{ THE BIG PICTURE }

## At the core of elections is the idea of the public

Voting is the method of choosing representatives for protecting and enhancing the wealth of the public in which we all have an equal share. As a voter, each one of us has a responsibility to strengthen the idea of the public

t is the season of voting once again. One might want to think that this is a carnival of democracy. But, alas, it is not. What does voting really have to do with democracy? Has the force of democracy been reduced to a mere act of voting?

Democracy is supposed to be about the power of the people. But what kind of power is this? "The People" do not have the power to enact legislation, to suggest policies, to make sure that the elected representatives do something for the benefit of the larger society. Ordinary people cannot even access the institutions that stand for democracy such as the state assemblies and Parliament. We do not have the power to stop the blatant misuse of government wealth as well as public institutions for the personal benefit of politicians and their family members. So what power do people

really have through this act of voting? Voting today is seen as a transaction by the majority of the voters. The well-to-do class believes that the poorer sections benefit monetarily or otherwise from voting.

From the context of the poor, there is nothing wrong with the benefits they get from voting. After all, they argue, it is only their votes that allow an individual to get political power, which is used by the politician to become richer. What is wrong with them demanding a tiny fraction of payment for their role in increasing the wealth of the politician?

The better-off class also sees voting as transactional. They too vote for material gains, such as economic policies that benefit their class. They vote on the basis of who is going to better support their ideologies. They too are demanding some personal benefit from their vote.

However, the significance of voting transcends this personal transaction. The importance of voting lies foremost in the idea of the public. In any society, there is a domain that is public and one that is private. Private land, and private wealth belong to individuals. They can do with them as they please. This is not the case with public wealth.

Sundar

Sarukkai

What is public wealth? Public land what is often called government land — is one example. Natural resources, oceans, forests, mountains and rivers are examples of public wealth. Social institutions, public universities and other such entities belong to all of us equally and reflect the wealth of the public. Essential values of a society such as fairness, equality, liberty, basic freedoms and fraternity are also public goods. All these are public in the sense that each one of us has an equal share in these.

None of these public entities belong to the politicians or those in power at a particular time. None of them can be seen as private entities

But then who actually owns the enormous wealth that belongs to the public? Who can decide what to do with that land and wealth? When we say that it is the government which owns them, what we are essentially saying is that each one of us. as the public, has an equal share in this wealth. This is the meaning of a democratic society. We are all co-owners and shareholders of the public domain. Most importantly, all of us — rich or poor, inde-

pendent of caste, religion and gender —
own the same percentage of the
public wealth. The richest and the poorest people in a society have an equal share in what is seen as belonging to the public.

If all of us have an equal share in the public wealth, then who should take care of it? Who should take the responsibility that this public wealth is not squandered or looted and that it should be availa-

ble for future generations to come? We cannot all govern this wealth since that would make it impractical. So we decide on representatives who will do this job on behalf of all of us.

Voting is this method of choosing representatives to protect as well as enhance the wealth of the public in which we all have an equal share. We elect somebody so that they can act as a trustee of the public wealth. Our primary responsibility as voters is to not let the wealth of the public go



The most important duty of voting is to protect all our public inheritance. If we do not make politicians accountable for their actions in destroying what is of value to the whole of society, then voting has no relation to democracy

into the domain of the private.

By its very definition, the idea of the public is based on the principle that everybody living in that society has an equal right to all that is in the public domain. It is this idea of the public as shared co-owners of a society that makes a society a unified one. What this means is that we recognise that this land, this society, this nation does not belong to one group or the other, but is only a shared ownership in which each and every one of us has an equal share.

This recognition is possible only when we cultivate a sense of fellow beingness with others around us, however different

they may be. This is the principle of fraternity. Ambedkar points out that while liberty and equality are important principles of democracy, it is only fraternity, or maitri, that holds these two principles together. As he notes, "Fraternity is the root of democracy". Fraternity is also the root of the idea of the public, of a society and a nation.

The most important duty of voting is to protect all this public inheritance and not destroy it or play with it as we like. If we do not make politicians accountable for their actions in destroying what is of value to the whole of society, then voting has no relation to democracy.

As a voter, each one of us has a responsibility to strengthen the idea of the public. This is possible only if voting leads to the betterment of society as a whole and not the betterment of individuals or groups. This can be accomplished only by making sure that, through our vote, those worse off than each one of us can improve their status, and that they have the same freedoms that you and I have.

Sundar Sarukkai's recent books include The Social Life of Democracy and a novel, Following a Prayer. The views expressed are personal

{ SUNDAY SENTIMENTS }



# Up and close: Ashok, the idol of my youth

Why Indian art is a blip on the big global canvas

Pavan K

Varma

guess it's not uncommon that when someone you are close to dies you're flooded with memories of the association with them. Incidents, long forgotten, return with an immediacy and clarity that is often astonishing. It's as if they happened yesterday. But they are probably three or, even, four decades old. The littlest things — an awry smile, a unique gesture, the startling timbre of voice — suddenly stand out. But a day earlier they would have seemed lost forever. Now, after a tragic death, you can't forget them.

Last week my cousin, Ashok Thapar, suddenly died. He was 15 years older but, in my teens and early twenties, he was an icon I sought to emulate. I admired his deliberate but careful sartorial style, his measured speech, his dry sense of humour and his, at times, acerbic comments. At that age, he was everything I wanted to be. But try as hard as I did. I could not copy him. My efforts were way

he year was 1960. KP Singh, now chairman emeritus of the real

estate giant, DLF, was then an

officer of the Indian Army. He

was travelling from Secunderabad to

Delhi. At the station, there was a mad

rush to get into the train. KP, sitting in

his first-class coupe, saw a thin, tall,

bare-footed, bearded man, with a tin box

on his head, desperately trying to get into

the train. As a last resort, he pleaded

with KP to let him in, and KP

agreed. That man was MF

That chance meeting led to a

life-long friendship. Husain

was employed by DLF as its art

director for a paltry amount of

some ₹3.000, but over time his

paintings rose to skyrocketing

prices. Many decades later,

when KP met Husain in Dubai

ping ₹24 crore!

where he was in self-imposed exile, he

had a fleet of luxury cars and a museum

to his name. At the home of Lord Gulam

Noon, in London, I saw a portrait made

by Husain in the 1950s of Noon's father

in Mumbai. He had charged ₹15 for the

work. In March 2023, one of Husain's

paintings sold at an auction for a whop-

that some painters — SH Raza, VS Gait-

onde, Husain, Rameshwar Broota, and

Ram Kumar — to name just a few, sell at

prices that are astronomical compared to

what they were sold for years ago. Aman

Nath, the founder of Neemrana Hotels,

bought a Tyeb Mehta for ₹2,700 in 1979.

So, is art a good investment? It is true

Husain.

off the mark.

In the summer of '77, in the warm afterglow of the end of the Emergency, Ashok and I would spend evenings walking the drive of his Chhattarpur farm. We'd plot innocent mischief between our fellow cousins. What lifted it above childishness was the artfulness of his efforts. Together he'd spin yarns and carry tales but they were never trite nor silly would be spent crafting them. Ashok had a memorable phrase for the occasions we successfully tied our relatives in knots. "It's such a hoot when we give fatty the flip!

In December 1981, the evening I got engaged, Ashok was determined we should celebrate together. So we got drunk. In a jeep he'd borrowed earlier that day from our cousin Mala Singh, we ended up at her home at midnight demanding more booze. By the time we left, we were truly pickled. Swerving to avoid a rehri-wala, we hit the divider and

In 2006, he sold it for ₹3.5 crore and bought a house in Nizamuddin East in

Delhi. Today, that painting is priced at

₹17 crore and featured on the cover of

Investment in Indian art has gone up

by 250% in the last decade. Last year

alone saw a 9% rise in turnover and a 6%

increase in the number of works sold.

This was facilitated by as many as 103

online auctions in 2022, held by interna-

tionally reputed firms like

Sotheby's and Saffron Art. The

annual India Art Fair, and the

Kochi-Muziris Biennale, have

soared in popularity. Today, the

turnover of Indian art has

reached \$144.3 million. Last year.

the late Amrita Sher-Gil's work.

The Storyteller fetched ₹61.8

crore, the highest for an Indian

Yet, it is sobering to note that the

Sotheby's catalogue.

painter.

brought the jeep to a shuddering stop. The police came to our rescue. Don't they always! As the sun peeped through

the dark winter night, Ashok dispatched me to Mala's to collect money. "You're a fine lot," she snorted. "First you arrive tipsy, then bash up the jeep and now you want money to bail yourselves out!" When it was all over, Ashok and I celebrated with a hearty breakfast at the Gymkhana Club. "Oh what a tangled web

we weave," he quoted, as he sipped the Club's black coffee. At the time I had no idea it was Walter Scott, I accepted it as one of the myriad aphorisms Ashok had squirrelled away and would produce at the apposite moment. I grew up in Ashok's company. Of that, I have no doubt. There were even times when, perhaps, he literally pulled me up.

But he taught me a lot. From the appreciation of a good carpet, the difference between Muslim and Hindu architec tural art, the way bright colours can speak to you and the unseen and, often, the uncared-for predicament of Indian In the years when it was unfashiona-

ble, Ashok was an agricultural expert. His columns in The Times of India explained the Green Revolution but also elucidated the problems it created. I can't say I fully understood them but read them meticulously I did. The fact that 50 vears later I remain in awe of the subject is entirely because of him.

What made him truly special was the

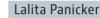
I GREW UP IN ASHOK THAPAR'S COMPANY. OF THAT, I HAVE NO DOUBT. THERE WERE EVEN TIMES WHEN, PERHAPS, HE LITERALLY PULLED ME UP. BUT HE TAUGHT ME A LOT. FROM THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MUSLIM AND HINDU ARCHITECTURAL ART AND THE WAY **BRIGHT COLOURS** CAN SPEAK TO YOU

fact he was so hard to define. He was no socialist but he had a profound social fussy. He was a raconteur but also knew when to keep stoically silent. He had a touch of class and a dash of flair but also an equal amount of control and restraint.

Now can you see why I admired Ashok? Writing about him is easy because I'm writing about what I once wanted to be. Farewell is difficult because I'm saying goodbye to a part of

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

#### { ENGENDER }





# In parched cities, water brings women closer

engaluru has been in the news recently for its water shortage due to poor urban planning and lack of proper governance. Rapid urbanisation intensifies the strain on water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) systems, heightening vulnerabilities and inequalities within urban areas, especially in the slums. Water conservation expert, Diwan Singh, has warned that cities such as Jainur. De Chennai, Bathinda and Mumbai could face the same magnitude of water crisis. As a scorching summer approaches, water management assumes great importance, especially for women.

Women suffer the most in such situations as fetching water is their responsibility. This cuts into time which could have been used for productive income generation. There is also a heavy burden in terms of health for women in rural areas forced to carry loads of water. sometimes up to 15 litres at a time. Arundati Muralidharan, co-founder, Menstrual Hygiene Alliance India says, "Research points to the negative health effects of carrying heavy loads on girls and women, such as back and knee pain, and, in extreme cases, pregnancy loss and uterine prolapse. Water access challenges may further place them at risk of violence. The linkages between water, sanitation and hygiene are profound for girls and women, owing to their biological needs and social-cultural contexts.'

But there are heartening examples of women taking matters into their own hands. A recent study in Jaipur revealed that communities with strong representation from women have not only secured safe water but also strengthened safe practices. Roshanara, water committee member, Ward 147, Jaipur, said that women face the brunt of water shortage. "Us and our children were badly affected and after a year of petitioning, we got a Bisalpur water connection. Today, we get two hours of supply and we store it properly. We reuse the water in multiple ways.

Echoing this, Sharmila, a WASH sub-committee member, Bandla Basti, Jaipur, says, "Given the struggle we have faced to get water, we cherish every drop of water we collected. I have been living here for 24 years and in the beginning, we used to fetch water from a settlement. No one was willing to share the water with us. We would go from house to house and then carry a heavy pot back home. After my 20th year, we got the Bisalpur line and now get a good quantity of water. For tioned the government and persisted with different decision-makers. Without this collective pressure, we would not have succeeded in getting the water connection.'

To enable the community to share their ways of dealing with many existential challenges and to bridge the gap between the community and the water and sanitation system. Jaipur Vaani, a mobile app-based radio was started by CFAR in 2022. With the sup port of over 300 volunteers and 168 community persons, the Jainur Vaani team recorded 6.207 grievances on inadequate water and sanitation services and this was relaved to the officials concerned of Jaipur Municipal Corporation. Of those actively recording their voi ces, 4.321 were women.

Given the many challenges, proactive measures are imperative to confront Jainur's intricate nexus of gender inequality, water insecurity, climate crisis, and governance challenges. Strengthening gender-responsive WASH programming, fostering community awareness, and promoting sustainable water management practices emerge as critical imperatives. Embracing innovative solutions to strengthen water quality testing, revitalise urban water bodies, and embrace circular water economy principles can build resilience and sustainability in water governance. There is a growing realisation among policyand decision-makers that community involvement is essential and that women like Roshanara and Sharmila are not only helping the community but also the system to make change happen

The views expressed are personal

Is art a good investment? It is true that some painters — SH Raza, VS Gaitonde, MF Husain, Rameshwar Broota, and Ram Kumar — to name just a few, sell at prices that are astronomical compared to what they were sold for years ago

Indian art market accounts for only 0.5% globally. The United States has 43% of the cake, and, significantly, China 27%. For a three trillion economy like ours, the art market should be at least six times more. In a country of 1.4 billion.

Often, we don't know the worth of our own emerging artists. One of the most talented among them is Manish Pushkale. Last year, the famous Musee Guimet in Paris selected his work for display, and it was visited by over 50,000 visitors. It is now moving to the Asiatic

which has the third largest number of

billionaires in the world, there are less

than 500 serious art buyers.

Museum of Art in Nice. How many Indians know of this success story? Manish's life reads like a dramatic

movie script. He arrived in Delhi penniless in 1996 and slept for days on the platform at Nizamuddin railway station. His first buyer was the renowned artist. Sakti Burman, who paid ₹11,000. The next icon to spot his talent was Raza, who also became his guru. Famous artist Manjit Bawa bought one of his works for ₹13,000, sold it to an art collector for ₹1 lakh, and in an exceptionally gracious gesture, gave the ₹87,000 he earned back to Manish. Last year, one of Manish's

paintings fetched ₹67 lakh. He now no longer lives in Shakarpur, where his landlords were a generous group of eunuchs, but has his own twin-floor home in Hauz Khas.

Indian art is yet to get its due global recognition. That will happen when our artists shun mimicry, work with the originality that has been the hallmark of our ancient civilisation, and have far more patrons, if only for investment.

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



#### { SUNDAY LETTERS }

#### Haley's future is compelling This is with reference to

'Nikki Haley's future is in good hands, hers' by Frank F Islam (Mar 31). Despite Trump's influence, Haley's endurance and moderate stance signal a potential shift within the party. Her future trajectory, whether in politics or the private sector, remains a compelling watch.

**Pranav Apte** 

#### CEOs must seize the India opportunity

This is with reference to 'Making the most of the India opportunity' by Janmejaya Sinha (Mar 31). India's rising prominence demands a mindset shift. CEOs must seize India's potential with tailored strategies and bold actions to thrive in this transformative era.

Manjula Bajaj

#### Kahneman's enduring legacy

This is with reference to 'Daniel Kahneman: An incomplete obituary' by Tamoghna Halder (Mar 31). Daniel Kahneman's insights into decision-making have

left a lasting impact. His legacy will continue to inspire. Vivek Barman

Write to us at: letters@hindustantimes.com

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#### Cracking the mystery of how the chemical origins of life formed

**The Hindu Bureau** 

Heat flows through cracks in rocks, such as those found in volcanoes or geothermal systems, can purify molecules relevant to the chemical origins of life, laboratory experiments described in a study published in the journal Nature reveal. The study offers an explanation for how the first building blocks of life may have formed from complex chemical mixtures.

