decades. Chinese scholars argue that both countries had agreed to delink the development of bilateral relations from the resolution of the boundary question; and that India has broken that compact by linking the broader relationship with progress on the border issue.

There is dissimulation in the Chinese argument. What the Chinese deliberately ignore is

that the maintenance of peace and tranquillity was acknowledged by both sides as an "essential prerequisite" and an "important guarantor" for the continued growth of bilateral relations, predicated on adherence to the provisions of several agreements signed since 1993. Many provisions of those agreements have been vio-

While the government has refrained from acknowledging it in the public domain, there is little doubt that the status quo along the borders has been seriously disturbed by Chinese encroachments and activities. The disengagement of troops at five "friction points"

has involved the creation of "buffer zones", partly on our side of the LAC, and the denial of access to patrolling points our troops were visiting earlier.

The Chinese have not agreed to disengagement in Depsang and Demchok. In Depsang, the Chinese continue to prevent our border forces from resuming patrolling beyond Y-Junction to five patrolling points.

There is a similar denial of access to traditional patrolling routes in Demchok. The LAC has become live and unstable, with enhanced and entrenched deployment of troops and military hardware, along with robust development of border infrastructure by both sides.

Ashok K

Kantha

It will not be desirable for India to accept this "new normal" along the LAC and "move on". However, the challenge involved in any reset in ties goes well beyond the border issue, even though it has again come to occupy the central space in the relationship. Well before the deadly clash in the Galwan Valley, India-China ties were bedevilled by a host of problems.

The worldviews of the two countries had become increasingly divergent, with growing suspicions about each other's strategic intentions. In India, China was seen as obstructing its rise and preventing it from realising its interests

and aspirations like permanent membership of the UN Security Council, inclusion in the Nuclear Suppliers Group, and its legitimate role in South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region.

On the Chinese side, there were strong apprehensions about India's closer alignment with the United States (US). The expanding bilateral trade was becoming increasingly lopsided in favour of China and anxieties were mounting in India about dependencies on China for key products.

Even before the Chinese intrusions in May 2020, the policy of welcoming investment from

China was being revisited. In a significant policy shift, Press Note 3 issued on April 17, 2020, put all foreign direct investment (FDI) from China in the prior approval category. Earlier, in November 2019, India had decided not to join the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership primarily because of the concerns linked to China. Post-Galwan, these structural

challenges in the relationship have become sharper as the trust deficit has deepened and the geopolitical context has become more contentious. China is now inclined to look at its relations with India through the prism of its strategic contestation with the US. It is making a misjudgement in underestimating India's

While pressing India to accept de-linkage between the border issue and overall relations, China seeks incremental gains along the LAC (as the foiled incursion into the Yangtse area of Arunachal Pradesh in December 2022 showed) and maintains a coercive stance through grey zone operations to consolidate those gains. It wishes to keep Indian troops bogged down along the borders, with the attendant cost and difficult trade-off in the allocation of military budget (for instance, lesser priority to maritime wherewithal).



Enhanced deployment of troops of the two countries in close proximity is not desirable as it can lead to accidents

While building up its own economic and military capabilities, India has more explicitly worked with the US, Quad and other likeminded countries to reinforce its deterrence visà-vis China through an unstated strategy of balancing. China's narrative on a host of issues like the Belt and Road Initiative, "Asia for Asians", and its behaviour in the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea has been questioned by India. It has also taken measures to reduce dependencies on China-dominated supply chains by developing domestic capabilities through production-linked incentives (PLI) in 14 sectors, tapping alternative supply sources, banning over 350 Chinese apps and close scrutiny of FDI inflows from China. This policy of de-risking is a difficult and protracted but necessary process.

Given these fundamental differences, there isn't much room for a reset at present. However, that doesn't preclude the possibility of improvement in bilateral ties, predicated on the restoration of peace, tranquillity and stability in the border areas without compromising India's traditional patrolling and grazing rights along the

India cannot be in a hurry to de-induct additional troops as it is at a disadvantage when it comes to re-induction, given the asymmetry in border infrastructure and the nature of the terrain. However, a situation of enhanced deployment of troops of the two countries in close proximity is also not desirable as it can lead to accidents.

Post-election, the government should seriously consider the resumption of a strategic dialogue with China, which can also be through back channels and special emissaries. The border issue cannot be addressed in isolation delinked from the exploration of a new equilibrium in the relationship. Going by earlier experience, it is unlikely that the stalemate in the relationship can be resolved at the level of corps commanders or a Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on the border.

The search for a solution to the unstable and potentially dangerous situation along the borders will involve a broader conversation on structural challenges in India-China relations.

While a broad stance of engagement is desirable, it must be anchored in realism, deterrence, economic security and the balancing of China as

the country's primary strategic challenge. However, it will be prudent to avoid investing high expectations in summit-level meetings. The Chinese are traditionally averse to using meetings at the highest level as platforms for negotiations on contentious issues. In past interactions with China, summit talks have been fruitful only when preceded by extensive prepa-

rations at lower levels. Navigating our relationship with China and bringing it back to a modicum of normalcy will involve painstaking negotiations, but then, we have come out of difficult periods in bilateral relations in the past. Both sides will have to keep their diplomatic ambitions modest and work towards the restoration of stability along the borders and incremental improvements rather than a reset in ties.

