



Split decision

The ECJ and the office of the Speaker have not played fair in cases of defection

In the run-up to the impending election to the Maharashtra Assembly, the rivalry between the two factions of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), now operating as separate parties, will have its inevitable influence on political developments and electoral outcomes. In the latest development related to the rift, NCP founder Sharad Pawar has approached the Supreme Court for a direction to the NCP led by Ajit Pawar to opt for a new symbol in the Assembly elections. The NCP's 'clock' symbol is with the Ajit Pawar group, following a ruling by the Election Commission of India (ECI) in February, recognising it as the official NCP. There is some logic to the demand that the Ajit Pawar group give up the 'clock' now. The ECI's order has already been challenged in the Supreme Court. Oral observations in early hearings indicated that there are some doubts about the 'legislative majority' test adopted by the ECI while recognising the Ajit Pawar faction as the NCP and allotting the 'clock' to the group. The ECI's order had justified the use of the legislative majority test by observing that the test on which group had organisational majority was inconclusive, as was the test based on the party's 'aims and objectives'. Mr. Ajit Pawar revolted against his uncle and joined the BJP-Shiv Sena alliance and became part of the ruling Mahayuti coalition, while the NCP (Sharad Pawar) is part of the Maha Vikas Aghadi, the opposition combine that includes the Shiv Sena (UBT) and the Congress.

However, in the Lok Sabha elections, Mr. Ajit Pawar's group won only one seat, while Mr. Sharad Pawar's party, using the symbol of a 'man blowing a turban' (trumpet), won eight, besides polling a much higher number of votes. The outcome raises the question whether the legislative majority during a given period could be used to gain or lose recognition. Further, Mr. Sharad Pawar has argued that the 'clock' has been the NCP's reserved symbol for many years and allotting it to one group may cause confusion in the voters' minds. The court will have to decide whether to have a level-playing field by denying the 'clock' symbol to both sides, or let the recognised faction use the symbol as long as the ECI order is in force. Such disputes, including the other major rift in Maharashtra over who represents the Shiv Sena, pose a challenge to the ability of parties to maintain organisational unity in the face of attempts to split them through defection and rebellion. The fate of the individuals and parties involved often depend on the Speaker under the anti-defection law and the ECI, which accords recognition to parties and allots symbols. Both institutions seem to need the Supreme Court to keep them honest.

Desert storm

Women's cricket gets the spotlight as the T20 World Cup gets underway

If West Asia is in the news as a conflict zone, the desert sands of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) may offer some relief over the next fortnight. The ICC T20 Women's World Cup that commenced at Sharjah on Thursday will oscillate between this venue and Dubai. Featuring 10 teams split into two groups of five each, the championship will conclude on October 20. The tournament was supposed to be held in Bangladesh, but the unrest of the previous months in Dhaka meant that though India's eastern neighbour holds the hosting rights, the matches had to be shifted to the UAE. While Australia will step in with the swagger of a defending champion, having seized the cup after vanquishing host South Africa in the 2023 edition, India will walk in with the hope of finally claiming the trophy. In the 2020 final at Melbourne, India wilted against Australia. Cut to the present, Harmanpreet Kaur's strong unit will clash against New Zealand at Dubai on Friday and a good first outing is essential. India has moved on from the era of Mithali Raj and Jhulan Goswami and those are massive shoes to fill, but Harmanpreet, Jemimah Rodrigues, Smriti Mandhana, and others have tried their best to chart a fresh path.

The tournament is also invested with a larger cause layered with gender sensitivity. While male players get accolades and commercial heft through cricket, female players have always fought for their rights. Even in the latest event, despite being pitted against each other as rivals, there is a sisterhood at play. Through interactions with the press, all the leading female players have sought more games and also more Tests. Often the women are resigned to playing just limited-over cricket. While Mithali turned out in 232 ODIs and 89 T20Is, it is a travesty that she played only 12 Tests in a long career. Harmanpreet and company have often sought comfort in diverse franchises leagues but there is nothing like a solid bilateral contest to toughen up the stars. Having won the title on six occasions, Australia remains the behemoth. Alyssa Healy and her merry bunch will be the team that most squads, including old rival England, would want to knock off the pedestal. And for those keen on watching neighbourhood rivalry, India and Pakistan are placed in Group A and will face off on Sunday. Diplomatic tensions have ensured that the two nations compete against each other only in global events.