The formation of biopolymers and their components was a key moment in the origins of life on early

However, these pathways are hard to replicate in the laboratory. Often, the number of by-products forming from these complex reactions means the formation of biologically relevant building blocks occurs in near-negligible amounts. Previous attempts to devise a purification method have been limited by their specificity, being unable to isolate a wide range of molecules at

Christof Mast from Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, Munich, Germany and others use geologically inspired chambers with miniscule cracks to separate over 50 molecules relevant to prebiotic life from complex mixtures of amino acids, nucleobases, nucleotides and other compounds.

Vast networks of similar

cracks can be found in the Earth's crust and are thought to have been abundant on Earth before life formed. The mixture was filtered along a temperature gradient, which enables the isolation and enrichment of specific molecules, owing to slight dif-

The experimental results show that even a moderate temperature difference was sufficient to separate and purify several

ferences in their molecular

structure.

types of prebiotic molecules, including 2-aminozoles and amino acids, increasing concentrations by a factor of ten and three orders of magnitude, respectively.

The concentration ratios could be improved further by increasing the size of the network of cracks and are shown to be successful across a variety of temperatures, solvents and pH values.

The experimental conditions were shown to facilitate the coupling of two glycine molecules, a starting point in peptide synthesis, aided by forming concentrations five times higher than the starting mixture.

The success of this method suggests that naturally occurring geothermal heat flows could have driven this separation in the early Earth and provided an efficient method for producing the compounds necessary to study the origins of life.

## Influenza A H5N1 detected in dairy cows in 6 states in the U.S.

The exact extent of the spread of H5N1 in cows has not yet been ascertained since cattle are not routinely tested for avian influenza and the symptoms have been relatively mild

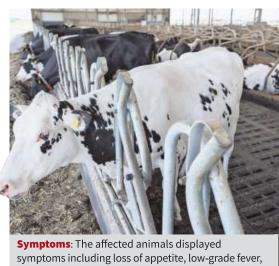
**Bani Jolly** Vinod Scaria

influenza (bird flu) is a highly contagious viral infection that primarily affects birds. An emerging new lineage 2.3.4.4b of avian influenza has been spreading across the globe since late 2020, carried by migratory birds following specific routes. This panzootic has a significant effect on the avian population with disastrous consequences to the ecology and significant economic loss affecting poultry across the world. In rare instances, the virus can infect mammals from birds causing spillovers, and in recent years, several such instances of spillovers spanning over 200 species have been noted, the most recent being polar bears in Antarctica. Close contact with infected animals could mean the virus could spill over infecting humans and this comes with a significantly large fatality

In late March 2024, a multistate outbreak of H5N1 in dairy cows was detected in the U.S. In what started as a mystery disease affecting dairy herds in Texas, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (US-DA) detected the highly pathogenic strain of the virus in herds across the states of Texas and Kansas. The affected animals displayed symptoms including loss of appetite, lowgrade fever, and reduced lactation. This marked the first time H5N1 had been detected in cattle, raising concerns about potential

H5N1 outbreak in dairy cows

The H5N1 outbreak in dairy cows began in late March 2024 in Texas



and reduced lactation. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

■ This is the first time that H5N1 has been detected in cattle It raises concerns about potential transmission routes

■ So far, H5N1 has been detected in over 12 herds from six Idaho and Ohio

In Texas, wild birds and cats that were in proximity to the affected farms have tested positive for the virus

Transmission of the virus within cattle has not yet been ruled out

■ In April 2024, a human infection of H5N1 was

sporadic humar H5N1 cases have been reported from over 20 countries, with a case-fatality ratio of 53%

reported

from Texas

for humans

risk of infections

remains low, but

farm workers are

at a higher risk of

getting infected

■ H5N1 infections

in humans can

symptoms to

even death

■ So far, 800

range from mild

severe illness and

transmission routes and the broader impact on the dairy and meat industry. To date, H5N1 has been detected in over 12 herds from six states – Texas, Kansas, Michigan, New Mexico Idaho and Ohio

In Texas, other animals in proximity to the affected farms – wild birds and cats - also showed signs of illness and have tested positive for the virus. The exact extent of the spread of H5N1 in cows has not yet been ascertained since cattle are not routinely tested for avian influenza and the symptoms have been relatively mild, leaving possibilities that there may be other undetected infected herds. The initial detections in late March in Texas, Kansas, and Michigan have yet to show a definitive pattern of transmission. Given the pace of the spread of infection across herds, the transmission of the virus within cattle has not yet been ruled out. Investigations are ongoing to determine the exact source of the spread to cows.

#### **Genomic insights**

In April 2024, a human infection of H5N1 was reported from Texas. The infected individual had contact with cows presumed to be infected with the virus. Fortunately, the patient had mild illness, with symptoms like eye redness, and has recovered after being treated with antivirals. Following this case, the CDC has reiterated that the risk of infections for humans remains low, although people with prolonged or close exposure to H5N1-infected animals such as farm workers, are at a higher risk. This is the second case of human H5N1 infection reported from the U.S. A previous case was reported in 2022 from Colorado. Human H5N1 infections are rare but have been sporadically reported in several coun-

H5N1 infections in humans can range from mild symptoms of eye infections to severe illness including pneumonia and death. Since 2003, more than 800 sporadic human H5N1 cases have been reported to the World Health Organization from over 20 countries, with a case-fatality ratio of 53%. In January 2024, concerns about H5N1 avian influenza rose in Southeast Asia when Cambodia reported two human cases, with tragically one resulting in death.

Researchers sequenced the H5N1 virus from both the infected Texas cows and the human case and found that both viruses belonged to clade 2.3.4.4b of H5N1, with the human strain having one minor mutation potentially linked to adaptation in mammals. However, this change has not led to increased transmissibility among humans, and the overall public health risk remains low according to the CDC. Since late 2021, H5N1 clade 2.3.4.4b has circulated in wild birds in the

Globally, 2023 also saw potential spillover events with H5N1 linked to the deaths of seals in Russia and infections in marine mammals in Peru. Early in 2023. dead seals in Russia and infected marine mammals in Peru suggested H5N1 might jump from birds to mammals. Additionally, the U.K. reported deaths of other animals including otters and foxes due to H5N1. These incidents underscore the need for further research to understand how H5N1 might evolve and potentially adapt to different species.

In summary, while the current risk of H5N1 transmission to humans is considered low, a combined approach of disease surveillance and monitoring the virus's genetic makeup (genomic surveillance) will be crucial for managing the outbreak.

(Bani Jolly is a senior scientist at Karkinos Healthcare and Vinod Scaria is a senior consultant at Vishwanath Cancer Care Foundation)



#### Fiber coupled to the body enables textile electronics

A flexible electronic fiber that utilises the human body as part of the circuit enables textile-based electronics without the need for batteries or chips, a study report. According to the researchers, the approach is well-suited for scalable manufacture of comfortable fiber-based electronics for a wide range of applications, including "smart" clothing. The soft, thin fiber that enables wireless visual-digital interactions utilises the human body as part of the circuit. The approach harvests electromagnetic energy.



#### 'Tightening of muscles could destroy epithelial cells'

In asthma, the tightening of muscles around the bronchi causes damage to the airway by squeezing and destroying epithelial cells, which promotes the airway inflammation and mucus production often associated with an asthma attack, researchers report. The findings suggest that preventing the mechanical damage rather than treating only its downstream symptoms, could pave the way for therapies that stop the asthma inflammatory cycle. More than 300 million people worldwide suffer from asthma.



#### Antibody therapy protects large animals from Nipah

Scientists have developed a potent antibody treatment that can protect large and small animals from infections with the Nipah virus, a deadly emerging pathogen with mortality rates as high as 40% to 90% in humans. The antibody treatment named hu1F5 targets the prefusion form of the Nipah virus F protein. In hamsters, the researchers found that administering the antibody one day after infection led to a 100% survival rate. It protected macaques.

**Question Corner** 

Can large landslides be

remotely detected in

Now it is possible to

remotely detect large

of occurrence and to

they are close to open

water and present a

tsunami hazard.

Researchers at the

University of Alaska

way to determine a

landslide's location,

impact. This might

support the National

Oceanic and Atmospheric

issuing a tsunami warning

Administration's goal of

within five minutes of a

landslide. A prototype

volume and potential

Fairbanks have devised a

real-time?

Landslide alert

## Over-reliance on smear microscopy for TB detection

#### R. Prasad

The presumptive TB testing rate in the country increased from 1,352 per lakh population in 2022 to 1,710 per lakh population in 2023. However, even two years before the 2025 deadline that the government has set to "eliminate" TB in India, only 21% of presumptive TB testing in 2023 was upfront done using a rapid molecular diagnostic test.

According to the India TB Report 2024, which is yet to be made public, at 79%, the vast majority of presumptive TB testing was still carried out using the 100-year old sputum smear microscopy, which has low sensitivity. Ironically, compared with 2022, there has actually been a marginal decrease - from 23% to 21% – in the percentage of presumptive TB

testing offered upfront using a molecular test in

The number of molecular testing facilities in the country has increased from 5,090 in 2022 to 6,496 in 2023. Also, there was a small increase in the rate of molecular testing in 2023 compared 2022; the number of rapid molecular tests offered for presumptive TB testing increased from 292.7 per lakh population in 2022 to 358 per lakh population in

However, this has not been reflected in an increase in the proportion of molecular testing last year compared with 2022. India has still a long way to go before it reaches the goal of offering a molecular test upfront to all presumptive TB patients, with nil reliance on microscopy.





**Grim choices:** The proportion of molecular testing in 2023 has not increased compared with 2022.

In 2023, 37.19 lakh patients were offered a CBNAAT test, of which 7.4 lakh people were diagnosed with TB, representing a yield of 20%. In the case of TrueNat, of the 31.13 lakh patients who were tested using TrueNat, 3.3 lakh persons were diagnosed with TB, representing a yield of 11%. For smear microscopy, of the 1.89 crore persons tested, only 5.78 lakh were diagnosed with TB, representing a yield of just 3%.

#### **Smear microscopy**

The National Strategic Plan 2017-2025 wanted to reduce the number of presumptive TB patients who are offered sputum smear million in 2015 to 5.1 million in 2023 while increasing the number of molecular tests from 40,000 in 2015 to over 14.7 million in 2023. However, as per the India TB report, in 2023, India was far from reaching the ambitious target set by NSP 2017-2025. The overreliance on smear microscopy has continued in 2023 with 79% of presumptive TB cases detected using smear microscopy and just 21% cases detected using a molecular test.

microscopy from over 9.1

The revised National Strategic Plan 2020-2025 has raised the bar even higher for precision tests to be used for initial diagno-

Four years after the launch of the revised NSP, India is nowhere near meeting the targets. One of the main objectives of the revised NSP 2020-2025 is the early detection of presumptive TB cases. It clearly says there

should be "prompt diagnosis" using highly sensitive diagnostic tests for detecting presumptive TB cases "at the first point of contact" both in the private and public sectors.

Universal drug-susceptibility testing in all drugsensitive TB cases is crucial for early identification of drug-resistant TB. The revised NSP 2020-2025 clearly states that NTEP should provide "universal access' to drug resistance testing.

However, in 2023, the proportion of notified TB patients offered drug-susceptibility testing was just 58% as against the target of 98%. In the absence of drug-susceptibility testing, it is not possible to ascertain drug-resistant cases and offer them suitable MDR-TB medicines.

been in place since August in the area of the Barry Arm of Prince William Sound, Alaska. It uses data landslides within minutes from seismic stations already in the Alaska quickly determine whether network. The method involves quickly identifying a landslide's long-period waves amid a seismic record busy with short-period waves created not only by a landslide but also by nearby earthquakes and glaciers and by human-caused activity.

system capable of

real-time detection has

Readers may send their questions /

#### Will new solar power rules boost production?

What is the Approved Models and Manufacturers of Solar Photovoltaic Modules Order?

#### **Jacob Koshy**

#### The story so far:

o incentivise India's solar module manufacturing industry, the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) has brought into effect from April 1 an executive order, The Approved Models and Manufacturers of Solar Photovoltaic Modules (Requirements for Compulsory Registration) Order, 2019.

#### What is the context of the executive order?

This order was first issued by the MNRE in 2019 and requires makers of solar modules to voluntarily submit to an inspection of their manufacturing facilities by the National Institute of Solar Energy, a Ministry-affiliated body. Being on the list as an 'approved' manufacturing facility certifies a company as a legitimate manufacturer of solar panels and not a mere importer or assembler. This became necessary because India's solar industry, its claim of indigenousness notwithstanding, is heavily reliant on imports of cheaper and comparable-quality solar modules from China.

Modules are multiple solar panels joined

The creation of a domestic list of manufacturers is also aimed at restricting imports from China, which controls nearly 80% of the global supply of solar modules

together. Solar panels are an assembly of solar cells. Despite being among the top manufacturers in the world and a commitment to scale solar installation four-fold by 2030, local production of these cells and modules is much

below demand. India also has limited capacity to make the raw material of a cell – ingots, wafers – and is dependent on imported cells.

#### Why is India reliant on imports?

The creation of such a list was also aimed at restricting imports from China, which controls nearly 80% of the global supply, with the downturn in diplomatic relations between the countries also being a factor. India has ambitious plans of sourcing about 500 GW, nearly half its requirement of electricity, from non-fossil fuel sources by 2030. This would mean at least 280 GW from solar power by that year or at least 40 GW of solar capacity being annually added until 2030. In the last five years, this has barely crossed 13 GW though the government has claimed that COVID-19 affected this trajectory. The difficulty is that meeting the targets require many more solar panels and component cells than India's domestic industry can supply

#### If the list is voluntary why pay to be on it?

The major advantage of being on the list is eligibility to compete for tenders issued by the government for its flagship solar energy programmes. This includes among others the recently announced PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana. The scheme envisages subsidising rooftop solar installations for nearly one crore households in the country involving an estimated subsidy of ₹75,000 crore. However, only domestic manufacturers, certified as part of the Approved Models and Manufacturers (AMM) list, would be eligible. There is also another scheme called the PM KUSUM (Pradhan Mantri Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthaan Mahabhiyaan) that aims to provide solar pumpsets and rural electrification. For manufacturers to be eligible to provide components under this scheme, they have to be certified as genuine local manufacturers. The government also has a ₹24,000 crore scheme, called the Production Linked Incentive Scheme, that is targetted at incentivising domestic manufacture of solar panels and their components. Eligibility for this scheme too requires one to be a bona fide local manufacturer. So far, 14 major companies have become eligible for incentives to manufacture solar modules worth 48 GW. However, these restrictions apply only to fresh projects and plants and facilities commissioned before March 2024 can rely on imported modules.

#### Is India's manufacturing capacity adequate? Last year was a fortunate year for Indians in the

solar business. China which supplies over 80% of solar components globally saw a curb in orders from the U.S. on the grounds that the former relied on "forced labour" by Uiyghur Muslims in the Xinjiang province. Europe too scaled back imports from China and a beneficiary of this was India which exported nearly \$1 billion worth of modules in six months of 2023-24. However, reports suggest that the U.S. might roll back duties on China and this could again mean uncertainty for the future of Indian exports. It is estimated that nearly half of India's solar modules are imported from China and the demand-supply mismatch is expected to persist. The government, however, has claimed that beginning this year, there will be a significant rise in manufacturing capacity. While the list of certified manufacturers on the AMM list has grown to 82 according to the MNRE, there is yet no list of such manufacturers of solar cells, implying that India is still far away from achieving a comfortable degree of self-reliance.

### Why are Katchatheevu pacts being questioned?

What triggered the controversy? Who owns the island? How was the issue settled? What were India's gains? Will revisiting bilateral pacts solve the fishermen's issue? What has been the response in India, especially in Tamil Nadu? What about Sri Lanka?

#### Meera Srinivasan

#### The story so far:

n March 31, Prime Minister Narendra Modi posted on social media platform 'X' that he blamed the Congress for "callously" giving away Katchatheevu island to Sri Lanka. He cited a media report on documents received in response to a Right to Information Act application from K. Annamalai, the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) Tamil Nadu president. Soon after, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar held a media conference, in which he sought to elaborate on Mr. Modi's allegation. Calling for a "solution", he said the bilateral agreements signed by India and Sri Lanka in 1974 and 1976, when the Congress and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) were in power respectively at the Centre and in Tamil Nadu, displayed indifference about Katchatheevu island, and compromised Indian fishermen's rights in the Palk Strait separating India and Sri Lanka.