Ashok K Kantha is a former ambassador of India to China. The views expressed are personal

SUNDAY SENTIMENTS } Karan Thapar

# Addressing citizens in a secular democracy

was brought up in an age when it was assumed prime ministers would do the right and honourable thing. And if the Prime Minister said it, it was bound to be correct. Terminological inexactitudes were, no doubt, common but my parents would never have believed Jawaharlal Nehru indulged in them. In an old-fashioned sort of way, he was considered a par-

We've travelled a long distance since the fifties and sixties. These days there's nothing you would not expect of a politician and prime ministers are no longer considered different, leave aside superior, to other hacks. The respect and, even, admiration that was commonplace in the decade after Independence has more or less completely disappeared. "Sab chor hain" (they're all thieves) is more likely to be the prevailing sentiment.

And yet, even in my most pessimistic

and darkest moods, I would never have thought I would hear a Prime Minister attack and demonise a sizeable section of his own fellow citizens. And find ways of repeating it. Artfully, his admirers might say, but multiple times. And seem to enjoy doing so and feel justified and vindicated. Otherwise, surely, he would have stopped, may have corrected himself, and, possibly, expressed regret? But that hasn't happened, whilst the re-iterations, public, forceful, and from changing locations, con-

Let me repeat what was originally said and then ask yourself is my response understandable or exaggerated? These were the words spoken in Hindi: "Pehle jab unki sarkar thi, unhone kaha tha ki desh ki sampati par pehla adhikar Musalmano ka hai. Iska matlab, ye sampati ikkathi karke kisko baatenge? Jinkke zyada bacche hain, unko baatenge, ghuspaithyon ko baatenge.

Kya aapki mehnat ki kamayi ka paisa ghuspaithyon ko diya jayega? Aapko manzoor he yeh?" (Earlier when they (the Congress) were in power they had said Muslims have the first right to the wealth of the nation. This means they will distribute this wealth to those who have more children, to infiltrators. Should your hard-earned money be given to infiltrators? Do you agree to

So, who are these people who have "more children"? Who are these people who have been called "infiltrators"? Isn't it clear and, even, obvious from the first sentence? Can there be any doubt? And who are these "Musalman" mentioned in that sentence? Are they not the Muslims of India, our fellow citizens, with equal rights and liberties as every one of us? Or could they be foreigners, outsiders, aliens?

Now, what's your answer to my question? Am I naïve to express shock? And to be, in fact, shaken? Or would you have expected such allegations from any of our prime ministers?

I know Donald Trump often speaks like this but when he does he makes us cringe. In the late 1960s, Enoch Powell spoke like this in Britain but the country's establishment turned its back on him. And no doubt the Pragya Singh Thakurs and Sadhvi Rithambaras of our generation revel in such rhetoric but they only invite contempt and derision.

There's something else that's surprised me though by now I accept my credulity

WE'VE TRAVELLED A LONG DISTANCE SINCE THE FIFTIES AND SIXTIES. THESE DAYS THERE'S NOTHING YOU WOULD NOT EXPECT OF A POLITICIAN

has probably taken a serious hit in your eyes. It's the response of our media. If there has been, I haven't noticed dismay, certainly not revulsion.

Maybe I read the wrong papers and watch the wrong TV channels but my impression is that what's been said has been taken in its stride. If not accepted, at least not remarked upon. Definitely not criticised. I find that almost hard to believe except I think it's undeniable. Again, would you agree?

I'm sorry I've posed a lot of questions today and given you very few answers. But I don't want to impose my views. Instead, I want you to reflect. So forgive one last question: Is it fitting - no, more accurately, is it morally correct — for the prime minister of a secular democracy to speak of fellow citizens of a different faith in this manner?

> Karan Thapar is the author of Devil's Advocate: The Untold Story. The views expressed are personal

# Action on toxic plastics can't wait for consensus

36

Bharati

Chaturvedi

lastics, ubiquitous and convenient, have long enjoyed widespread usage owing to their versatility. From simple flexible tubes to sophisticated laptops, these materials have unparalleled utility. But this convenience comes thanks to toxic additives and chemicals, a persistent environmental and health challenge. Additives leach from intact products, or as microplastics, contaminating the human body. Plastic pollution, therefore, is also chemical pollution.

Take Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals, or EDCs, a generic name for chemicals that disrupt the endocrine system. This causes hormonal

systems to become dysfunctional, causing illnesses such as developmental disorders, thyroid disorders, infertility, and sleep disorders, among others. Scarily, EDCs mimic hormones sending the wrong signals to tissues and organ systems - like a hostile takeover of the human body. EDCs, like bisphenols found in everyday items such as reusable water bottles, food can linings, and medical

equipment, can mimic hormones, leading to a cascade of adverse effects.