In this digital age, we reduce everything to numbers. This trend has consumed the education ecosystem, as seen in the rise of global ranking agencies, which assign ranks to universities across the world every year. India has its own National Institutional Ranking Framework to rank universities in the country.

The purpose of a university is to teach and mentor future citizens; and to acquire and create knowledge through research. Research and teaching are two sides of the education coin: knowledge creation and dissemination. A university needs to excel in both in order to fulfil its obligations to students and society. Through its activities, a university also has social and economic impacts. It is impossible to capture a university's multidimensional nature with a single metric, represented by a global or national rank. Yet, this is what ranking systems claim to do.

Overemphasis on research

The global university ranking system is one-dimensional. It places huge emphasis on research activity. A university's research output is quantified using criteria such as the number of papers published, the impact factor of the journals in which they are published, the amount of research funding acquired, and the number of PhD students who were admitted and graduated. These numbers by themselves cannot capture the quality, content, relevance, and impact of research. Sadly, despite being aware of this flaw in the ranking process, Indian universities are all in the ranking race. A world rank makes the university 'visible' and helps attract international students, world-class faculty, and academic partners, philanthropists, and donors.

Universities and the government even tweak or alter policies to improve ranks. A university that is not ranked may as well not exist — such is the power we have accorded to global rankings.

India has bought into the American education system, which is shaped by a strong belief in free market capitalism and unfettered private competition. To help improve the global ranking of India's top universities and premier institutes, the government set up the Higher Education Financing Agency (HEFA) a few years ago. HEFA mobilises market resources to fund the country's global rank-aspiring institutions in the form of repayable loans at competitive interest rates.

In tandem, the government also granted full autonomy to several public higher education

S. Swaminathan

Retired professor and scientist. Views are personal

The metrics-focused system has created a situation which implies that education is a market rather than a citizen's right and the state's duty

institutions. This encompasses financial autonomy as well, which means that the government will cease to support them. In other words, public higher education institutions will need to generate their own funds by enhancing student fees. This is touted as a 'win-win' strategy for both the university and the government: the university has a shot at improving its rank and the government no longer has the onerous responsibility of funding it. But if the race for a global rank sacrifices the essential function of educating students (which is not factored into the ranking process), this is not a meaningful 'win' for either. Importantly, it is also not a 'win' for the economically weaker sections of society.

The importance of teaching and mentoring

The metrics-driven, global rank-aspiring higher educational system has had an adverse impact on the teaching community. The undue emphasis on research to the exclusion of other vital functions, especially teaching, has created a sorry situation in which university job aspirants are often judged by the number of research papers they have produced, the impact factor of the journals they were published in, and the numbers of their citations; and not by their ability to be an effective communicator, teacher, and mentor.

Once selected as a faculty member of the university, the candidate's subsequent career advancement depends on additional metrics such as the amount of research grant funds secured and the number of PhD degrees awarded. This obsession with metrics ignores the faculty member's actual teaching and mentoring capacity as a determinant of career advancement in the higher education ecosystem.

Unlike in the case of research, teaching is not amenable to quantification using metrics. It is the unmeasurable something that metrics cannot deal with. So, the role for teaching has declined in the education system. In fact, in the perspective of a typical university professor, writing a paper or working on a grant application takes precedence over teaching today. Ironically, teaching is a distraction from 'all important' research. University professors have become contractors churning out research papers to improve the university's ranking.

The higher education ecosystem is pervaded by a culture of 'publish or perish' without a meaningful and transparent mechanism for accountability in place. Is this kind of research, at

the expense of educating students, really meaningful? Are instances of plagiarism, data manipulation, and other research misconduct emanating from our premier institutes and universities the undesirable and unintended consequences of our pre-occupation with metrics? In these cases, are not the teachers failing in their role as mentors and role models? Students who emerge from this system either quit in disillusionment or end up propagating this situation, propelling us into a downward spiral.

Creating two tracks

There is no doubt that research is the engine that drives growth and innovation, but it cannot be an excuse to neglect teaching, which prepares students for the real world. Universities should consider separate tracks for research-focused and teaching-focused faculty members. Interests of faculty members in these two tracks may extend beyond their primary focus, but they must not be expected to excel in both at all times. Otherwise, there will be scope for resentment and lack of commitment, undermining the very faculty members whose contributions are critical to the university's mission.