#### Where is Katchatheevu?

Katchatheevu is an uninhabited island spanning some 285 acres in the Palk Strait that separates Tamil Nadu and northern Sri Lanka. More precisely, it is located 14.5 km south of Delft Island and about 16 km to the northeast of Rameswaram. It is barren, has no drinking water or infrastructure, except a sole Catholic structure dedicated to St. Anthony.

#### What was the dispute?

The dispute was over who owns Katchatheevu. Negotiations began in 1921, between the British colonial governments of Madras and Ceylon, with both sides claiming territorial ownership.

When India agreed that Katchatheevu would be in Sri Lankan territory, New Delhi obtained sovereign rights over Wadge Bank and its rich marine resources

The matter was settled some five decades later, after the Governments of India and Sri Lanka, under Prime Ministers Indira Gandhi and Sirimavo Bandaranaike, signed two bilateral agreements in 1974 and 1976. The governments agreed that Katchatheevu falls within Sri Lanka's territory, and on a maritime boundary in the Gulf of Mannar and Bay of Bengal to define the two countries' exclusive economic zones. With the exclusive economic zones, India and Sri Lanka agreed to exercise sovereign rights over the living and non-living resources of their respective zone. The understanding was that fishing vessels and fishermen of India and Sri Lanka shall not fish in each other's waters, territorial sea and the exclusive zone.

However, despite the historic dispute over its territorial definition, fishermen from Tamil Nadu visit Katchatheevu every March, along with their Tamil-speaking counterparts of northern Sri Lanka, for the annual St. Anthony's festival. The Indian fishermen do not require a passport to visit the island in Sri Lankan territorial waters for this purpose, because the 1974 agreement expressly permitted them to access the island for rest, drying of nets, and the festival, while prohibiting any fishing activity.

#### What did India get?

Commentary and analysis from the time, including in The Hindu, shows New Delhi was seen as gaining some diplomatic mileage with its neighbour, which was tilting towards China then. A few years after the liberation of Bangladesh, and alongside the difficult question of citizenship for Indian-origin Tamils who were rendered stateless in Sri Lanka, New Delhi deemed strong and close ties with Sri Lanka important. Further, New Delhi got sovereign rights over Wadge Bank, located near Kanniyakumari, and its rich marine resources. Earlier this year, the Union Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Directorate of Hydro-Carbon put out Notice Inviting Offers (NIO) for the exploration and development of oil and gas blocks in India, under the Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy (HELP). The move drew flak from residents of Kanniyakumari and environmentalists who raised concerns over such activity impacting the marine ecosystem around Wadge Bank.

#### Are fishermen arrests related to the island? No, they are not. Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu have been facing arrests by the Sri Lankan Navy for many years now, for fishing illegally in Sri Lanka's territorial waters. Invariably, the

arrests are made well past Katchatheevu, very

close to Sri Lanka's northern shores. Northern

Sri Lankan fishermen, also Tamil speaking, have been agitating since the end of the island nation's civil war in 2009, to assert their fishing rights. The Indian fishing boats are a major

impediment to their post-war recovery. In particular, they resist the use of the bottom-trawling fishing method used by their Indian counterparts, where trawl nets go down to the seabed, and scoop out all marine organisms, including small fishes and eggs Eager to boost its marine exports, India began encouraging mechanised trawler fishing decades ago, when the Norwegian government invested millions of dollars into modernising India's fishing fleet from the 1950s and up to the early 1970s. Owing to the practice, marine resources along Tamil Nadu's coast have depleted, pushing Indian fishermen towards the Sri Lankan coast, rich in marine biodiversity, especially shrimps. Northern Sri Lankan fishermen are opposing the use of the fishing method that Indian fishermen stubbornly hold on to, despite the two governments in 2016 agreeing to expedite the "transition towards ending the practice of bottom trawling at the earliest". The fishermen's conflict is a contest between Tamil-speaking fishermen in India and Sri Lanka, with those from Tamil Nadu habitually fishing illegally in Sri Lankan waters, using bottom trawlers that are banned in Sri Lanka. Although many politicians in India often conflate the two issues, Katchatheevu is not the site of this struggle, and its "retrieval" cannot be a solution to it.

#### What has been the response?

Opposition parties led by the Congress have slammed the remarks, citing the government's own position in 2015 that the previous agreements did not "involve either acquiring or ceding of territory belonging to India". Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin asked if PM Modi raised the issue of the retrieval of the Katchatheevu island with Sri Lanka once during his 10-year rule. Senior diplomats, who have led Indian missions in Sri Lanka, said questioning past agreements could damage India's credibility and impair relations with our neighbour. Former National Security Adviser Shiv Shankar Menon told The Hindu that reopening the 50-year-old-agreement could prove to be a "self-goal."

In what some see as a muted response from the Sri Lankan government, the country's Foreign Minister Ali Sabry has said there is no need to resume talks on a matter resolved 50 years ago. Sri Lanka's Fisheries Minister Douglas Devananda has accused India of acting in self-interest "to ensure Sri Lankan fishermen do not have access" around Katchatheevu. Fishermen on both sides have voiced concern over the remarks, while reminding the two governments that much needs to be done to resolve the actual fisheries conflict that is threatening both the region's marine ecosystem and livelihoods of fisher folk who depend on it.



Controversy again: A view of Katchatheevu. BALACHANDAR. L

## What is the outlook on women's employment?

What does the India Employment Report, 2024 state about key labour market indicators? Why is women's participation in the labour force low? What are the recommendations to bring about a change in women's job prospects?

#### Sudipta Datta

#### The story so far: he authors of the India Employment

Report, 2024, released recently by the Institute for Human Development and the International Labour Organization, point out that key labour market indicators have improved in recent years. The Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR), the Workforce Participation Rate (WPR) and the Unemployment Rate (UR) showed long-term deterioration between 2000 and 2019 but improved thereafter, the authors note, saying that the improvement coincides with periods of economic distress, both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, with the exception of two

#### What about women's participation?

peak pandemic quarters.

The female LFPR is very low compared to the male counterparts; in 2023, the male LFPR was pegged at 78.5; and the women LFPR was 37. The world women LFPR rate is 49, according to the World Bank figures. The female LFPR had been steadily declining since 2000 and touched 24.5 in 2019, before inching up, particularly in rural areas. But the writers point out that notwithstanding the modest improvements,

Nearly twothirds of the employment after 2019 comprised selfemployed workers, among whom unpaid (women) family workers predominate

employment conditions remain poor. Amit Basole, who teaches Economics at Azim Premii University, and heads the Centre for Sustainable Employment, explains that the increase in labour force participation has come mostly in rural areas and mostly in self-employment, which means largely unpaid work. "This suggests that it is distress resulting from the economic slowdown prior to COVID and then the pandemic itself that has contributed to women entering the labour force," he says.

Prof. Basole adds that there are some other hypotheses out there, such as improvements in measuring women's work in the Periodic Labour Force Survey and increased non-farm employment for men that has led to women substituting for men in agriculture. "But this is less likely. However, definitive evidence on the cause(s) is lacking," he notes.

#### Where are women employed?

The India Employment Report shows that it is women who largely account for the increase in self-employment and unpaid family work. Nearly two-thirds of the incremental employment after 2019 comprised self-employed workers, among whom unpaid (women) family workers predominate. The share of regular work, which steadily increased after 2000, started declining after 2018.

The rate of youth not in employment, education or training globally has been consistently the highest in South Asia, at an average of 29.2% between 2010 and 2019 (ILO 2022a). India also has a large share of youth not in employment, education or training, and the rate is higher among young women than men.

#### What are some of the reasons for low women's participation in the labour force?

Economists and women's rights experts point at various barriers women face in terms of a careers or a job. They list factors from a lack of jobs, women being made responsible for all care-giving duties at home plus cooking and cleaning to low wages, patriarchal mindsets and safety issues. In her 2022 book, The Making of a Catastrophe: The Disastrous Economic Fallout of

the COVID-19 Pandemic in India, Jayati Ghosh, observing the sharp decline in women's labour participation between 2004 and 2018, writes that only some part of the phenomenon of women moving out of the labour market could be explained by greater involvement in education, especially for the age cohort 15 to 19. But with participation rates falling for women across all ages, "clearly, there was a process in operation, which has also been noted globally, of women being squeezed out of employment because of overall scarcity of paid work."

Prof. Basole feels there are both supply and demand side reasons for the decline in women's LFPR. On the labour demand side, in general, India's growth pattern has not been job intensive. This combined with social norms that restrict women's mobility and make them primary caregivers at home, means that women are not free to take up available opportunities. In addition, concerns over public safety and lack of transport also confine women to looking for work close to home, further limiting their options, a point Prof. Ghosh too makes.

The 2023 Economics Nobel Laureate Claudia Goldin's research showed that several factors have influenced the supply of and demand for female labour. "These include women's opportunities for combining paid work and a family, decisions relating to education and childrearing, technical innovations, laws and norms, and the structural transformation of the economy." In a paper about her research, the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, pointed out that at the heart of Golden's analysis is the fact that women's choices have often been, and remain, limited by marriage and responsibility for the home and family. Her research may have been conducted in the U.S., going back 200 years, but her insights hold true in many other countries, including India as well.

#### What needs to change?

Economists say interventions are needed on both the demand and supply side of the labour market. On the demand side, says Prof. Basole, policies that promote labour intensive sectors (in both manufacturing and relatively higher productivity services) are needed. Public investment in safety and transport is also critical as is public investment in affordable child and elderly care. "All of these types of support can enable women to work outside the home and take advantage of relatively better paying opportunities," he adds.



GETTY IMAGES

## The charity that Israel bombed in Gaza

#### **World Central Kitchen**

Israeli forces say 'misidentification at night' led to the bombing of an aid convoy belonging to the charity in which seven of its members were killed, but its founder Jose Andres says the IDF systematically targeted the aid workers, 'car by car'

#### Adithya Narayan

don't open restaurants, I tell stories," two-star Michelin chef Jose Andres said in an interview in January. Little could he have imagined back then of the sad chapter that would bookend the story three months later. On the night of April 2, seven workers of his non-profit aid group, World Central Kitchen, operating in Gaza, were killed in Israeli strikes.

Hamas's cross-border attacks of October 7 spawned a full-blown Israeli invasion of Gaza costing over 33,000 Palestinian lives, mostly women and children, and injuring more than 75,000. Along with air strikes and ground operations, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government has imposed a choke-hold on the enclave.

Tel Aviv's measures to this end have included discrediting the UN Relief Works Agency, accusing it of harbouring extremists within its fold, and hampering the entry of humanitarian aid into Gaza. Together, these actions have wrung the territory dry of food and water, with a famine looming in the enclave.

Stepping up to these challenges was the World Central Kitchen (WCK), which tried to minimise the fallout from Israeli actions by preparing 42 million meals through 68 community kitchens on the Strip. Before that, the group served 1.75 million hot meals to Israelis displaced by the Hamas attacks. This is, however, set to become a thing of the past as the WCK, along with ANERA and Project HOPE – two other groups carrying out aid work in the territory – has paused operations in the attack's aftermath.

Before the Israeli Defence Forces' attack, the WCK was engaged in a range of activities on the Strip. In the words of Mr. Andres, "We don't just feed people, we create systems"; a spirit best reflected by the makeshift jetty the charity built in the southwest of Gaza using building rubble.

Expanding on this, the cooks' collective helped facilitate a maritime corridor to bring humanitarian aid from Cyprus to Gaza with funding from the UAE and in collaboration with the Spanish NGO Open Arms.

Last month's pilot project saw 200 tonnes of aid arrive at the jetty. Soon after, a second convoy of 332 tonnes set sail from Cyprus on March 30. WCK workers, who had overseen the offloading at the pier, had unloaded 100 tonnes of aid at a warehouse in Deir-al-Balah in central Gaza and were returning to Rafah in the south when their convoy was hit on April 2. That they were travelling on a route pre-approved by the Israeli Army, or in a band of three vehicles, of which two were armoured and had giant logos of the WCK emblazoned on top, had little bearing on the IDF which proceeded with the strike.

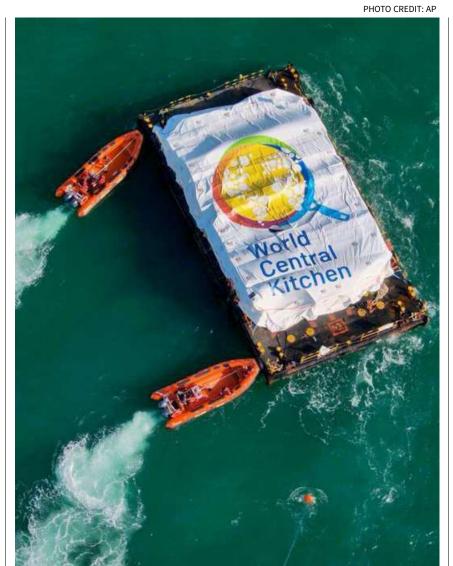
Mr. Andres, while appearing on a talk show in November, said he was proud that the individuals of his group who possessed the courage to move into a disaster zone when others stepped away from it; just that this time around, they were forced to pay the price for that courage.

#### 'Grave mistake'

In the wake of the strike, the ship with the remaining 220 tonnes of food returned to Cyprus while the IDF held an inquiry. Headed by a former General of the Israeli Army, the inquiry announced the findings on April 5, leading to the dismissal of two officers. Mr. Netanyahu, while calling the attack 'tragic', callously remarked, "These incidents happen during wartime." However, the Israeli Army put out a rare admission in which it acknowledged that the strike was a 'grave mistake' and said 'misidentification at night' had led to the error in judgment.

But this is not the first time aid delivery has come under attack in Gaza. On February 29, Israeli forces fired at an aid distribution point in northern Gaza causing a stampede and killing 115 Palestinians. Similar incidents, though smaller in magnitude, were reported through March. Also prevalent is the targeting of police officials guarding aid distribution works, who the IDF says nurture militants within their ranks.

Given that the victims of the latest strike involved six foreigners – three Britons, an Australian, a Polish national, and a dual citizen of the U.S.



and Canada – along with a Palestinian driver, the attack triggered sharp responses from world powers, who until now had largely turned a blind eye towards the plight of aid workers in Gaza. U.S. President Joe Biden, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk are among the leaders who have criticised Israel now.

For Mr. Andres, who called out the IDF for systematically targeting his team "car by car", the incident marks an about-turn in his stand towards the conflict. What began in the form of support for Israel's right to defend itself in the wake of the Hamas attack – so much so that the 54-year-old chef

even criticised a Spanish Minister for accusing the Jewish nation of committing war crimes in Gaza – has given way to the condemnation of the Netanyahu government's 'indiscriminate killing'.

He also said Israel should stop using food as a weapon – a sentiment echoed by the International Court of Justice when it asked Israel to ensure an unfettered flow of food aid into the enclave.

This is not the WCK's first brush with casualties. According to the BBC, the charity lost seven volunteers in Ukraine, which was the first active conflict zone it served in. Until then, it specialised in preparing and

distributing food in disaster zones. Mr. Andres was vacationing in the

Cayman Islands when he learned about the Haiti earthquake in 2010 which killed more than 2,00,000 people. It was then that the idea for a collective struck him; one that inspires cooks and chefs to join the ranks of first responders, one that puts them on the front line and teaches them to adapt to situations.

The WCK is a non-profit that functions with a "private sector mentality", says its former CEO Nate Mook in the Ron Howard-directed documentary *We Feed People*. The NGO cooks by procuring food locally and employing local infrastructure.

#### **Global operations**

After its Haiti stint, the WCK helped people during earthquakes in Turkey, Morocco and Japan, Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico, and the wildfires in Chile. Riding on the goodwill garnered through these activities, the charity functions on donations. In 2022, it raked in \$518 million and Mr. Andres received \$100 million from Amazon founder Jeff Bezos in 2021.