Within synthetic furnishings and electronic components are embedded brominated flame retardants (BFRs), designed to prevent fires even after long hours of usage and heating up. These are linked to profound impacts on reproductive health and cognitive development in children, as we learn from a detailed review by the Endocrine Society and the International POPs Elimination Network. Meanwhile, the inclusion of phthalates to impart flexibility to certain plastic products poses grave health risks. A February 2024 report by Toxic Links, a non-profit, found that, of the items it examined in India, 86% of toys and 67% of plastics that come in contact with food were contaminated with phthalates.

Concerns are compounded at the end of a plastic product's lifecycle. Despite recycling efforts, a significant proportion of the toxic payload is often retained in the new avatars. Recycling processes weaken polymer bonding, facilitating chemical leaching. Furthermore, direct exposure incidents abound, such as when

young children chew on flexi toys and teethers. In response, the recently concluded fourth session of the intergovernmental negotiating committee to advance a plastics treaty (INC-4) in Ottawa, leached of political will, failed to come up with even the semblance of an ambitious attempt at protecting human and planetary health. A bespoke strategy is required for India to navigate this terrain, mostly on its own.

India's consumer affairs ministry must enable interested persons to easily learn of every ingredient in a product and its packaging. It can use barcodes on items so the data are detailed and readable. This could become both a disin-

> centive for manufacturers to use these chemicals and a tool for consumers to seek safer alternatives.

Transitioning away from hazardous additives demands substantial investment in research and development, bolstered by financial incentives and green procurement policies. The next step is the extended producer responsibility (EPR) regime, which should be expanded in the coming few years to phase out additives and

other harmful chemicals. Testing is expensive, but essential. Establishing robust testing regimes with public data sharing, under the Central Pollution Control Board and the Bureau of Indian Standards, will enable adherence to evolving scientific standards and hold accountable both domestic manufacturers and importers of non-compliant goods. Most recycling still takes place in the informal sector, because of expensive pollution control and costly real estate. A majority of the recyclers cannot afford increasingly gentrified industrial areas. Instead of vilifying them, ena-

In charting this course, India must confront the perils posed by plastics head-on. While the current state of play suggests eliminating plastics will prove elusive in the medium term, mitigating toxicity can't wait for global consensus.

bling their long-term compliance to improved

standards can play a pivotal role.

Bharati Chaturvedi is the founder and director of Chintan Environmental Research and Action Group. The views expressed are personal



# { SUNDAY LETTERS }

## The government's growth narrative This is with reference to

Maitreesh Ghatak's "Debating inequalities in the backdrop of elections" (Apr 28). The "don't worry about inequality, growth will take care of everything" narrative is certainly not convincing. The government needs to ensure that growth percolates through all economic classes.

Rahul Bharadwaj

# Address Rushdie's plight

This is with reference to Karan Thapar's "Using words to remake and reclaim the world" (Apr 28). We need to examine and introspect why our government did not express sympathy and solidarity with Salman Rushdie after the terrible ordeal that he underwent.

Priyanka Sharma

# Jagdish Bhagwati's economic genius

This is with reference to NK Singh's "Being Jagdish Bhagwati in a conflict-riven world" (Apr 28). Jagdish Bhagwati is a visionary par excellence who guided Indian economic reforms in the early 1990s.

Samiul Hassan Quadri

Write to us at: letters@hindustantimes.com

# The best President India failed to have

Pavan K

Varma

think most people will agree that Karan Singh - philosopher, statesman, writer and orator — was the best President our Republic never got. The sad part is that Rashtrapati Bhavan was within his reach. When the opportunity came in 2007, he was a fit 75 years old, and his party, the Congress, was in power, as part of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA).

At that time, he was a member of the Rajya Sabha, and the president of the Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR), of which I was the director-general. He was, therefore, my direct boss. But "boss", I think, is an inappropriate word. We were also friends and intellectual companions, and the relationship was one of great warmth and trust.

Our ties extended to our families. His wife, Yasho Rajya Lakshmi, from a royal family in Nepal, was 19 years his junior and a lady with rather strong likes and dislikes. But, quite inexplicably, she became very fond of me and my wife, Renuka. We became friends too with his children, Jyoti, Vikramaditya and Ajatashatru, and their spouses.