Universities must realise that the scientific content of a paper and its possible societal and economic impact are more relevant than the impact factor of the journal in which it is published or the number of citations it garners. Teaching must be recognised as an important function of the university and teachers must be encouraged to improve curricula. Careful, unbiased judgment must replace metrics.

Universities must enable a paradigm shift in their institutional culture to value and enable the success of both research and teaching efforts that collectively contribute to their overall mission as being centres of higher education and learning.

The metrics-focused system or 'metricocracy', if you will, which we mistakenly believe is synonymous with meritocracy, has created a situation which implies that education is a market rather than a citizen's right and the state's duty; knowledge is a commodity and not a means of becoming more humane; and students are customers, instead of future citizens. This warped ecosystem views academic rigour as detracting from the business of delivering the product to the customer. It kills creativity and the enthusiasm to learn, does not prepare students for the real world, and is harmful to future generations.

Why Italy matters to India

Antonio Bartoli

Ambassador of Italy to India

In this age of 'polycrisis', Italy and India share common interests but also joint challenges in the Indo-Mediterranean Sea. This region is vital for global trade, especially for Italy which ranks sixth among the world's largest exporters. It is also crucial for digital connectivity: the Blue-Raman submarine data cables will soon connect Genoa with Mumbai. Piracy in the Red Sea, the conflict in Gaza and Lebanon, and the effects of Russia's aggression against Ukraine on agricultural and oil trade require our joint efforts to ensure a free, open, and prosperous Indo-Mediterranean.

Therefore, Italy has stepped up its commitment in security and defence in the Indian Ocean Region and West Asia. Apart from joining the Group of Friends of UNCLoS in 2021, it has been the second largest contributor to the European Union Naval Force (EU NAVFOR) Atalanta and the European Maritime Awareness in the Strait of Hormuz (EMASoH). Since February 2024, Italy has been a driving force in the EU military operation, EU NAVFOR ASPIDES, to safeguard freedom of navigation in the Red Sea, the Indian Ocean, and the Gulf.

Naval presence

We have also increased our naval presence in India. After joining the Information Fusion Centre of the Indian Ocean Region in March 2023, patrol ship *ITS Francesco Morosini* visited Mumbai in August 2023. The Italian Carrier Strike Group (aircraft carrier *ITS Cavour* and frigate *ITS Alpino*) is currently in Goa. We are expecting the amazing tall ship *ITS Amerigo Vesputi* in Mumbai from November 28 to December 2. It is the training vessel of the Italian Navy. We are also planning to build an 'Italy village' that will offer cultural, fashion, and culinary events, as well as conferences and exhibitions.

ITS Cavour is a short take off and vertical landing ship constructed by the Italian naval shipyard Fincantieri and has been in the service

Piracy in the Red Sea, the conflict in the Middle East, and the effects of Russia's aggression against Ukraine on agricultural and oil trade require our joint efforts to ensure a free, open, and prosperous Indo-Mediterranean

of the Italian Navy since 2009. As a 'dual use' vessel, it can project maritime power, but also provide logistical autonomy and serve environmental and humanitarian interventions. We are delighted that PASSEX exercises (training exercises to develop and maintain mariner skills and strengthen interoperability) are being held during the stay. *ITS Cavour* is also hosting a workshop on defence industry cooperation. At the same time, it serves as a hospital to operate children with facial malformations: a team of Indian and Italian doctors is performing surgeries under the framework of 'Operation Smile', organised by the Smile House Foundation, Italy.

Defence ties

Bilaterally, the Italy-India defence cooperation relies on a defence agreement signed in October 2023. This document lays the basis for a further expansion of our defence ties in many fields, from research to industrial cooperation, maritime domain awareness, sharing of information, and education and environmental issues related to military activities. At the same time, our defence cooperation strongly relies on regular talks such as the Italy-India Military Cooperation Group meeting, held in March in New Delhi.

When it comes to defence production, Italy matters to India: two of our companies, Leonardo and Fincantieri, are ranked among the first 50 of SIPRI's top arms-producing and military services companies in the world (2022), while other companies, such as Breda, Elettronica and KND, albeit smaller in size, possess outstanding technical know-how. Over the last few years, Italian defence companies have shown to be open to joint ventures, co-production, and joint development. Fincantieri is cooperating with Cochin Shipyard since 2020, while Elettronica signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Bharat Electronics Limited in 2019. This partnership approach is in line with India's 'Make in India' ambitions and can respond to growing

requirements by the Indian armed forces.