The group has not been without its share of controversies. The charity acknowledged reports of fraud in 2023 and said it was looking into its activities in Ukraine, where it said it was spending some \$2 million per day. Media reports had also blamed Mr. Andres for asking volunteers to go to places in Turkey that were deemed too dangerous after earthquakes.

Yet, Mr. Andres and his U.S.-based charity were nominated for the Nobel Prize by Democrats. He became a naturalised U.S. citizen during Barack Obama's presidency and is currently a co-chair of President Biden's Council on Sports, Fitness and Nutrition.

Mr. Andres, who wears his immigrant badge with pride, also had a run-in with former President Donald Trump, pulling out of a restaurant project at the Trump International Hotel in Washington, when he derided Mexican migrants.

Speaking about the WCK's future in Gaza after the strike, Mr. Andres had said "everything has its time" – something that is quickly running out for the people of Gaza.

#### THE GIST

Jose Andres founded WCK in 2010 in the wake of the Haiti earthquake in which more than 2,00,000 people were killed

After its Haiti stint, the WCK helped people during earthquakes in Turkey, Morocco and Japan, Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico, and the wildfires in Chile.

Riding on the goodwill garnered through these activities, the charity functions on donations: in 2022, it raked in \$518 million and Andres received \$100 million from Amazon founder Jeff Bezos in 2021

## End of an innings

#### Sanjay Nirupam

The Sena leader-turned-Congressman, who was sacked from the party, says Nehruvian socialism has lost its importance in today's India

#### Shoumojit Banerjee

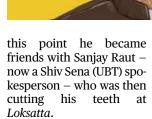
or a journalist whose dawn in politics began with the blessings of late Shiv Sena founder Bal Thackeray and reached its zenith in the Congress, Sanjay Nirupam, who was recently expelled from the Congress, has lost none of his acerbity honed during his first vocation.

Ostracised for "anti-party activities", Mr. Nirupam relentlessly warned of the dangers in letting his party's ally, the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT), dominate the Congress in Mumbai and Maharashtra.

Lashing out at the Congress's leadership, Mr. Nirupam observed that just like the Bolsheviks, who had become ideologically bankrupt after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Congress's Nehruvian socialism ceased to be of import today.

Hailing from Rohtas in the eastern Indian State of Bihar, Mr. Nirupam began his career as a journalist in 1986, and moved to Mumbai in 1988 where he worked with *Jansatta*, the sister publication of the *Indian Express*.

An ardent film buff and admirer of iconic Bollywood star Dev Anand, Mr. Nirupam even penned the story for Anand's *Return of Jewel Thief* (1996) – the failed sequel to classic *Jewel Thief* (1967). It was at



After Mr. Raut moved on

to Saamana (the Shiv Sena's mouthpiece), he put a call to his friend Mr. Nirupam, intimating him of the party's need for a journalist to head its Hindi mouthpiece – Dopahar ka Saama*na*. The Hindi edition was Bal Thackeray's brainchild aimed at reaching out to Mumbai's Hindi-speaking populace in the aftermath of the 1992 Bombay riots. In a twist of fate, as their respective political careers progressed, Mr. would later become Mr. Nirupam's bitter foe.

Mr. Nirupam joined *Dopahar ka Saamana* as its executive editor in 1993. His career subsequently saw a meteoric rise, with the Shiv Sena supremo sending the scribe as an MP to the Rajya Sabha in 1996. Importantly, Mr. Nirupam became the face of the Se-

na's endeavour to reach out to Mumbai's thriving North Indian voters, after the party shifted from its nativist stance of the late 1960s to a hardline 'Hindutva' position.

ILLUSTRATIONS: R. RAJESH

#### **Slide in fortunes** Mr. Nirupam's S

Mr. Nirupam's Sena sojourn came to a crashing end after he was asked to step down as Rajya Sabha MP in 2005, a full-year before his term expired. He quit the Sena and joined the Congress in April 2005, being soon appointed as a general secretary of the Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee. He won the Mumbai North Lok Sabha seat in 2009, defeating the BJP's Ram Naik by a little over 6,000 votes.

The Congressman's political fortunes, however, saw a sharp slide with the BJP's re-emergence at the Centre under Narendra Modi in 2014.

This period was marked by a general decline in the Congress's fortunes in Maharashtra and Mumbai. The frenetic political manoeuvring between parties after the 2019 Maharashtra Assembly election resulted in the formation of the tripartite Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government headed by Uddhav Thackeray.

A firm opponent of an alliance with Mr. Thackeray's Sena right from the start, Mr. Nirupam embarrassed the party's ally further when he sought an investigation into the Thackeray family's newlybuilt residential property in Mumbai's Bandra.

The resentment against the Sena (UBT) reached a crescendo during pre-poll seat-sharing parleys when Mr. Nirupam strongly objected to Sanjay Raut's assertion that the Sena (UBT) would contest the same number of seats (23 of a total 48) that it had done in 2019 (when the Sena was not split and in alliance with the BJP).

While Mr. Nirupam protested against the Sena (UBT)'s "excessive demands", he was even more appalled at the Congress's seeming inability to contain its MVA ally.

Never the one to mince his words, Mr. Nirupam delivered a Parthian shot before his exit, pre-empting the Congress high command by submitting his resignation letter even before his official sacking, urging them to save stationery instead!

## From prison to presidency

#### **Bassirou Diomaye Faye**

Senegal's youngest President has his task cut out as the country is battling extreme poverty and high unemployment in a region that is plagued by conflict and unrest

#### <u>Priyali Prakash</u>

emocracy is not really one of the ethos of West Africa's troubled Sahel region, but Senegal's 2024 presidential election offers a glimmer of hope in a land marred by conflict and un-

At 44, Bassirou Diomaye Faye was elected Senegal's new President – the youngest ever to hold the post – on March 25, barely two weeks after he was released from prison. He beat former Prime Minister and frontrunner Amadou Ba. Mr. Ba was supported by outgoing President Macky Sall, who attempted to postpone the election a few times, leading to mass protests.

Mr. Faye was born in Ndiaganiao, and completed his college education in M'bour, a coastal city in Senegal. A lawyer by degree from Dakar's Cheikh Anta Diop University, he excelled at his public administration exams and trained at the National School of Administration to be an inspector of taxes and estates.

ko, leader of the Pastef Party, while working as a tax inspector. Pastef was created in 2014, and Mr. Faye started attending bureau meetings before he officially joined the party. His closeness to Mr. Sonko

He met Ousmane Son-



helped, and the party valued not only his ideas but also his loyalty to decisions of the larger group.

Mr. Faye's journey from prison to the presidency of Senegal is not an ordinary story. He was imprisoned in early 2023 on charges of contempt of court and defaming magistrates. Pastef Party leader Mr. Sonko was also arrested a few months later and was denied permission to contest in the presidential election. Mr. Faye, on the other hand, was not barred and decided to continue to take his party's aspirations forward. Initially selected as a proxy for Mr. Sonko, Mr. Faye's popularity among the Senegalese was visible in his short but lively campaign before the elections.

While the Pastef Party was dissolved in 2023, the Diomaye President Coalition received the support of more than 118 parties and movements for the 2024 presidential election.

and movements for the 2024 presidential election. Backed by Mr. Sonko and his loyal supporters, the Opposition coalition saw the tide turning in its favour after the early count of votes on March 25. By the evening, Senegalese people took to the streets to celebrate Mr. Faye's victory. Mr. Faye was sworn in on April 2, and he appointed Mr. Sonko as Prime Mi-

Mr. Faye's election promises focused on Senegal's youth many of whom take the route of illegal immigration to escape the country's endemic poverty. In a recent such incident, at least two dozen people died off Senegal's northern coast and many were injured after their Europebound boat capsized in February.

His manifesto touched upon better governance of Senegal's natural resources. Senegal is rich in oil and gas, and large companies, like BP, have attempted to commercialise fields off the West African shore with little success trickling to locals. Mr. Faye has promised economic sovereign-

by promoting national private companies as well as opening the economy to multinational corporations. The newly elected President also assured better rule of law in the country, which includes preventing intimidation of opponents and journalists and avoiding arbitrary imprisonment.

#### A new era

Senegal currently faces widespread youth unemployment, and Mr. Faye promises to deliver on this front. According to Afrobarometer data published in October 2023, three in 10 Senegalese youth are unemployed.

Mr. Faye had also promised to roll back the French-inspired West African CFA Franc currency, but later dropped the plan to instead focus on reforming the West African Monetary Union.

The International Monetary Fund has predicted an acceleration in Senegal's GDP growth due to start of large hydrocarbon projects, which coincides with the first year of Mr. Faye's term. Experts are also cautious of how much influence will Mr. Sonko yield over Mr. Faye. Reuters notes Mr. Sonko to be more of an anti-establishment leader, while Mr. Faye is believed to be more austere.

CM VK



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What will happen if the roles are reversed? Suppose a state

government charges the Prime Minister of committing an offence within its territorial jurisdiction and arrests him, and the magistrate remands the PM to police or judicial custody. The consequences will be nightmarish and catastrophic

# Constitutional morality is at stake

THE ARREST of a serving chief minister on an alleged charge of corruption is a legal issue, a political issue and a Constitutional issue. It is also an issue that goes beyond the words of the Constitution; it touches upon Constitutional morality.

Let me clear the way of so-called "facts". The allegations in the cases against chief ministers are that they received "bribes" in order to do favours to the bribegiver(s). At the present time, all that can be said is 'an allegation of corruption' is not equal to 'a finding of guilt'. The time-honoured legal principle is that 'every person is presumed innocent until proven guilty'.

Let's, therefore, start with the presumption of innocence (the legal aspect). A person is a member of a political party. The political party contests an election, its candidates win a majority of seats in the legislative assembly, the legislature party elects the person as leader, the governor swears in the person as the chief minister, the CM and his ministers assume office, and the new government is in place. The script is familiar and has been played out hundreds of times in the last 75 years. The script is in accordance with the Westminster principles (the po*litical aspect*) and the provisions of the Constitution (the Constitutional aspect).

#### Unseating a CM

It is self-evident that a chief minister must be a free person to perform his du-

ties. He must advise the governor; he must hold cabinet meetings; he must listen to the views and grievances of the people; he must speak and listen in the legislative assembly; he must vote on motions and Bills; and, above all, since our system of government is based on records or files, everything has to be in writing and signed. No un-free person can perform the functions and duties of a chief minister.

There are many ways to defeat and unseat a chief minister. The electoral way is to defeat a CM and his party at an election that will be held once in five years, or sooner. The parliamentary way is to pass a motion of no confidence in the Assembly or to reject a Finance Bill or an important motion on policy. In either case, the majority will prevail. Besides, political parties have invented wicked ways to unseat a chief minister. Operation Lotus is one such invention under which a certain number of legislators are persuaded to resign from the ruling party or 'defect' to another party, and reduce the ruling party to a minority in the Assembly. Defection entails disqualification under the Tenth Schedule; nevertheless, the Tenth Schedule is violated with impunity.

#### DESTABILIZING A GOVERNMENT

Are there other ways to unseat a chief minister? I cannot find another way to do so, but there are cleverer men and women. They have discovered an apparently legal way to un-free a chief minister: register an FIR or ECIR against him, summon him for questioning, and arrest him. The CBI is somewhat circumspect but the ED is brazen. Once a chief minister is arrested, there is a clamour for his resignation or dismissal by the governor. It is argued that the chief minister, like any other accused, must go through the process of production before the Court, application for bail, police remand, judicial remand, appeals against orders, and finally an order from the Supreme Court granting or refusing bail. Meanwhile, the government is vulnerable. It teeters on the edge and, sooner than later, it will collapse. If an interim leader takes the place of the arrested chief minister, he may

face the same threat of arrest. No politi-

cal party will have the strength or the re-

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achieved. All this is apparently legal. From the political angle, it may be outrageous; from the Constitutional angle, the matter is debatable; but my question has a larger dimension. Is the arrest and detention of a serving chief minister consistent with Constitutional morality in a country that has adopted the Westminster model of government? Can the Constitution be erased by the political powers of the day?

#### PROTECTING **PARLIAMENTARY** DEMOCRACY

Some countries realized the grave dangers of malicious political rivalries, obliging investigative agencies and conflicting judgements of courts (in the matter of bail). Hence, they incorporated a clause on immunity to the President or chief executive of the government during his term of office. In the cases of judges in India, the Supreme Court has ruled that no investigation may be conducted against a judge without the previous consent of the CJI or the CJ of the High Court, and there is an implied immunity.

What will happen if the roles are reversed? Suppose a state government charges the Prime Minister of committing an offence within its territorial jurisdiction and arrests him, and the magistrate remands the PM to police or judicial custody. The consequences will be nightmarish and catastrophic.

Absent an immunity clause, should the Courts read into the Constitution an implied immunity from arrest to a Prime Minister and a Chief Minister as long as he enjoyed the confidence (majority support) in the Lok Sabha or Legislative Assembly? That is the real issue. The answer will determine whether the Westminster principles of parliamentary democracy will survive and Constitutional morality will prevail in India.

## inside **COOMIKAPOOR**



#### STRAIGHT SHOOTING

NSA AJIT Doval has indicated to friends that at 79 it may be time to hang up his boots and play with his grandchildren. Although his son Shaurya Doval was not given a BJP ticket from Uttarakhand, it is wrong to assume that the veteran sleuth in the James Bond mould is out of favour. Doval was largely responsible for India adopting a more offensive foreign policy, refusing to turn a blind eye towards anti-nationals operating from outside the country.

Over a dozen avowed enemies of the Indian state have been killed in safe havens abroad under murky circumstances during the last three years. Some claim orders for such killings emanated from India, though several such deaths were attributed to gang warfare. US Ambassador Eric Garcetti's recent stern message to countries crossing the red line is seen as an implied reference to the assassination plot on American citizen and Khalistani separatist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun. Doval's remark in Kazakhstan last week about "shunning double standards in combating terror" appeared to be a counter.

The US authorities, fighting a legal battle in Czechoslovakia to extradite Nikhil Gupta, accused of involvement in Pannun's attempted murder, are hopeful of the trial against Gupta in a US court beginning by May. American sleuths suspect that the government official who conveyed the shoot suggestion telephonically has been transferred out of RAW to the BSF. The Canadians, meanwhile, hope that court records of the Pannun case in the US bolster Canadian Premier Justin Trudeau's claim of "credible allegations" against India in the Nijjar case.

#### STAR-CROSSED SEARCH

A few union ministers and a Maharashtra leader were deputed by the BJP high command to recruit some Bollywood faces for the 2024 polls. Their mission was largely unsuccessful, with Salman Khan, Akshay Kumar, Madhuri Dixit, Jackie Shroff, Dimple Kapadia and Urmila Matondkar turning down their request to be involved. Bollywood realises that in today's polarised atmosphere, it is wisest to steer clear of politics. Some who attended the Ram Mandir consecration ceremony in Ayodhya received a lot of flak on social media.

#### NOT BITING BAIT

Varun Gandhi had the opportunity to fight the Lok Sabha elections on a BJP ticket, if he had consented to contest against cousin Priyanka Gandhi in the event she fought the polls from the family bastion of Rae Bareli. He declined. If the BJP permitted Maneka Gandhi to stand from Sultanpur again, despite Varun's rebellious remarks on the farmers' agitation or youth unemployment, it was because the BJP calculated it was wiser to have the two Gandhis on its side rather than them being propped up by the joint Opposition.

In December, Varun had conveyed his unhappiness to the PM over his political role. Earlier this month, at a fairly cordial meeting, Varun reiterated his sentiments politely, explaining that it was best he took time off to contemplate his political future since he was not to contest from Pilibhit.

#### NO ONE INDISPENSABLE

Odisha CM Naveen Patnaik, at a closeddoor party meet of senior leaders, uncharacteristically lost his cool with his deemed successor, VK Pandian. He made clear that no one was indispensable. When he first came to Odisha, A U Singh Deo assumed he could call the shots, then it was his onetime aide Pyarimohan Mohapatra. Jay Panda and Pinaki Mishra had similar delusions. Pandian had wrongly assumed he had carte blanche to work out an electoral alliance with the BJP, Patnaik said.