Karan Singh, although the former maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), carried his royal lineage lightly. Due to a childhood injury, which damaged his hip, he needed a highchair to sit on. The only time he would laughingly refer to

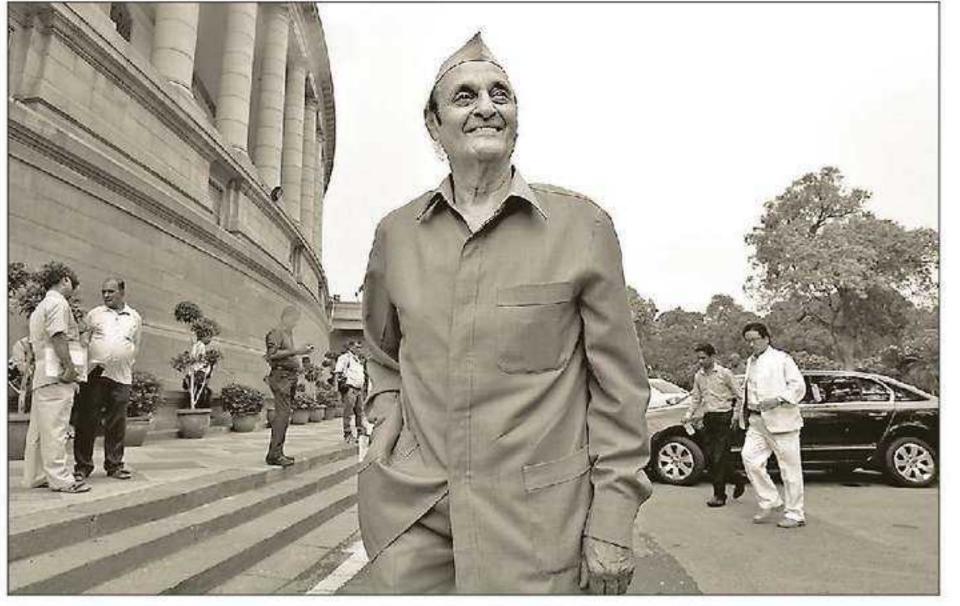
his background was when he would say: "Kya karein, uunchi kursi ki bachpan se hi aadat hai" (What can I do, since my childhood I have been used to a high-

Although said in jest, it was a valid claim. In 1949, at the age of 18, he became the prince regent of J&K, after his father, Hari Singh, stepped down. From 1952 to 1965, he was the Sadr-e-Riyasat (presi-

dent) of the state, and subsequently its governor till 1967. He then joined the Union cabinet as its youngest-ever member, holding the portfolios of tourism, civil aviation, and later, health. He won elections to the Lok Sabha twice and was a member of the Rajya Sabha for over two decades. He was ambassador of

India to the United States (1989-90), chancellor of the Banaras Hindu University for three terms, and was awarded the Padma Vibhushan in 2005. Although a scholar of the Hindu faith, whose family trust maintains 175 temples in J&K, he was unambiguously secular and led the global interfaith movement for years.

With this vast experience and erudition, who could have been a better candidate to become President? But destiny plays its tricks. The UPA was then in power in coalition with the Left parties. CPI(M) leader, Prakash Karat, vetoed the possibility on the grounds that Singh was a royal. It was a ridiculous reason. Karan



Karan Singh had, as a teenager, rebelled against his father to join democratic politics under Jawaharlal Nehru SONU MEHTA/HT ARCHIVE

mentor who called him by his pet name, "Tiger". He fought and won Lok Sabha elections. Few people know that even before Indira Gandhi abolished the privy purses in 1971, he had voluntarily surrendered his own and donated the money to a charitable trust. Far from coveting wealth, he was quite detached from it. The priceless jewels of his family, valued

Singh had, as a teenager, rebelled against

his father to join democratic politics

under Jawaharlal Nehru, who was his

at an estimated thousand crores, lie sealed in a Srinagar vault. I once asked him why he doesn't pursue his legal claim to them, and his answer was: "Let it go, Pavan. They are tainted by the blood of the conquests by my ancestors." Sitaram Yechury, Karat's senior colleague, was my class fellow in St Ste-

phens and remains a good friend. I

requested him to put some sense into Karat. But Yechury flatly said that nobody can change Karat's mind. Frankly, Sonia Gandhi too did not strongly press the case of Karan Singh, remaining non-committal and ambiva-

Pratibha Patil became the next President, but Singh took it stoically, largely, I think, because of his spiritual anchorage. A few days after he lost out, my wife, and I were invited to lunch at his Srinagar home, Karan Mahal. He received us at the porch, and with a hearty laugh said: "Welcome. This is not the Rashtrapati Bhavan, but nothing to scoff at either!"

Pavan K Varma is author, diplomat, and former Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha). The views expressed are personal

By putting out lies and enabling the truth of the Congress' manifesto to be brought into the election debate, and making no reference to BJP's manifesto, Mr Modi has endorse d Mr Stalin. He has acknowledged that the Congress' manifesto is the true hero of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections

# Mr Modi acknowledges hero of LS 2024

THE CONGRESS'S manifesto for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections was a product that was in the making since 2019. Mr Rahul Gandhi undertook a historic journey (yatra) on foot from Kanyakumari to Kashmir listening to the concerns of ordinary people and witnessing, first hand, how and in what conditions they lived, and what their aspirations were. The Udaipur Conclave brought together the leaders of the Congress party for three days to deliberate on the challenges faced by the country, and the possible responses to the challenges. The AICC session at Raipur enabled the party to put together a comprehensive and credible platform of policies that could challenge the BJP in state as well as national elections.

The Nav Sankalp Economic Policy was crafted at Udaipur. The 'pivot to the poor' was a position that was deliberated on and adopted at Raipur.

The Congress' manifesto was released on April 5 and was called 'NYAY PATRA'. The thread that ran through the 46 pages was 'justice' that had been denied to large sections of the people. The word 'justice' included social justice, justice for youth, justice for women, justice for farmers and justice for workers. Large sections of the people had been discriminated against and denied a fair opportunity to participate in the growth story — fast or slow — of the country. What the Congress's manifesto did was to puncture the veil of 'sabka saath sabka vikas' and show the mirror to

the rulers of the country. It also presented an alternative vision of growth and development with equity and justice.Mr M K Stalin, the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, described the Congress's manifesto as the Hero of the 2024 elections.

Initially, Mr Modi and the BJP decided to ignore the Congress' manifesto. The media too paid little attention to the document. As the translated versions reached the states, and candidates and campaigners took the key messages to villages and towns, the Congress' manifesto became the talking point among the people (read: Mr Modi Re-writes Congress' Manifesto, Indian Express, April 28, 2024).

Nine days after April 5, the BJP released its manifesto. No one took notice of it. Nor did Mr Modi extol the virtues of the Modiworshipping document aptly titled Modi Ki Guarantee. Seven days later, on April 21, polling was held in 102 constituencies. The 'intelligence' was apparently bad news for the BJP. It became clear that voters who voted for the Congress and its allies had voted for the 'promises' in the manifesto, just as they had voted for the 'guarantees' in Karnataka and Telangana. That got Mr Modi's goat, and he switched gears on April 21.

The script that the BJP laid out for all its leaders and members would have made Goebbels proud: lies, more lies and even more lies; if truth rebutted the lie, ignore the truth. Here is a sample of the lies that have been peddled for the last 14 days:

**Lie:** Congress' manifesto has the imprint of the Muslim League.

**Truth:** The word 'Muslim' did not occur in any of the 46 pages. Minorities were defined as religious and linguistic minorities and the Congress promised "Linguistic and religious minorities are granted human and civic rights under the Constitution of India. Congress pledges to uphold and protect these rights." There were numerous references to SC, ST and OBC but no reference to any religious community.

**Lie:** If Congress is elected to power, it will bring back the Shariat law.

**Truth:** The manifesto said "we will encourage reform of personal laws. Such reform must be undertaken with the participation and consent of the communities concerned."

**Lie:** Congress' manifesto advocated Marxist and Maoist economic theories.

**Truth:** In the introduction to the 10page section on the Economy, the Congress said: Congress' economic policy has evolved over the years. In 1991, the Congress ushered in the era of liberalization and steered the country toward an open, free and competitive economy with regulatory oversight. The country reaped enormous benefits in terms of wealth-creation, new businesses and entrepreneurs, a huge middle class, millions of jobs, important innovations in education and health care, and exports. Millions of people were lifted out of poverty. We reiterate our commitment to an open economy in which economic growth will be driven by the private sector complemented by a strong and viable public sector."

**Lie:** If elected, Congress will end the reservations for SC, ST and OBC.

**Truth:** The manifesto said "Congress guarantees that it will pass a constitutional amendment to raise the 50 per cent cap on reservations for SC, ST and OBC. The reservation of 10 per cent in jobs and educational institutions for Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) will be implemented for all castes and communities without discrimination. We will fill all the backlog vacancies in posts reserved for SC, ST and OBC within a period of one year.' There were many more promises to advance the cause of SC, ST and OBC.

**Lie:** Congress will impose an inheritance tax.

**Truth:** In a 12-point section on Taxation and Tax Reforms. Congress promised to enact a Direct Taxes Code; maintain stable personal income tax rates for 5 years; cap cesses and surcharges at 5 per cent; pass GST 2.0; and lessen the burden of taxes on MSMEs and small retail businesses. There was no whisper of inheritance tax.

By putting out lies and enabling the truth of the Congress' manifesto to be brought into the election debate, and making no reference to BJP's manifesto, Mr Modi has endorse d Mr Stalin. He has acknowledged that the Congress' manifesto is the true hero of the 2024 LS elections.



# Divide and win?

WRITING A political column is fraught with difficulties in these days of social media. Two-rupee trolls who manage to string one sentence together think they have become political commentators and spend their time attacking people like me Perhaps because they believe they should be writing a column in The Indian Express? Who knows? If I write something that sounds like criticism of the Congress Party, I am accused of 'hatred' for the Gandhi family. If I write something that sounds like criticism of Narendra Modi, the charges become scarier. They range from being a 'Pakistani agent' to being anti-Hindu and anti-India.

Now that the Lok Sabha election has begun, the trolls have become virulently verbose. Critiques of this column are sometimes longer than the column itself. Since they are always written with the supreme confidence that only fools have, they sound credible to those who have no idea what political analysis is. So, there are many on social media who dare me to respond to these diatribes. This is never going to happen. Last week, it was Congress trolls who vented their fury at me. By this evening, anticipate that it will be the Modi fan club that is going to be in belligerent mood.