#### Dais full, Not **GROUNDS**

The entire Opposition leadership responded to the call to attend last Sunday's rally at Delhi's Ramlila Maidan. While the dais was filled to capacity, the crowds on the ground left much to be desired. A leading newspaper put the figure at 10,000.

The only state which contributed a large contingent was Punjab. Haryana Congress leader Bhupinder Hooda, known for his ability to mobilise Jat crowds, clearly did not exert himself. Nor did other Opposition leaders from neighbouring states. The mystery was why AAP could not put up a more impressive show on its home ground. AAP is feeling the absence of its top leaders and the lack of an organised cadre.

There was a slight show of one-upmanship between the allies. AAP put up a large poster of Kejriwal behind bars, overshadowing the main INDIA rally streamer, to which the Delhi Congress objected. Only after the AAP poster was removed, did the three Gandhis walk up to the dais. Sonia Gandhi was given premiere placement, next to the wives of two jailed politicians a current CM and a former CM.

#### Life & **WORK SANDIPG**

continue jeering him.

Mumbai. So have several other cricketers

in the past, without much fuss or fire, and

the audience have not cared or bothered

much. Chris Gayle has featured for four

different clubs in the league, but nowhere

was he booed. Even Pandya would testify.

After eight years with Mumbai Indians,

when he turned up in the Gujarat Titans

shirt at the Wankhede in 2022, he was not

welcomed cordially, but the crowd didn't

resort to booing or heckling. After all, in-

ter-franchise rivalries are not yet deeply-

set in the country's cricket consciousness,

unlike in football or basketball where club

culture and its attendant vices have a long

ing their own captain, an integral part of

their golden years, one that is the rarest of

rare species in the country, a fast-bowling

all-rounder, one that has influenced sev-

eral games for them in the past, one that

could still win them trophies, which, by

the way, the team has not in three years.

But it often takes little to dislike a person

It has seen Sachin Tendulkar — its finest

product, its insignia in world cricket, the

man that cannot be unloved — being

booed when he perished for a 21-ball-1

against England during a Test match in

2006. Nothing then should shock the

world. If they could subject Tendulkar to

the sound of displeasure, they could mete

out this treatment to anyone, or everyone.

Two decades before this, the Eden

Gardens crowd threw fruits at Sunil

Gavaskar during a Test against England,

not just for the slow tempo of batting but

The Wankhede has witnessed worse.

Stranger is Mumbai Indian fans boo-

and tumultuous history.

these days.



## The unpleasant soundtrack of the boo



Mumbai Indians captain Hardik Pandya was jeered by fans in Ahmedabad, Mumbai and Hyderabad during recent IPL matches. Nirmal Harindran

because he had just replaced Kapil Dev, the darling of the masses, as the team's captain. At the toss, they would chant "No Kapil No Test". He vowed never to play at the Eden Gardens and kept his word, even famously sitting out of a Test against Pakistan in 1987. Sachin's batting heir Virat Kohli too was chorused with "cheater cheater" screams at Wankhede in 2013. Kohli would retort: "Don't forget, I play for India too."

So does Pandya. But perhaps such nationalistic sentiments have begun to erode in the evolutionary leap of the league, in its 17th edition, with arguably a different set of consumers and fan-base. A league shaped in the mould of the European football league, it's natural that it inherits some of its traits too, both the good, bad and those in between.

In football, it's now part of the matchday experience. Few games pass without a wave of boo (directed at players, owners, government, or the world at large), or a taunt, or "traitor" jersey. It's only when the hues of racism creeps in that the incidents acquire a sombre shade, or when a famous player switches to their bitter rivals.

As was with Luis Figo, the Portuguese midfield virtuoso when he moved from Barcelona to Real Madrid. When he returned to Camp Nou, the fans he incensed flung in the head of a pig, besides cigarette lighters and beer bottles directed at him. A year later, the legendary Zinedine Zidane would join him from Italian super-

powers Juventus, kicking off the galactico era of Real Madrid. Zidane was always welcomed warmly in Turin. But the man who replaced him, Pavel Nedved, the blonde-haired playmaker from Czech Republic, was mocked "all hair, no skill" after his initial struggles. But in the next eight years, he transformed into one of their legends, a hero of the masses, Ballon d'Or winner, and, after retiring, served a seven-year term as the vice chairman of the board of directors.

Similarly, a clutch of performances could win Pandya the love of the Mumbai Indians faithful. There is no opinion that match-winning shows and trophies cannot alter. If he could overturn the horrific start to the season and finish strongly, he would be reinstalled as a hero. History teaches you. The same Mumbai hecklers would cheer for Tendulkar for another decade; they still do when they spot him. So do they for Kohli, and so do they for Gavaskar when he enters the Eden Gardens, often as a commentator.

Though Pandya looked crestfallen at the crowd response, he would only channel the hurt to achieve something fruitful. A fierce siege mentality has driven him throughout his career, from his humble beginnings to off-field scandals like the Koffee With Karan faux pas. Whether he wins the crowd back or not, booing would turn into a recurring reality of IPL. A soundtrack that would buzz more frequently in the ears of fans and players.

#### Fifth COLUMN TAVLEEN SINGH Twitter@tavleen\_singh



## Modi as a Congress role model

AS A diligent political columnist, I considered it my duty last week to watch the release of the Congress Party's election manifesto from start to finish. It made for dismal watching. The leaders of our oldest political party looked defeated and frail. And some promises that they made in their speeches sounded as if they had been taken directly from Narendra Modi's recent election rallies. It startled me to find that even the words seemed borrowed. Modi is given to using the word 'guarantee' a lot these days, so it would have been wise to at least not use this word. Instead, it was used so many times by the Congress Party's senior leaders that a reporter asked afterwards what the difference was between Congress guarantees and Modi's guarantees.

More worrying for me was that some ideas in the Nyaya Patra (Justice Letter) seemed copied from Modi. The Prime Minister has been saying since the beginning of this election season that in his eyes the four castes in India are: youth, women, farmers, and the poor. The Congress President spoke of the four pillars of the party manifesto being: youth, women, farmers, and workers. His speech was received with such apathy by his colleagues that he asked in a sad voice if people had 'forgotten how to clap'.

When it came to Rahul Gandhi's turn to speak, he repeated what he has said many times since the last general election. He said that Indian democracy and the Indian Constitution have never been more endangered than they are today. This is something that international democracy watchdogs have often pointed out. Some have gone to the extent of declaring that India is already an 'elected autocracy'. It is an important issue for our main opposition party to raise. But Rahul has raised it so often, that his message has become devitalised from overuse.

What worries me most about the Nyaya

Patra is that the Congress Party's economic worldview has moved so radically to the Left that it is beginning to sound like the Communist Party. The Marxists also released their manifesto last week and they talked of reversing privatisation and introducing strict new taxes on the rich. The Congress Party, mercifully, has not gone that far, but has 'guaranteed' that unemployed educated young people will be given jobs or apprenticeships worth a lakh of rupees a year. Every Indian woman will also be guaranteed an annual gift of a lakh of rupees. If taxpayers' money is spent recklessly on largesse of this kind, where will the money come for building airports, roads, hospitals and universities? A question that the Congress Party must ask itself.

India's tragedy is that there has rarely been a more urgent need for a strong opposition party than there is now. Modi is very good at hyping his 'guarantees' and the purported achievements of his government but the truth is that there are millions of Indians who continue to live in abject poverty. I met some of them last week in a village in Maharashtra. And I would like to describe for you the conditions in which this Adivasi community lives in one of our most developed states.

The first thing I noticed was that there was not a single house that could be described as a house. There were shacks made of waste material, so walls were of plastic and discarded political posters, and roofs made of strips of waste metal that seemed as if retrieved from abandoned construction sites. I asked people why they had not qualified for the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana. They said that some had received money under Modi's vaunted scheme, but the amount allowed per household is Rs 1,20,000 and to build a simple one-room house would cost at least Rs 3,00,000.

When I asked about Modi's other celebrated schemes, I learned that the Ujjwala Yojana had provided most households with a gas cooker, but a gas cylinder costs more than Rs 900, so people have been forced to go back to old-fashioned cooking. Outside every house lay piles of wood gathered from a nearby forest. The only welfare scheme that has helped them is the free rations of food grain that they get every month and without which they would not be able to survive.

At the end of this depressing tour, I asked what their biggest problem was. In one voice, the men and women who had gathered around said 'water'. They are forced to buy water from tankers that charge exorbitant rates because there is yet not the smallest sign that piped water will become available as 'guaranteed'. I meant to ask if they had benefited from the scheme that provides cash subsidies to build toilets, but when I saw the fragile, makeshift homes I did not dare ask such a stupid question.

The Congress Party should have been able to benefit from this failure to lift millions of our citizens out of poverty. But polls indicate that it is unlikely to. Could it be because the solutions that Congress offers are those same old ones? Scraps off the political high table as charity in the form of freebies. What people living in extreme poverty need are the tools to escape poverty: good schools, decent hospitals and jobs. What they do not need is 'alleviation' of their poverty. The Congress manifesto indicates that its leaders have not learned this.

# The eternal trap of bodily perfection

On the **LOOSE** 

IN A HILARIOUS clip that's been watched and shared a million times, the protagonist in the show Fleabag is attending a feminist lecture where the speaker asks the audience: "Please raise your hands if you would trade five years of your life for a 'perfect body'." She raises her hand enthusiastically but cringes after realising she's the only one who has. "We're bad feminists," the eponymous Fleabag whispered to her companion, rolling her eyes and shrugging philosophically. Why is this funny? Because it's true. Women of every age, background, race, caste and whatever else there is that divides the female gender otherwise is in unanimous agreement

about this, that they'll willingly give up al-

epaper indianexpress.com

most everything to be svelte and sexy. Alas, perhaps, this hard truth doesn't

paint us in an intellectually flattering light. Fleabag's most relatable honesty stands in sharp contrast with the muddled messaging around body image, stupefyingly, that you can't be a feminist and care about your appearance at the same time. Entrenched stereotypes cast feminists as angry, grey-haired and badly dressed, too preoccupied with women's woes to be bothered by something as transient as chasing beauty. Vanity, as a primary motivation, is frowned upon as a frivolous pursuit; as though in practice anyone is actually doing anything about climate change. All this posturing and lip service to woke-ness has vanished post Ozempic that has exposed society's secret ambivalence to fat — in the process calling out a lot of bluffs within the discourse that what you look like doesn't matter.

"All bodies are beautiful," claimed body-positivity influencers over the last decade, whose blithe posts like "A flat stomach won't change your life" resonated with the unfit masses. Lately, plussize models have graced the cover of the original, holy grail of fit bikini-bodies, Sports Illustrated, "fat-activism" has entered the popular lexicon and Abercrombie & Fitch got cancelled for not making extra large sizes. Clothing brands don't dare disregard overweight icons whose huge Instagram followings have made them a force to reckon with. However, what does it say that the minute a miraculous drug that promises weight can be fixed enters the scene — the very people who proudly celebrated their curves immediately abandoned their fight against weight stigma - and chose thin-

ness instead? Examples: model Dronme Davis, Oprah Winfrey.

Thin is in. It was always in but for a while it hasn't been cool to say so. It's hard to shake off thousands of years of conditioning; even a Biblical proverb warns against the sin of gluttony. In our era of instant gratification, what joy to be able to feast without a care in the world! Though we may finally have that proverbial cake and eat it too, this breakthrough raises several existential questions. Luxury, as any economist will attest, is a function of scarcity; not unlike thinness, which many strive for but few achieve. The overarching appeal of 10-carat diamonds and a willowy frame is exclusivity, because getting there is painstakingly hard, requiring a mix of denial and effort. Competitive thrills being an intrinsic part of human nature, will we ascribe the same value to

slimness when everybody can pop Ozempic and look fantastic?

It's the holy month of Ramadan, the ordained time for reflection and gratitude for the blessings we have, but pertinently, it's a sobering nudge towards personal transformation. Logically, fasting is counterintuitive, but it's only by experiencing hunger can we imagine the plight of those who live with constant deprivation. While hardship doesn't have a lot to recommend it, taking all the pain out of doing hard things isn't the answer either. Slogging at work, dieting, ending a relationship is a way to get to know ourselves and discover what we're capable of. A chemical intervention to achieve a target weight is akin to taking drugs to get high; a quick fix, minus the reward of clarity that comes only the old-fashioned way: through

grit and perseverance. The writer is director, Hutkay Films **FE SUNDAY** WWW.FINANCIALEXPRESS.COM

# SUNDAY, APRIL 7, 2024



Hardik Pandya plays a shot during the Indian Premier League

## MI captain Hardik Pandya booed at home

This shows IPL fans want their voice heard



MUMBAI INDIANS PLAY their fourth match of the IPL season today, and it will be interesting to see if a few days' gap will cool down the emotions of the fans, who have been giving new captain Hardik Pandya a tough time. Rohit Sharma is a very popular skipper, his status immensely enhanced by what he has been able to achieve with the national side. The way India made a stirring comeback in the Test series against England, with several first-choice players missing, had a lot to do with Sharma's leadership. He also led from the front as India steamrolled through the 50-over World Cup before coming unstuck in the final. Hardik clearly had huge boots to fill. The pitch was queered further as he seemed to be parachuted straight back from another franchise, whose fan base was peeved at the perceived 'betrayal'. That Hardik returned to his original team as captain, without the owners or team management making it very clear why the change was made, didn't help matters either. As a result, from Ahmedabad to Hyderabad to Mumbai, the boos have got louder and the chants nastier, even though the trolls may not be able to explain what's their exact beef with Hardik. The smile and stoic demeanour have not left his face, at least in public, but

seem forced. It hasn't helped that Mum-

bai Indians have lost their first three

matches and Hardik himself has hardly

distinguished himself with bat, ball or in

the field. Some of his captaincy calls have

had experts scratching their heads, and

sometimes he does seem to cut a lonely

figure on the ground. Admittedly, a good

performance or two, or a few wins, will get

the Mumbai Indians support base

onside. Fans are a fickle lot, and the five-

#### time IPL champions have gone on to win titles despite bad starts before.

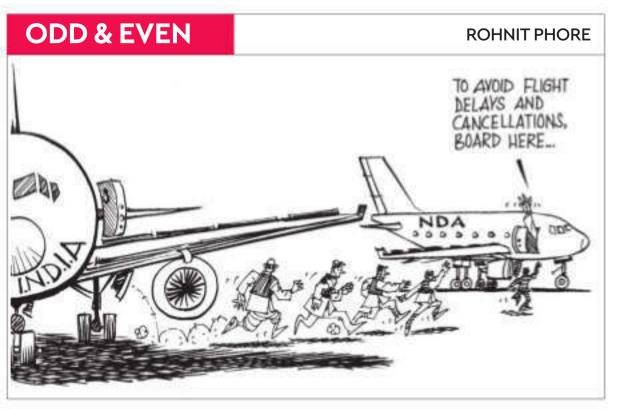
The cardinal sin But, what really explains this rude behaviour towards Hardik? It can be explained in one word: Ambition. Mumbai Indians wanted him back, with some sort of succession planning in mind, and were ready to reward him handsomely for it. It was an offer too tempting to refuse, from a cricketing as well as monetary aspect. However, the timing was a bit off, with Sharma's popularity at an alltime high. Add to it the fact that Hardik has rarely turned out for India in the recent past, walking off injured at the World Cup too, but seems to regain fitness by the time the IPL comes along. Those trolling Hardik for making a lucrative career move may have never switched jobs to enhance their career prospects. In an age when ambition and ruthlessness are deemed to be virtues in the cut-throat corporate set-up, it seems precious to chide a cricketer for adhering to those values. After all, a career span for an athlete at the top level is short, and there is only a small window to optimise their earning potential. Hardik would

know that his body may let him down anytime, so may find it prudent to make haywhile the sun shines. However, looking at the bigger picture, the founding fathers of the IPL may allow themselves a little smile, even if commentator Sanjay Manjrekar asking the Wankhede crowd booing Hardik at the toss to 'behave'. When the IPL was launched in 2008, one of the concerns would have been how fan following based on international rivalries will react to a franchise set-up, which is not organic in nature, with player turnover at a high frequency. With pan-India appeal of the biggest cricketing stars, how will city-based identities be developed? Chennai Super Kings and Royal Challengers Bengaluru have die-hard followers, but they are more of personality cults than team fan bases. Those who flock to the stadiums were more interested in a 'darshan' of the deity than in the fortunes of the team. The loyalty was unquestioned.