The reason is that I am going to say today in absolutely clear language that the Prime Minister is demeaning himself and India with the latest twist that his campaign has taken. I could hardly believe my ears last week when I heard him say that Pakistan wants the Congress 'Shahzada' to win. He based this bizarre charge on the premise that some obscure politician who was a minister in Imran Khan's government had praised Rahul Gandhi. This obsession with Pakistan gives the Islamist Republic more credit than it deserves. And it negates the years of diplomacy spent by us on trying to de-hyphenate India from Pakistan. We are no longer on the same playing field. If Modi wants to show that he is truly a leader with a '56" chest' then let him take China on instead.

More worrying is the way Modi has demonised our own Muslim citizens. This has debased the Prime Minister's office. India has the world's second largest Muslim population, after Indonesia, so calling our Muslim citizens 'infiltrators' is irresponsible, untrue, and very dangerous. Then there was Modi's comment on how the Congress Party was going to steal gold and 'mangalsutras' from Indian women and redistribute this wealth to those 'producing more children'. This comes from his Alma Mater. I once had many RSS friends and discovered over many post-shakha Punjabi breakfasts in Delhi that they were paranoid about India becoming a Muslim majority country because Muslims bred more children than Hindus. What an ordinary Sanghi can say cannot, and must not, be said by the Prime Minister because he is supposed to rep-

resent everyone. Not just Hindus. Usually, it is women living in desperate poverty who have many children. Usually, it is because they are less literate and usually it is because they are coerced into loveless arranged marriages and coerced into producing lots of children. It is true that there are many more illiterate and desperately poor Muslim women in India, and this is because Islam has a peculiar allergy to women being educated. The extreme form of this is visible in Afghanistan since the Taliban returned to power.

Another reason why more Muslim women live in dire poverty is because in the glory days of 'secularism' when the Congress Party ruled supreme, Muslims were frightened into becoming a Congress vote bank but given no benefits. When Modi's team bangs on about 'tushtikaran' (appeasement), they deliberately ignore this ugly reality. There was a moment when the Prime Minister himself admitted that there were Muslim communities who were 'pasmaanda' or backward and it seemed as if he would go ahead and help these sections with special schemes. This did not happen.

The real question is why Modi has suddenly rediscovered the nastiest and most divisive aspect of Hindutva? If it is to consolidate the Hindu vote for the next five rounds of polling, then he is doing exactly what Congress did. He rails against 'vote bank politics' but is playing the same game. What should worry Modi is the charge from Rahul Gandhi that he is resorting to communal politics because he has 'gone into a panic'. The man who appears confident that on June 4 the results will bring the Congress Party back to power recently said that he has information that the BJP will be reduced to 150 seats in the next Lok Sabha.

This is not what the polls indicate. It is not what I have picked up on my travels but who knows what can happen? Indian voters are notoriously secretive about who will get their vote. But for the moment, Modi appears to be throwing away his own lead in this election, by bringing up issues that matter only to the worst kind of Indian voters. If this election has a single big issue, it is Modi himself. People who plan to vote for him say it is because they believe he will keep his promise of making India a developed country. Those who will be voting against him say this is because they believe that he has failed to deliver on that promise of 'achche din' that he made in 2014.



## Worker Let Down

IF THE BIP appears more vulnerable than

its earlier predictions suggested, it is not merely because of voter apathy and lower turnout. The party has assessed that there was a discernible drop in worker enthusiasm in the first two rounds of voting. BJP workers, largely drawn from the RSS cadres, are the all-important cog in the party machine who bring out the voters on election day. Many karyakartas are finding it hard to reconcile with the changing face of the BJP. "You cannot order us to blacken a corrupt Congress leader's face one day and then turn around and ask us to campaign for him the next," a BJP worker protested. Anger among rank-and-file loyalists has been building up. One grievance is that minor requests, including deserving postings, transfers etc, forwarded by the RSS to the government are usually ignored. This time the RSS had almost no say in the distribution of BJP tickets, a fact admitted by a senior RSS functionary when asked to intervene on behalf of Pramod Mahajan's daughter and Mumbai North Central MP Poonam Mahajan, who was denied a ticket. The RSS's embarrassed explanation to its flock is that Modi has done far more to fulfill the RSS agenda than any earlier party politician.

## No One-Horse-Race

The replacing of popular sitting BJP MPs with political lightweights or turncoats is deeply resented by the rank and file. Actor Arun Govil who was parachuted as a BJP candidate in Meerut even hinted at internal sabotage after polling concluded last week. In Bareilly, UP, and Mysuru, Karnataka, MPs Santosh Gangwar and Pratap Simha are among several others who have been replaced, even though surveys suggested they would win handily. In Nanded, Maharashtra, where former Congress CM Ashok Chavan recently joined the BJP, a third of local party workers did not attend the PM's rally. Defying party discipline, a Karnataka BJP leader admitted to the media that he had alerted his party seniors about Deve Gowda's grandson Praiwal Revanna's unsavoury reputation. There are those who go so far as to suspect that the continuing protests by Rajput groups in several states over Gujarat minister Parshottam Rupala's controversial remark has secret encouragement from within their ranks. Pertinently, after the second round of voting, the *satta* market has re-assessed the BJP victory down to a

mere 290 seats (the halfway mark is 272), indicating that the 2024 election is not a one-horse race as projected.