#### Fans care

But the whole Pandya episode shows that after more than a decade and a half of its existence, people now care and don't consider IPL as mere entertainment. People care about who is the captain of the team they follow. They are ready to express their displeasure over the decisions of the team owners and management. Towards that end, if someone has to be made into a pantomime villain, for no apparent fault, so be it. Make no mistake, the interest around the IPL is still largely individualbased. With the T20 World Cup soon after, most of the talk is around who will make the selection cut based on IPL performances, not which teams are favourites to go all the way. The teams with the biggest fan bases are ones with larger-than-life players or even co-owners. Those franchises have the biggest valuations, even if they are not too successful on the pitch. It's still some way from reaching the levels seen in club football, where the fans often demand the ouster of managers or even owners.

The biggest football clubs in the world are global entities, but have their foundations in a defined physical area where they were founded and which they represent. They have a history that sometimes goes back to more than a century. The IPL teams are franchises, not clubs, and their following is more diffused. Non-international games don't always provoke that much passion, so the loyalties have to be generated, and personalities are the most obvious device to do it. It remains to be seen how the rest of the season pans out for Hardik and Mumbai Indians. One wonders whether the strong fan reaction has made the decision-makers wonder whether they made the right call. Whether franchises now listen to fan groups on vital matters will be an interesting watch. It's an interesting period in the life of the IPL. Sharma, MS Dhoni and Kohli can't go on forever. Transitions have to take place sooner or later. Whether the franchises stick to their icons in some prominent non-playingrole or carve an independent path will show whether the league will turn into a competition where winning and losing decides a team's standing.





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Let me clear the way of so-called "facts". The allegations in the cases against chief ministers are that they received "bribes" in order to do favours to the bribe-giver(s). At the present time, all that can be said is 'an allegation of corruption'is not equal to 'a finding of guilt'. The time-honoured legal principle is that 'every person is presumed innocent until proven guilty'.

Let's, therefore, start with the presumption of innocence (the legal aspect). A person is a member of a political party. The political party contests an election, its candidates win a majority of seats in the legislative assembly, the legislature party elects the person as leader, the governor swears in the person as the chief minister, the CM and his ministers assume office, and the new government is in place. The script is familiar and has been played out hundreds of times in the last 75 years. The script is in accordance with the Westminster principles (the political aspect) and the provisions of the Constitution (the Constitutional aspect).

#### Unseating a CM

It is self-evident that a chief minister must be a free person to perform his duties. He must advise the governor; he must hold cabinet meetings; he must listen to the views and grievances of the people; he must speak and listen in the legislative assembly; he must vote on motions and Bills; and, above all, since our system of government is based on records or files, everything has to be in writing and signed. No un-free person can perform the functions and duties of



a chief minister.

There are many ways to defeat and unseat a chief minister. The electoral way is to defeat a CM and his party at an election that will be held once in five years, or sooner. The parliamentary way is to pass a motion of no confidence in the Assembly or to reject a Finance Bill or an important motion on policy. In either case, the majority will prevail. Besides, political parties have invented wicked ways to unseat a chief minister.

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#### Destabilising a government

Are there other ways to unseat a chief minister? I cannot find another way to do so, but there are cleverer men and women. They have discovered an apparently legal way to un-free a chief minister: register an FIR or ECIR against him, summon him for questioning, and arrest him. The CBI is somewhat circumspect but the ED is brazen. Once a chief minister is arrested, there is a clamour for his resignation or dismissal by the governor. It is argued that the chief minister, like

any other accused, must go through the process of production before the Court, application for bail, police remand, judicial remand, appeals against orders, and finally an order from the Supreme Court granting or refusing bail.

Meanwhile, the government is vulnerable. It teeters on the edge and, sooner than later, it will collapse. If an interim leader takes the place of the arrested chief minister, he may face the same threat of arrest. No political party will have the strength or the resilience to put up successive candidates for the post of chief minister. The immediate purpose of the allegations of corruption — to unseat a chief minister — is achieved.

All this is apparently legal. From the political angle, it may be outrageous; from the Constitutional angle, the matter is debatable; but my question has a larger dimension. Is the arrest and detention of a serving chief minister consistent with *Constitutional morality* in a country that has adopted the Westminster model of government? Can the Constitution be erased by the political powers of the day?

#### Protecting parliamentary democracy

Some countries realised the grave dangers of malicious political rivalries, obliging investigative agencies and conflicting judgements of courts (in the matter of bail). Hence, they incorporated a clause on immunity to the President or chief executive of the government during his term of office.

In the cases of judges in India, the Supreme Court has ruled that no investigation may be conducted against a judge without the previous consent of the CJI or the CJ of the High Court, and there is an implied immunity.

What will happen if the roles are reversed? Suppose a state government charges the Prime Minister of committing an offence within its territorial jurisdiction and arrests him, and the magistrate remands the PM to police or judicial custody. The consequences will be nightmarish and catastrophic.

Absent an immunity clause, should the Courts read into the Constitution an *implied immunity from arrest* to a Prime Minister and a Chief Minister as long as he enjoyed the confidence (majority support) in the Lok Sabha or Legislative Assembly? That is the *real* issue. The answer will determine whether the Westminster principles of parliamentary democracy will survive and Constitutional morality will prevail in India.



Website: pchidambaram.in Twitter: @Pchidambaram IN

#### **INSIDE TRACK COOMI KAPOOR**

## Straight shooting

NSA Ajit Doval has indicated to friends that at 79 it may be time to hang up his boots and play with his grandchildren. Although his son Shaurya Doval was not given a BJP ticket from Uttarakhand, it is wrong to assume that the veteran sleuth in the James Bond mould is out of favour.

Doval was largely responsible for India adopting a more offensive foreign policy, refusing to turn a blind eye towards anti-nationals operating from outside the country. Over a dozen avowed enemies of the Indian state have been killed in safe havens abroad under murky circumstances during the last three years. Some claim orders for such killings emanated from India, though several such deaths were attributed to gang warfare.

US Ambassador Eric Garcetti's recent stern message to countries crossing the red line is seen as an implied reference to the assassination plot on American citizen and Khalistani separatist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun. Doval's remark in Kazakhstan last week about "shunning double standards in combating terror" appeared to be a counter.

The US authorities, fighting a legal battle in Czechoslovakia to extradite

Nikhil Gupta, accused of involvement in Pannun's attempted murder, are hopeful of the trial against Gupta in a US court beginning by May.

American sleuths suspect that the government official who conveyed the shoot suggestion telephonically has been transferred out of RAW to the BSF. The Canadians, meanwhile, hope that court records of the Pannun case in the US bolster Canadian Premier Justin Trudeau's claim of "credible allegations" against India in the Nijjar case.

#### Star-crossed search

A few union ministers and a Maharashtra leader were deputed by the BJP high command to recruit some Bollywood faces for the 2024 polls. Their mission was largely unsuccessful, with Salman Khan, Akshay Kumar, Madhuri Dixit, Jackie Shroff, Dimple Kapadia and Urmila Matondkar turning down their request to be involved. Bollywood realises that in today's polarised atmosphere, it is wisest to steer clear of politics. Some who attended the Ram Mandir consecration ceremony in Ayodhya received a lot of flak on social media.

#### Not biting bait

Varun Gandhi had the opportunity to fight the Lok Sabha elections on a BJP ticket, if he had consented to contest against cousin Priyanka Gandhi in the event she fought the polls from the family bastion of Rae Bareli. He declined.

If the BJP permitted Maneka Gandhi to stand from Sultanpur again, despite Varun's rebellious remarks on the farmers' agitation or youth unemployment, it was because the BJP calculated it was wiser to have the two Gandhis on its side rather than them being propped up by the joint Opposition.

Odisha CM Naveen Patnaik, at a closed-door party meet of senior leaders, uncharacteristically lost his cool with his deemed

successor, VK Pandian. He made clear that no one was indispensable

In December, Varun had conveyed his unhappiness to the PM over his political role. Earlier this month, at a fairly cordial meeting, Varun reiterated his sentiments politely, explaining that it was best he took time off to contemplate his political future since he was not to contest from Pilibhit.

#### No one indispensable

Odisha CM Naveen Patnaik, at a closed-door party meet of senior leaders, uncharacteristically lost his cool with his deemed successor, VK Pandian. He made clear that no one was indispensable. When he first came to Odisha, AU Singh Deo assumed he could call the shots, then it was his one-time aide Pyarimohan Mohapatra. Jay Panda and Pinaki

New Delhi

Mishra had similar delusions. Pandian had wrongly assumed he had carte blanche to work out an electoral alliance with the BJP, Patnaik said.

#### Dais full, not grounds

The entire Opposition leadership responded to the call to attend last Sunday's rally at Delhi's Ramlila Maidan. While the dais was filled to capacity, the crowds on the ground left much to be desired. A leading newspaper put the figure at 10,000.

The only state which contributed a large contingent was Punjab. Haryana Congress leader Bhupinder Hooda, known for his ability to mobilise Jat crowds, clearly did not exert himself. Nor did other Opposition leaders from neighbouring states.

The mystery was why AAP could not put up a more impressive show on its home ground. AAP is feeling the absence of its top leaders and the lack of an organised cadre.

There was a slight show of one-upmanship between the allies. AAP put up a large poster of

Kejriwal behind bars, overshadowing the main INDIA rally streamer, to which the Delhi Congress objected.

Only after the AAP poster was removed, did the three Gandhis walk up to the dais.

Sonia Gandhi was given premiere placement, next to the wives of two jailed politicians — a current CM and a former CM.

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New Delhi, April 7, 2024

# the pioneer

"So long as you have food in your mouth, you have solved all questions for the time being"





Renowned for its lavishness and extravagance, Dubai unveils yet another culinary treasure in its illustrious array. Presenting a dining oasis exuding sheer opulence, the distinguished Dubai Mall now hosts a luminous addition - the prestigious Blue Box Cafe by iconic jewellery brand Tiffany & Co

BY RUPALI DEAN

lthough Truman Capote's 1958 novella and the famous 1961 movie featuring Audrey Hepburn implied a fancy event called 'Breakfast at Tiffany's,' this didn't become a real thing until Blue Box Café first opened its doors in 2017 . For those who do not know, the title refers to Holly Golightly, a lively Texan woman in the story, enjoying pastries while looking through the windows of the famous Tiffany & Co. store on Fifth Avenue, making this scene well-known. Bid adieu to your routine coffee pit stops and embrace a decadent experience sipping from the renowned 1837 Blue cups at the Blue Box Cafe, overseen by the talented French chef Marion Lefebvre. Outside, the café maintains the House's enchanting tradition of creating captivating window displays, a legacy immortalized in the cinematic masterpiece 'Breakfast at Tiffany's." The café's interior reflects the ambiance of Landmark while drawing inspiration from Tiffany & Co.'s renowned Fifth Avenue store. It's like stepping into a magical place filled with blue and white colours that that mirrors the elegance, promising a chic and refined rendezvous that is simply unparalleled. An exclusive chandelier crafted from the signature blue-coloured boxes is a visual delight.
The menu presents three distinct culinary experiences inspired by French influences on traditional New York fare: 'Breakfast at Tiffany's,' 'Afternoon Tea at Tiffany's,' and A La Carte all-day dining. Imagine enjoying a royal breakfast and pretending to be Audrey Hepburn. I get to have Breakfast at Tiffany's and taste Holly's













delicate, buttery formed as the croissants bake to perfection, exuding a symphony of

flavours and textures that evoke a sense of indulgence and culinary excellence.

I must admit, indulging in this was quite a lavish treat for myself. I truly loved the luxurious experience and would definitely suggest it to anyone who loves the movie, the song, or the brand. Or maybe you just want to feel like Audrey Hepburn for a bit. If you happen to be in Dubai and seek something truly unique to do, I highly recommend booking a table for breakfast (or afternoon tea!) at The Tiffany Blue The author is a travel, lifestyle and food

writer and photographer



Blue Box Café Dubai Located at Tiffany & Co. flagship store, Grand Atrium, Dubai Mall Tel: 04 250 4935

Email: reservations@blueboxcafedubai.com Hours of Operation: Monday - Sunday: 10:00 AM - 12:00 AM



happiness and found a global ethic based on mutual respect. Born in 1926, Nhat Hanh's

spiritual odyssey began at the tender age of sixteen when he

was ordained as a Buddhist monk. His early years were

shaped by the tumultuous backdrop of war-torn Vietnam. Amidst the chaos,

he co-founded the An Quang Buddhist Institute, a beacon of Buddhist studies amidst the

teachings of Gandhi, he spearheaded nonviolent strife. Embracing

embodying the principles of Engaged Buddhism. In 1967 Martin Luthar King Jr won the Noble peace prize. In the crucible of war, Nhat Hanh

faced a profound dilemma whether to retreat into contemplation or to engage actively in alleviating suffering. Choosing the path of compassionate action, he founded the Engaged

movements,

movement,

endeavours

Buddhist

for transformation as a catalyst

Throughout the 1960s, Nhat

blossomed, from founding the Hanh

University to establishing the Order of Interbeing, a testament to his commitment

to peace and enlightenment. His tireless advocacy earned him a Nobel Peace Prize nomination in 1967, a

recognition of his unwavering dedication to nonviolence.

Despite exile from his homeland, Nhat Hanh's message of peace resonated globally. His pilgrimage took him to the for corpora of the

him to the far corners of the

earth, where he tirelessly advocated for harmony and compassion. It was during this

time that Plum Village, a

sanctuary of mindfulness, took root in France,

blossoming into a vibrant

community dedicated to

resonating across cultures and

continents. His literary legacy, spanning over a hundred

titles, serves as a beacon of

readers on the path to inner

boundaries,

guiding

mindful living. Nhat Hanh's

enlightenment,

transcend

resistance

Buddhism

advocating

for societal change.

Through his life, his books, and his teachings, he continues to illuminate the path towards a world suffused with love. understanding, and mindfulness

the pioneer of the pi

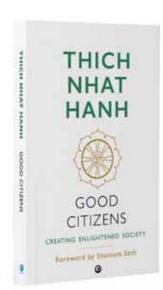
# THI()H NHAT

#### A GUIDE TO MINDFUL CITIZENSHIP, PEACE, AND ENLIGHTENMENT

BY **GYANESHWAR DAYAL** 

n the midst of escalating stress and uncertainty, mindfulness emerges as an indispensable tool for navigating the complexities of modern life. The relentless pace of society, coupled with incessant demands and pressures, often leaves individuals feeling overwhelmed In disconnected. such turbulent times, mindfulness offers a lifeline, providing a refuge amidst the chaos. By cultivating a present-centered awareness and cultivating an attitude of acceptance, individuals can develop resilience in the face of

adversity. Mindfulness stands as a timeless practice with profound implications for modern living. In a world inundated with distractions and incessant stimuli, cultivating mindfulness offers presence. By fostering a nonjudgmental awareness of the present moment, mindfulness enables individuals to navigate life's challenges with grace and equanimity. It serves as a



powerful tool for managing stress, anxiety, and emotional turmoil, allowing practitioners to cultivate amidst adversity. Moreover, mindfulness fosters deeper connections with oneself and others, fostering empathy, compassion, As understanding.

unlock the profound potential live more fully, authentically, often pulls us away from the essence of our being.