## ONE-MAN SHOW

A striking feature of the BJP's 2024 election campaign is that it is focused entirely around the Prime Minister. The 2019 campaign was also Modi-centric but state satraps and even national leaders were also projected in the campaign. Popular BJP leaders such as Shivraj Singh Chouhan, Vasundhara Raje, Nitin Gadkari, Rajnath Singh, Sushil Modi, Devendra Fadnavis etc are missing from the election posters in their respective states.

## FRANTIC OUTREACH

It is no coincidence that Modi's hard-hitting speeches targeting the Muslim community began after the first round of voting. The speeches, scripted by the PM's core team, were criticised for being unbecoming for a twoterm PM and statesman with an important role on the world stage. It was assumed that the PM's speeches were aimed at polarising Hindu voters, who might have been lulled into complacency, what with the media echoing the assessment of a one-horse race. Many believe Modi's speeches were directed towards party workers. He wanted to make the point that despite forging alliances with questionable partners and inducting suspect individuals, he has not digressed from the RSS core ideology. His personalised letter to all BJP candidates, addressing them as "fellow karyakarta", is perceived as part of this outreach. Last month, while campaigning in Vidarbha, he stopped overnight at the RSS headquarters.

## ALL-TIME LOW

Significantly, Modi has for the first time not set the terms of the campaign narrative. Rather, he has dredged stray remarks from the past by Congress leaders to spread fear and suspicion of the minority community. He has demolished some of Rahul Gandhi's thoughtless comments.But the seasoned Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge's caustic observation about the President Droupadi Murmu and former President Ram Nath Kovind not being invited to the Ram Mandir consecration struck a chord. As have WhatsApp messages sent out by hired social media influencers suggesting the BJP wants to amend the Constitution and do away with reservations. As the BJP engages in firefighting, some in the Opposition have even utilised fake morphed videos to further spread false rumours of reservations coming to an end. The 2024 campaign rhetoric has surely fallen to its lowest level ever.

## **HEADLINE CHAKSHUROY**



THE LOK SABHA elections are in full swing. The third voting phase, scheduled for May 7, is a crucial milestone. This phase will witness all 26 seats in Gujarat and the remaining half of 14 seats in Karnataka going to polls. Once this phase concludes, voters will have exercised their franchise for more than half of the 543 seats in the Lok Sabha. After that, the election momentum will shift to Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, where voting for all the seats will occur on May 13.

The history of elections in our country has multiple starting points. One of them is the discussion about every adult's right to vote. Colonial administrators decided that an illiterate electorate, the absence of political organisations and the burden on the official machinery made adult franchise impracticable. After Independence, our Constitution framers discussed the issue at length. There was scepticism because of illiteracy, but there was also the belief that a limited franchise would be "a negation of the principles of democracy". They decided that adult suffrage should be the basis of elections to Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies.

While these deliberations were ongoing, the Constitution Assembly Secretariat began preparing a draft electoral roll in 1947. Ornit Shani, in her book, How India Became Democratic, details the meticulous process followed by the secretariat. In the introduction, she states, "Making the draft electoral roll on the basis of universal franchise in the context of the unfolding grim tragedy of partition, ultimately enrolling 49% of India's population, the vast majority of whom were poor and illiterate, in anticipation of the constitution, required a rich political imagination."

In 1950, the Election Commission (EC) took over the work done by the Constitution Assembly Secretariat. Passing the appropriate legislation, election preparedness of states, and environmental factors like floods in Bihar delayed the first elections. In November that year, President Rajendra Prasad informed the members of the Provisional Parliament that General Elections would take place in November-December 1951.

During this time, the EC was also busy finalising the details of the actual voting process. It adopted the polling process suggested by the Indian Franchise Committee of 1932 (which recommended against adult franchise). This committee suggested that there should be a separate ballot box with a distinctive

# How India's first voters got their ballot box



CEC Sukumar Sen (left) and S Subramaniam, Secretary to the Election Commission, examining ballot boxes in October 1951, ahead of the first general elections. Source: PIB

colour/symbol assigned for each candidate. The committee provided a simple mechanism for allocating colour/symbols to candidates and the location and design of polling stations. It noted that a pair of polling clerks should not handle more than 1,000 voters.

To ensure standardisation in the voting process, the EC prescribed the shape and specifications for the ballot box. One requirement was that the slit on the top of the box should allow the insertion of a ballot paper of the size of a rupee note. It also specified that the manufacturers were to use 20 gauge steel for making the boxes. The EC estimated that holding the first general elections to Parliament and state assemblies would require roughly 19 lakh steel ballot boxes. Manufacturing these would have required 6,000 tonnes of steel. To put that number in context, the iron weight in the Eiffel Tower is 7,300 tonnes.