Mindfulness is the essence of Thich Nhat Hanh's teaching. He taught just that and what is most amazing. He did it so

even before one realised one was already drawn into it. Renowned globally as Thay, Vietnamese, Thich Nhat Hanh embodies the essence of tranquility and wisdom. His journey, from the serene landscapes of central Vietnam to the bustling cities of the

peace, compassion, and

mindfulness. organised a session of meditation and lectures to promote his teaching in New Delhi. The occasion was the launch of his book 'Good citizens.' In this book Thich

embrace mindfulness, we effortlessly and calmly that West, has been marked by a Nhat Hanh addresses citizens religion to lay the foundations of a renewed ethic capable of Four Noble Truths world of peace and sharing of wealth, capable of overcoming divisions to live in total harmony. Through practical mindfulness exercises and examples taken from the life

of the Buddha, profound commitment to of every tradition, culture and Vietnamese monk indicates a path entirely based on the Buddhism: through awareness of the existence of pain and the for the roots of evil, we proceed to understand its causes to finally be able to

embark on a path towards

peace and understanding.
Translated into myriad languages, his works continue to inspire and uplift souls worldwide. In India, the seeds of Nhat Hanh's wisdom find fertile ground, with Ahimsa Trust leading the charge in disseminating his teachings. Publishers like Circle, Aleph, and Harper Collins have brought his works to Indian readers, mindfulness and compassion. As Thich Nhat Hanh's legacy continues to flourish, his

vital as ever.





The auspicious night of Shivaratri represents the enlivening of the Shiva tattva (principle) — the most beautiful aspect of Consciousness

## THE MOST BEAU **ASPECT OF CONSCIOUSNESS**



ORD Shiva is not a person or a figure. Shiva is the eternal tattva (principle) that is the essence of everything. It is the principle from which everything has come, which sustains everything and in which everything dissolves. How does one capture and express this tattva that is so

express this tattva that is so subtle yet palpable?
One of the expressions that encapsulate this most exquisite and unfathomable substratum of existence in substratum of existence in its near totality, is the depiction of Shiva as Nataraja or the Cosmic Dancer. Nataraja is a fascinating symbol of the interplay between the material and the spiritual realms of creation Of the realms of creation. Of the 108 postures of the Nataraja the most adored and beautiful is the Ananda Tandava — the dance of bliss. The beauty, elegance and grace with which the Shiva Tandava is represented here unparalleled.

When one has access to mystical realms through sadhana detachment to the material world, one is able to experience the Ananda Tandava. There are multiple dimensions of existence. One who has gained entry to the subtle realms of creation will find that the dance of Shiva is happening in a ceaseless continuum. This blissful dance of the cosmic rhythm can be enjoyed only after transcending the body, mind, intellect and ego

complex. Though it is mistakenly



believed that Shiva took a human form and walked this planet, Shiva is Anadi
— birthless, and Ananta deathless. To limit Shiva to a form confined to time and would space

undermining omnipresence, omnipotence, and

Shiva is in the shape of

omniscience of this Eternal Principle. The damaru in the upper right hand of the Dancing

infinity. It signifies sound and space and symbolizes the expanding and collapsing nature of the Universe. Through finite sound one can behold the infinite.

The fire in the upper left hand of Nataraja represents the primordial energy of the cosmos. Ananda upholds energy while pleasure depletes it. The lower right hand, which is in abhaya mudra represents



protection and assurance of orderliness. The other hand pointing to the feet is indicative of infinite

possibilities. Underneath the feet is Apasmara, the demon that symbolizes ignorance and denotes the epileptic state in which there is absolutely no control over the body and the life force.

When human consciousness is able to free itself from the shackles of ignorance and gains mastery over the body-mind complex, the dance of ecstasy starts dawning in life.

The Ananda Tandava of Nataraja symbolizes the cosmic cycles of creation and destruction. The whole world is nothing but a rhythm of energy, rising and contracting again and again.
Devas can only be perceived in the subtle realms or the sukshma jagat. Those who have gone deep in meditation have discovered this phenomenon. It is said this phenomenon. It is said that Deva Apraakrata Divya Manusha Rupa meaning the devas have non-material bodies of light which are

human beings. The different forms of divinity that we see are the outer projections of what the sages observed in deep meditation. These inner experiences of the sages have found beautiful expressions in temples and the artistic landscape of India. The Chidambaram temple

perceived in human form by

message of peace and enlightenment remains as

in Tamil Nadu is a magnificent representation of the cosmic stage of Nataraja. Chidambaram — 'Chit' meaning Consciousness and 'Ambar' meaning space — refers to scintillating the consciousness. The eternal dance of Shiva never occurred on earth. It is happening perpetually on the stage of consciousness. The central roof of the Chidambaram temple is adorned with 21,600 gold tiles, denoting the number of breaths taken by a human being in a day.

The scriptures extol the Shiva Principle as being allpervasive — Sarvam Shivamayam Jagat — everything in this world is an expression of Shiva. Shivaratri is the most

unique time to rise above the mundane and bask in the mundane and bask in the supreme glory of the infinite, innocent and blissful Shiva tattva. Though the external worship to Shiva seems elaborate with numerous offerings, it is said the finest flowers used in Shiva's worship are knowledge, equanimity, and peace. Celebrating the Shiva tattva in oneself is real Shivaratri.

## Immigration takes centre stage in US President primaries



MANAN DWIVEDI

President Biden faces Republican criticism over his policies, especially concerning Mexican migration. The issue gains momentum amid global observations of Trump's immigration clampdown and domestic instability in Mexico. These factors shape crucial debates in the upcoming elections

c o n t e s t e d occasions, whether it is the campaign utilising roaring tigers in Pakistan by the PML(N) or the whistlestop tours of the American Presidential Elections. For a has been a theme that has drawn both strategic and political traction. In the contemporary context of the US Presidential primaries, before the elections heat up to a crescendo, President Joe Biden is being attacked by the Republicans for his stance and policies on immigration. Mexico stars in the debates and discussions wherein, once the migration of Mexican settlers increases to 5,000 people per day, then the American checkpoints close

Donald Trump and the Republicans do not intend to be seen as weak or soft on the theme of Mexican influx, so they assail President Biden whenever the opportunity aris-

According to one American undocumented aliens account for around 11 million in the American homeland. They enter the nation and dissipate into the realm of unorganised vocations and the resultant economy, which has been a difficult challenge investigative and enforcement agencies. If one refers to the Hollywood American nation's mafia emigrated from Italy and other European nations and

lections in any and economic roost in the nation tend to be US, consistent with one hotly and keenly assessment of the dark economy and societal

The domestic situation in the nation-state of Mexico is also in a state of instability and flux as controversies cast a pall of despondency over long time in the United the country. Reuters States, immigration of aliens reported in one of its articles: "Huge crowds filled Mexico City's main square on Sunday in support of the nation's electoral authority, accusing President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador of trying to weaken the body ahead of a presidential election in June. The protests, one of several in recent years, meant to 'protect' the National Électoral Institute (INE), come after Lopez Obrador sent a sweeping package of constitutional reforms to Congress, which would include an overhaul of the

One can hark back to the issue of illegal migration into the US from Mexico and South America. The Darien Gap is a stretch of densely forested land that serves as a conduit for illicit migration into the US territory. Depending on what they can pay, people trudge through the Darien swamp and walk for five to ten days at the mercy of criminal gangs who, after demanding a lump sum the bill, despite its inclusion for amount, often maim, mutilate, and rape the migrants in the Darien Gap. These are a few of the issues flick, "Scarface," the entire being debated in the US Presidential Election deliberations for November



succinctly states that a highly anticipated bipartisan immigration and foreign aid bill was recently defeated by former President Trump, a staunch opponent of a border deal. He actively lobbied Republicans to vote against of many provisions they had initially supported. Even Senate Minority Leader McConnell succumbed to Trump's influence, voting against the bill despite his role in its development and his prior began to rule the political In March 2024, a report efforts to garner support

within his party. This action by McConnell has further intensified the

electoral

candidates. With some Americans advocating strongly for immigration reforms, President Biden could leverage Republican intransigence immigration to lay blame on Trump for obstructing progress on immigration The rhetoric policy. surrounding immigration policy remains

between the two presidential

confrontation

upon illegal immigration as a pivotal issue in the 2024 Presidential primaries. While it might be considered hyperbolic, one cannot ignore the significant role immigration plays as an electoral issue that could sway the outcome of the US Presidential Elections. The highly notion of aliens posing a divisive, potentially leading threat to national and

to further recriminations

from both presidential

Further north in the United

Republicans have seized

America,

of

candidates.

homeland security in the US has gained considerable political and popular traction. Republicans have political popular intensified their criticism of President Biden's lenient approach towards the steady and unlawful influx of immigrants from South

America through Mexico. This has emerged as a central electoral theme, eliciting considerable criticism and political upheaval. It has been argued that

policies are failing. Recently,

it's been contended that the

immigration

American

In Latin America, for example, countries like Venezuela are suffering under the grip of kleptocracy, which adversely affects both the nation and its people. So, what is the solution? The pertinent question arises: do people migrate to the United States of America to escape repression and hardships, seeking the promise of a brighter future despite the perceived decline in America's fortunes?

system is broken and could

potentially harm President

Biden's re-election prospects.

Immigration laws are under scrutiny as Capitol Hill debates intensify. There are concerted efforts to amend menace of migration from immigration laws within the American homeland. Efforts to overhaul the nation's immigration laws, for the first time in decades, have gained sudden momentum. Additionally, the upcoming US Presidential election will likely revolve around the dilemma of whether citizenship or permanent resident status, signified by a green card, will become the prevailing norm, and how much emphasis the twin candidates will place on this issue.

There was a global impact of Trump's immigration clampdown, which was observed by IR experts and the legal fraternity.

The first executive order signed by President Trump disallowed migrants from seven West Asian nations to enter the American homeland.

One of the initial executive orders signed by President Joe Biden revoked these bans on migrants from Islamic

countries. These nations included Iran, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen, Somalia, and Sudan. However, one cannot overlook the fact that the agencies responsible for monitoring and tracking terrorist outfits such as Boko Haram, ISIS, the Taliban, and Al-Shabaab are the worst affected when deals occur between political leaders. Trump's bravado, premised upon the theme of immigration, resulted in a plethora of economic costs and was fraught with political

Several European nations,

similar to the United States of America, are facing the conflict zones such as Ukraine, Syria, and Iraq, thereby initiating talks of fencing and walling the frontiers and borders, which is exactly what former President Trump also advocated on the global stage, specifically in America. As a telling fact, the cost of managing the Oresund bridge between Denmark and Sweden is a significant amount. Additionally, apart from Mexican human outages, gun running, and drug trafficking pose a perilous threat to the homeland security of the United States of America.

In the Hollywood film "The Mule," released in 2018, Clint Eastwood's character, Earl Stone, indulges in drug trafficking after his flower farming business goes bankrupt. (The writer teaches at

International Relations and International Organisations, Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi)

#### PERSPECTIVE

MAKHAN SAIKIA

The CAA is not

anti-Muslim; it just prioritises citizenship for persecuted minorities, not others, from three neighbouring countries. Future legislation may address concerns for Tamils and Rohingyas. Recognising historical context, it aims to assist six religious groups seeking refuge in India. Importantly, the CAA doesn't prevent Muslims from these countries from applying for **Indian citizenship** 

### hy the hullabaloo? behind a trail of human rights

→he Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) marks a watershed moment in India's electoral system. The government amended the Citizenship Amendment Act 1955 to facilitate citizenship acquisition for religious minorities from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh, reducing the qualification period from 11 years to Bangladesh, years under the new law.

The Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) was initially introduced in Parliament in the Lok Sabha in 2016 by amending the existing Citizenship Act 1955. Subsequently, the Bill was referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC), which submitted its report on January 7, 2019. The Lok Sabha passed the Bill the following day, but with the dissolution of the 16th Lok Sabha, the Bill lapsed.

By December 9, the Bill was reintroduced by Home Minister Amit Shah in the 17th Lok Sabha and passed on December 10. The Upper House, Rajya Sabha, also passed the Bill on December 11, 2019. This outlines the journey of the present CAA through both houses of Parliament, culminating in its establishment as a crucial piece of legislation.

The Act is drawing both national and international attention for three main reasons: First, it offers citizenship to six persecuted religious and undocumented groups who arrived in India from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan on or before December 31, 2014. These groups include Hindus, Jains, Parsis, Buddhists, Sikhs, and Christians. Second, it excludes Muslims from these countries from applying for

Third, the Narendra Modi Government introduced the Act just one month before parliamentary and assembly polls in some states. Now, the critical question arises: why is the Act sparking Opposition ire and protests in some States?

citizenship in India.

The central point of controversy is its alleged discrimination against Muslims, as it does not offer citizenship to Muslim migrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan. Critics argue that Muslim minorities such as the Baloch, Shia, Ahmadiyya of Pakistan, Hazras from Afghanistan, Rohingyas from Myanmar, and Tamils from Sri Lanka face religious persecution in their homelands, yet they are not covered by the Act. Second, critics contend that the CAA violates Article 14 (Right to Equality), the first Fundamental Right mentioned in Part III of our Constitution, by providing a classification of citizens based on religion, which is prohibited under this Article. Third, it allegedly seriously violates the historic Assam Accord signed between the All Students Association (AASU) and the Rajiv Gandhi-led Congress Government in 1985. This accord set the cutoff date for entry of illegal migrants to Assam as March 24, 1971, whereas the current Act pushes this cutoff date to December 31, 2014. Moreover, there is widespread fear that once these illegal migrants from six religious groups become citizens, they will have access to all other rights and facilities like the locals, thus burdening Assam's limited

economic resources. Meanwhile, the matter has reached the Supreme Court, with nearly 237 petitioners approaching the top court to stall the immediate implementation of the CAA. Under this Act, the Government can fasttrack the grant of Indian citizenship to non-Muslim migrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan. The lead petitioner in the case is the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML). During an oral mention of the case last week by a three-judge bench headed by Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud, efforts were made to calm the



apprehensions of all petitioners regarding the fast-tracking of the citizenship acquisition process by the Union Government. Again, the Supreme Court has agreed to consider the question of staying the operation of the new Citizenship Amendment Rules of 2024 on April 9. However, so far, there is no official statement from the Government indicating that it would not grant fast-track citizenship to the aforementioned groups of people. Today, the main arguments emerging in the Supreme Court include: the rules governing the CAA are based solely on religious grounds; once citizenship is granted, t cannot be reversed; and the Act has eliminated the scrutiny of new citizenship applications by District Collectors and recommendations of respective State Governments. Opposition parties

more months to implement the Now, the irony lies in why countries like America are so concerned about an internal issue of India. India is a democratic country, and its Constitution provides equal rights

and various petitioners are also

arguing that if the Government

could wait for the last five years, it

should be willing to wait for a few

and opportunities to all its citizens, including religious minorities, since its independence and the very inception of the Constitution itself. American Senator Ben Cardin is raising the seriousness of the issue by branding this Act as controversial and also questioning the intentions of the Indian Government as it deeply impacts Muslims, especially during their holy month of Ramzan. He speaks about the Indo-US relationship, based on shared values, where we need to be concerned about the protection of human rights for every person regardless of religion. It is true, we need to respect the human rights of all minorities, including Muslims. But sadly, the people of India in

general and the Government of India in particular do not need to learn lessons on human rights from any foreign parliamentarian like Cardin. India's long history and cultural traditions have displayed enough of our tolerance and mutual co-existence, demonstrating how this land has accepted people from various civilisational roots. Instead, Cardin should focus on how his own

country is engaged in wars after

wars in many Muslim nations,

especially in the West Asia, leaving

For the Opposition parties in the country (INDIA Bloc), their aim is not simply to oppose the NDA Government at the centre, but specifically the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. With the CAA, they have yet another issue to raise concerns about the Muslim minority in the country. Frankly speaking, for decades, the Congress ruled this country and many of the States. The grand old party, with its visionaries on board, should have already addressed the plight of persecuted minorities, including the Tamils from Sri Lanka, in India.

violations for years now.

By now, the US should have been

carrying out bloodshed against the

Palestinians, a war conducted in the

name of fighting Hamas militants.

Before pointing fingers at Vladimir

Putin (for the Ukraine invasion) and

Xi Jinping (for the alleged genocide

of Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang),

America should introspect and

The Ministry of External Affairs has

already termed the American

statement on the CAA as

"misplaced, misinformed, and

unwarranted". It has categorically

said: "The CAA 2019 is an internal

matter of India, showcasing the

inclusiveness of Indian society. The

CAA is an act of granting

citizenship, not of revoking it."

assess its actions worldwide.