The EC then approved designs by multiple manufacturers across the country. Three significant ones were Godrej and Boyce Manufacturing from Mumbai, Allwyn Metal Works of Hyderabad, and Bungo Steel Furniture based out of Calcutta. The Godrej-designed ballot boxes had a unique locking mechanism that ensured no one could tamper with them without breaking a seal. They secured most of the ballot box orders. In its contract with Bihar, Godrej offered to donate the difference between their and a competitor's price to the state government.

But things did not go smoothly in some of the other cases. In the box made

by Allwyn Metal Works, the slit for inserting the ballot paper was smaller. The company had the impression that the ballot paper, which was the size of a one-rupee note, could be folded before being inserted into the box. When EC noticed the anomaly, it ordered the ballot paper to be cut to a smaller size. Bungo Steel Furniture did not produce adequate ballot boxes for different states. As a result, Madras became the only state that used steel and wooden ballot boxes, the wooden ones made by prisoners.

EC came up with detailed guidelines for ensuring the security of ballot boxes. It also introduced marking voter fingers with indelible ink to prevent impersonation. By the second general election in 1957, the EC had shifted from separate ballot boxes for each candidate to one box for all candidates. It also publicly addressed concerns about the ballot boxes' tamperproof nature. However, with increasing muscle power in elections, in certain parts of the country, booth capturing and stuffing ballot boxes became a regular affair. The EC responded by making booth capturing a crime and gradually shifted to the Electronic Voting Machines.

The humble ballot box is no longer part of the general election process. The EC now uses it for elections to the office of President, Vice President and Rajya Sabha. While the ballot box may be history, the principles from that era are still in use during the general elections in the country.

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# A vacation on one's own terms



THE MOST famous painting in the world, the *Mona Lisa*, has recently been called the world's most disappointing masterpiece, according to research that analysed over 18,000 online reviews. This deflating truth is not news to the curators at the Louvre who see disgruntled tourists jostling for pictures in front of this remote treasure, shielded as it is by bullet-proof glass. There was an attempt to gently nudge irate crowds stuck in snake queues to appreciate the other compelling if not as famous works, with a sign in the gallery: "The Mona Lisa is surrounded by other master-

pieces—take a look around the room." Alas,

to no avail because everyone wants to tick off a to-do bucket list item, however unsatisfying it may be. The tragedy of museums and all the

wonders on earth, Machu Picchu or the Great Pyramids of Giza, for instance, is that they are overwhelmed by the phenomenon of viewers needing a photograph as memento, to mark their presence. Selfie and bucket list culture have destroyed the pleasure of travel. The idea that if you're not striking off destinations one by one you're missing out is patently flawed because discovery happens by slowly loitering around and giving oneself up to chance. But in the "I was there!" Instagram era, people care less about knowing why a work of art or particular place is worth visiting but just the fact that everyone is, has turned us into shallow

curiosity seekers. Yet, often, while viewing what sophisticated aesthetes and UNESCO have declared to be uniquely important, a confusing thought tends to arise: really, this? Standing before something that in our imaginations was supposed to evoke shivers of delight yet here we are feeling nothing at all is much more common than we admit.

Sure, the mania for the *Mona Lisa* is merited; for generations, art scholars have tried to interpret what lies behind that enigmatic, knowing gaze. But most of us novices flocked to the Louvre, enticed by peer pressure, insidious marketing and the painting's fame, so no surprise that after elbowing one's way through the hordes, the experience is highly anti-climactic. It's not such a revolutionary idea that we don't have a duty to like or look at stuff merely because everyone else does. For years, every trip for me began with a sense of dread, of being herded around single file, half heartedly admiring artistic accomplishment. My threshold for the appreciation of beautiful things, I discovered, is half an hour, after which my eyes glaze over and I'm blinded by the unfamiliar over stimulation. While evaluating the cost benefit analysis of museum pricing, travelers think it's a waste not to see all of it. But if you've had enough, it's a bigger waste of time to lose a precious day.

We travel for sights and scenes, a break from routine but also to know ourselves better. Time slows down when you're ambling without a plan, anonymous in a new city, embracing the role of an outsider. "The road is life," observed Jack Kerouac in On the

epaper.indianexpress.com

Road, the 60-year-old classic about his meandering journey across North America that inspired generations to explore the world on their own terms, travel itineraries be damned. Perhaps, people are too wired and fancied up now to want to drive through the mountains in the back of a truck with strangers, wind rustling through their hair, one of the many lush, adventurous scenarios Kerouac paints. A trip those days represented freedom, the delicious state of not knowing what came next. The cumulative effect of a holiday like that is entirely unexpected and totally original experiences lodge in our psyches as fond memories. And indeed, it takes these sojourns to the furthest corners of the globe to understand,

there really is no place like home. The writer is director, Hutkay Films