It is clear that the CAA is not against Muslims. This Act is designed to offer expedited citizenship only to persecuted minorities as mentioned in it, not to others. Therefore, a new legislation can be considered by the Government in the future for Tamils and Rohingyas. In fact, this new law acknowledges the historical background of partition and aims to address the plight of these six religious groups who sought refuge in India. The CAA does not prohibit Muslims from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan from applying for

Indian citizenship.

The CAA does not violate Article 14. In the 1997 case of David John able to stop its closest ally Israel from Hopkins vs Union of India, the Madras High Court clarified that the Union Government's right to refuse citizenship is absolute and not fettered by equal protection under Article 14. Similarly, in the 1991 case of Louis

De Raedt vs Union of India, the Supreme Court held that the right of a foreigner in India is confined to Article 21, and they cannot seek citizenship as a matter of right. These judgments make it clear that citizenship is not a matter of right for any foreign citizen in this country. It must be emphasised that the Union Government has the final power to decide the acquisition and termination of citizenship and all other matters under Article 11. Additionally, the CAA has been implemented under the Seventh Schedule, which includes citizenship in the Union List, making Parliament the sole authority to decide on this matter. State governments, currently refusing to implement it (such as West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala), have no final say in this matter. Also, the CAA does not change or

dilute the Assam Accord, as it is applicable throughout India. It does not apply to the tribal areas of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Tripura, nor to areas under the Inner Line Permit prescribed by the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation 1873. Lastly, the Opposition and the hundreds of petitioners should have enough faith in the apex court of this country, as the matter has already been brought before it. The court will decide the fate of this Act, determining whether it violates the basic tenets of the Constitution, including secularism, and other pertinent issues raised by the

(The writer is currently President of the Global Research Foundation.)

petitioners so far.

## REFLECTIONS

# Vijender's punchnama



GOOD SPORT ROHIT MAHAJAN

IJENDER SINGH — boxing great, former Congressman — turning turncoat represents the moral conundrum of our times: what to choose in the conflict between principle and careerism, and must the choice be made on the grounds of morality or of success and profit?

Vijender Singh's move to the BJP—as of several other non-sportspersons—suggests that he, and they, believe that a political career out of the BJP is doomed to fail. Principles and convictions, thus, can be forsaken for a better future if, as Vijender says, one is determined enough to "serve the country".

In the winter of 2020, for rebels looking for a cause, Singhu border was the place to be — to march and shout slogans and carry placards and camp, in solidarity with the farmers protesting there against the three new farm laws.

Vijender, though, wasn't at Singhu out for a spot of union-style agitational tourism—he was already in politics, having fought the 2019 Lok Sabha election on a Congress ticket. He had finished third in the contest for the South Delhi seat that year, sinking without a trace—with 13.56 per cent of the votes cast, he had lost his deposit.

His appearance at Singhu inspired other sportspersons to speak out against the contentious farm laws. He said he was aware that the farmers enjoyed the support of sportspersons. He said he was there because he was grateful for what Punjab had given him, for he had trained in Patiala. "I have trained in Punjab and eaten their

bread. They have been protesting in this biting cold and I have arrived here as a son and a brother. Other athletes from Haryana wanted to come too but they have government jobs and fear repercussions. I am in touch with them and they are with our farmers," Vijender said at Singhu.

He also declared that he would return his Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna, the country's highest sporting honour; if the government did not withdraw the farm laws. They are "black laws", he said. Yet, during the 11 months the government stonewalled before deciding to repeal the three laws, Vijender did not return the award.

"I am from a farmer's family and have worked in the fields. I understand their concerns and pains. We want to return our awards so the govemment pays heed," Vijender had said.

Times change, views change, ideologies change — farming is so tough, farmers often turn non-farmers when they have the choice. Vijender might be from a farmer's family but he's no longer a farmer tilling his fields, and a political career would offer much greater allurements than working in the sun.

#### Times change, views change, ideologies change. Expediency, it seems, is all that counts

This is reminiscent of what Indian migrants in the UK have told this writer—as fresh immigrants, they voted for the Labour Party because of its economic policies, which were friendlier towards the working classes and migrants; after they settled down into comfortable financial security, they started voting for the Conservative Party—because its economic policies and tax cuts suited them. This is human nature—the adage 'consistency is the virtue of fools' is

truest in politics, as is being demonstrated every day as smart politicians mock at their previous selves by moving to parties whose ideologies they once hated.

"Today I am joining the BJP... it is like ghar wapsi," Vijender said after joining the party this week. His instinct of career advancement is sharp, though one reason he cited for the switch seemed abit too simplistic: "When we used to go abroad to fight earlier, to the UK and Dubai, for instance, certain things would happen at airports... But since the BJP and the Modi government came to power, we can go anywhere easily."

It would appear that switching parties with a massive swing in political principles is a big phenomenon indemocracies where the electorate is less aware, numbed into indifference — or is non-homogenous and very complex and varied. Right next door, we have several Pakistani politicians who have managed to be part of practically every government over the last two decades.

Things could be different in older democracies. An analysis of the list of politicians leaving their parties in the UK in the recent decades shows that when they leave the Labour or Conservative party, most turn independent; many were forced out after being convicted of a crime, or for committing an impropriety. A Labour politician joining the Conservatives, or vice versa, is a very rare phenomenon. However, in the dark stages of the British democracy 300 years ago, the practice of switching between the Tory and Whig parties was very common in the House of Commons—those were benighted days, when all women and most working class men were disenfranchised.

Are British politicians now more moral, or more securely grounded in their political ideology, or is it that they're fearful that an aware voter would mock them out of politics if they dumped their lifelong political beliefs for diametrically opposite ones? One would bet that fear of the intelligent electorate is the reason they don't burn their beliefs at the altar of expediency, as politicians in our country do.

# A matter of conditioning



RAAJA BHASIN

WHILE before I got married, I received my first
formal invitation to a
dinner hosted by a senior officer of the Army.
The ADC called and said, "If you are
married, please bring the lady wife." I
wasn't married then and that was the
first time one had heard the phrase,
'lady wife'.

"What other kind is there?" were the first words that passed through my head. I, too, was a product of the conditioning of our times. Thesewere years before some of us put aside a tiny measure of our hypocrisy and accepted that the entire human race is not 'straight'—and that that is one of the characteristics of what makes us human. For all the unswerving inflexibility of a male-dominated and often malefic world, everyone is entitled to love and whatever measure of happiness life may have to offer.

It was only years later and in an entirely different context that one learnt that the use of the words 'lady wife', at least in India, stemmed from our years of being colonised and carried the rancid odour of racism. Its connotation was quite different from what may have been in the West, where it could be a genteel wording of politeness. In India, however, 'lady wife' meant the lady who had come from the mother country, Britain, and was not the native 'Bibi', the common-law or legally-wed local lady. When men from Britain sailed out to India and spent several years, if not entire lifetimes in the country, expectedly, they formed liaisons or relationships with local ladies — who were often courtesans and who, out of compulsion or choice, stepped out of the taboos imposed on women. However, this was not always the case, and many high-born Indian women had white husbands. One result of this free-mingling were the early 'Anglo-Indians' or 'Eurasians' a community, one may add, that has had to suffer neglect, indifference and even discrimination at the hands of all parties concerned.

Often unnoticed, these dyed-inwool attitudes carry on in other ways. My late mother's nameplate, written and placed without a second thought, one assumes, had the prefix, 'Dr (Mrs)', before her name. The 'Dr' on its own obviously required the assistance of the 'Mrs' to complete the nameplate and subsequently, this appeared on visiting cards and letterheads. Then, not very long back, someone called to say that a nurse from overseas wanted to visit. We expected a lady and were fairly surprised to receive a hulking 6-foot-tall nurse, who was male.

Like the nurse, depending on where you are in the world, some simple activities remain interpreted by gender. When we were young, numerous Tibetan refugees arrived in the hills. We could not but help notice and admire how they kept



Depending on where you are in the world, some simple activities remain interpreted by gender

their young. These displaced persons often worked on road gangs, shifting rock and rubble, and somewhere by the side, in a wooden box held up by canvas straps, would be a baby that everyone would take turns to peek at and see if all was well. When not working or spinning their prayer wheels, almost all the men knitted. Caps, gloves and socks poured out from those sharply clicking needles held by large muscular hands. Another fairly common sight and one that is not seen any more is of Pahari men who walked and performed their normal tasks while wielding drop spindles, taklis, and spun coarse wool.

Again, a task that came along and crossed the bridge of gender was art. At one point, I was painting terrible landscapes and even worse images of still-life. A teacher had handed me a piece of cloth, some thread and a needle. "Embroider and stitch," I was told. "It will make your fingers and hands more dexterous." Others with greater talent had been handed a pack of cards to shuffle and that was expected to realise the same thing that people at the bottom of the art barrel, like me, were expected to achieve.

There was a moment, however, that I was able to palm off a bit of rubbish as inspired art. That came from a plank of wood over which I had pasted some other bits of wood and several leftover blocks from childhood building sets. It went over a wall on a landing. Visitors came by and remarked on the new addition. I explained it like it was — "A piece of wood and more pieces of wood stuck on." That it was colourful and supposedly creative, should have merited more than the casual remark, "How nice", that it drew. For the next lot of dinner guests, a story was in position. Now, that plank of wood signified the earth and the forests, the bits over it were cities and mankind, the funny little thing on top was man searching for meaning and balance in this world. Now, this had everyone's attention. I waxed eloquent and the dinner guests nodded sagely. They even gave my parents that dangerous line, "He has promise."

I stood below that piece of wood, which also had twists from the wire spiral of an old calendar. Someone asked me about those helices spinning on the sides of the wood. I happily explained them away as genders seeking their position in the human zoo.

## A story of our lived reality



BIDYUT KUMAR NATH

ROM 390, we were down to 10. Our play had been selected along with works of theatre veterans like Makarand Deshpande and Piyush Mishra, an achievement in itself. That day, my wife and I couldn't even force a morsel down our throats. We were just so scared. We were so new to this kind of limelight. Our light operator had never worked on this big a stage. And then Mahindra Excellence in Theatre Awards (META) began flowing in for 'Raghunath', one by one, six in total. Gautam Saikia was felicitated for the Best Light Design and Best Director, Best Actor, Best Original Script, Best Production, Best Stage Design were bagged by me.

Our play is about Raghunath, whose daughter dies while trying to cross a floodedriver to go to school. Hermemories haunthimall the time. He dreams of a village where no children die because of the lack of a mere bridge. To realise this, he spreads a false rumour that he has found an ancient statue of a god in the pond behind his home, believing that it will attract the government and the media to the village and that eventually the government will build a temple in it.

This play was born out of a theatre workshop.

I had told the participants to go through the
newspapers and pick a story. One of them was



about a girl getting washed away in the floods. Floods are a bitter reality in Assam. Governments try to help but at the grassroots level, politicians eat up all the money.

My tryst with theatre began when I was in class IV. An uncle of mine was an actor and I felt drawn to it the moment I saw him on stage. I soon got a break in theatre courtesy Prabin Saikia, Biplab Jyoti Bhuyan and Nirumoni Bhuyan. But this ended following my father's untimely demise in 2004; I was in senior secondary then. I gave tuitions, worked at restaurants, and my mother had to work in people's homes before she became an ASHA worker earning ₹1,000 per month.

Many years later, senior artist Jyoti Prasad Bhuyan, who knew about my interest in theatre, asked meto act in a play. I participated in the All-

Winner of five awards at META reflects on his theatre journey and odds he faced

Assam one-act play competition where I won a cash prize of ₹10,000-₹15,000. I was back on the circuit and was now being invited by several people, famous actor-director Rajen Phukan being among them. Importantly, theatre was paying, too. Around this time, my senior colleague Manuj Saikia, a passout from National School of Drama, Delhi, told me to go join the drama school. I could not go to Delhi leaving my mother and sister behind and instead joined its Sikkim campus for a year-long course. That changed so many things. People wanted to work with me. I was taking theatre workshops.

And then came the lockdown, a testing time again. I had to work as a delivery boy for 18 months. This time, I bounced back quickly.

'Raghunath' was conceived in August 2022. I knew this was a different story but I had no money to do a play. I went on Facebook and asked people to fund our production. One mandonated ₹10,000, another ₹4,000. We soon managed to collect ₹40,000. The actors were approached, the set was made from bamboo, the story was improvised upon. We went house to house to sell tickets in Nagaon where I stay. The play was a success.

Interestingly, the play did not have a script until we decided to send it to META. A friend, filmmaker Khanjan Kishorenath, watched it, wrote the subtitles and then translated the script into English.

Despite the odds that I faced in life, I knew that theatre is what I wanted to do. The experience at META has left me richer. I have realised that all theatre is same —only some are big stories and some are small stories. The culture it emanates from sets it apart. With 'Raghunath', we told a story of our lived reality.

—As told to Sarika Sharma

## Wordsworth, colonial education, and us



GJV PRASAD

ODAY, April 7, is the birth anniversary of the famous English poet William Wordsworth. He who wrote a poem that used to be a part of most English textbooks — 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud', or simply titled 'Daffodils'. Generations of schoolchildren in different parts of the world once ruled by the English, would recite the lines: "I wandered lonely as a cloud/ That floats on high o'er vales and hills,/ When all at once I saw a crowd, A host, of golden daffodils;/ Beside the lake, beneath the trees,/ Fluttering and dancing in the breeze." Most children who recited it had no idea what a daffodil looked like! I myself didn't see one till much later in life! It was to us a strange object, much like the apple pie that intrigued RK Narayan when he began to learn English — "A is for apple pie. B bit it. C cut it." "Wonderful," said Narayan. "We knew what it was to bite and cut. But what was apple pie?" His teacher didn't know either and wondered if it was like an idli! All of them felt free to guess what an apple pie was, to make up the contours of the civilisation that was being portrayed in their books based on their own experiences and imagination.

How does it matter really? We know that the daffodil is a flower and seeing a great deal of them flowering gave much pleasure to Wordsworth. Just like apple pie was certainly something to eat, and it was obviously something the English liked. Much post-colonial angst has been expressed blaming the alien subject matter of the texts that the colonised were made to study. It is not as if we, in a large country like India, will recognise the flowers and trees across our land or the values our various cultures place on



Whether we have ever seen daffodils or not, we surely empathise with Wordsworth and can think of such delightful scenes from our own life them. We definitely have no idea of our different food cultures and the taste and texture of many food items from different parts of our country, sometime even from our own state! Community, region, caste and class play a major role in what we eat, what is our comfort food, and what we don't or have no idea of.

I have often shared an anecdote — an older North Indian colleague shared with me that a new Tamil neighbour in Delhi in the 1940s gave them what they assumed to be was uncooked food that they could fry at their convenience and eat. It was a return gift from their neighbours since my colleague's family had sent over tea and meals when they had shifted in.

The next day, they fried the white uncooked food and ate it with some sour dal that had been sent to them as accompaniment! Thus, they had the nation's first fried idlis! I asked him how they knew it wasn't a sweet. "Oh, my father tasted a bit before we fried it." Someone reading about it wouldn't have known whether it was sweet or savoury.

But let's get back to Wordsworth and the

poem. The poet goes on to say how the daffodils lifted his mood. In fact, he was creating a memory — "I gazed — and gazed
—but little thought/ What wealth the show
to me had brought." What it had brought
was what we hope our photographs and
videos of our vacations will bring us, but
never really do, for we never look at them
over the years, much like our photocopied
books that we never read again.

As the poet says, "For oft, when on my couch I lie/In vacant or in pensive mood,/ They flash upon that inward eye/ Which is the bliss of solitude; And then my heart with pleasure fills,/ And dances with the daffodils." When we take photos, what we hope is to make such memories. If I seem to be using this poem to make a didactic point, I am not doing anything different than Wordsworth, who drew many lessons from nature. So, whether we have ever seen daffodils or not, we surely empathise with the poet and can think of such delightful scenes from our own life. My grandmother disliked the flowers of Delhi and called it a cursed land, but she would have understood Wordsworth completely.