Italy also looks at India as a valuable partner for development of the Indian Ocean Region, from East Africa to India's shores via the Arabian Sea. Both Italy and India are keen promoters of Africa in international fora and jointly supported the inclusion of the African Union in the G20. During the Italy-Africa Summit in January, Italy launched a new initiative with Africa, the Mattei Plan, aimed at creating a mutually beneficial partnership to realise several important projects across the continent. This initiative mobilises Italian capabilities with €5.5 billion in public investments and the involvement of all public entities and the private sector. Among the first countries chosen for this plan, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Mozambique are adjacent to the Indo-Mediterranean area. The ambition is to engage with other partners to realise sustainable projects which will help drive economic and social development in Africa.

At the same time, Italy has supported the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC). Amid the conflict in Gaza and the escalating tensions in West Asia, we believe that IMEC can be part of a long-term vision to ensure shared prosperity in the region. Railway connections, ports, logistics and custom systems can support peace endeavours along a trade route that is as essential for Italy as it is for India.

People-to-people ties

Italy matters to India as a friend. We host the second largest Indian diaspora in the EU. Italy is a reliable economic and defence partner, the second largest manufacturing country in Europe, and a robust security provider taking up responsibilities as a member of the EU and NATO. What persists over time are people-to-people ties. These bonds dig deep into an ancient history of contacts between our two civilisations and find new inspiration with every story of cultural exchange, integration, and business success.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Crisis in West Asia

The United Nations Security Council called for an emergency meeting on the Lebanon-Israel conflict, but doesn't seem to be able to do much to stop the crisis ("Israel vows to hit back at Iran, reinforces troops in Lebanon", October 3). It is time for serious reforms in the UN. The body must keep pace with a rapidly changing world order. One hopes that at least the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation will try to bring about peace in West Asia.

Rohit Varon S.S., Chennai

Israel showed arrogance in declaring the UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, 'persona non grata'. It is only going to get more and more isolated in the international community if its Prime Minister opens up more war fronts.

Cijo Joseph Kottayam

A PhD candidate must have

A PhD candidate must have an aptitude for research, apart from a passion for the subject, and a critical bent of mind ("The net result will be poor doctoral research", October 3). Not everyone

who passes the NET will have these skills. It is critical that universities and institutes of higher learning and research have autonomy in selecting PhD candidates.

Kosaraju Chandramouli Hyderabad

Many humanities and social science departments have exposed students to global standards of research at an affordable cost, despite challenges such as poor funding and threats to academic freedom. By asking candidates to write proposals and by

conducting interviews, universities would test skills such as writing, critical thinking, and the art of formulating research questions. The UGC's move tests none of these skills. In the long run, it will compromise our ability to generate original research.

Anna Jacob Delhi

Corrections & Clarifications

The first paragraph of a report, "U.S. stays India's top trading ally, export destination in 2024" (Business page, October 1, 2024) said that the U.S. bilateral goods trade with India in January-July 2024 as \$290 billion. It should have been \$72 billion.

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I had cracked NET and qualified for UGC-JRF in the 1990s without attending coaching classes. NET was different back then: Part A and B were multiple choice questions (MCQ) and Part C (on a particular subject) was descriptive. Today, Part C has been replaced with MCQ. Although I do not agree that MCQ

predominantly assesses our memory capabilities and recalling abilities, going back to the earlier pattern would be a more balanced and accommodative suggestion. Replacing NET with individual entrance exams across institutions is unwarranted.

Padmesh P. Pillai Kasargod



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IN THE LIMELIGHT



At the Oscars: A still from Laapataa Ladies. T-SERIES/YOUTUBE

Politics of aesthetics: how 'Laapataa Ladies' got a shot at the Oscars

The Academy Award for Best International Film is bestowed on the country and not an individual. As Kiran Rao's social satire represents India at the Academy Awards, let's peel the layers of the comedy of manners to figure out what it says and what it implies

Anuj Kumar

Towards the end of *Laapataa Ladies*, when Inspector Shyam Manohar foretells that Jaya, one of the two 'lost ladies', will go a long way, constable Dubey responds, "Indeed sir, she has to reach Dehradun." Since Kiran Rao's potent comedy of manners has been chosen as India's official entry to the Oscars this week, social media is abuzz with outrage from those who wanted to see Payal Kapadia's *All We Imagine As Light* on the road to Los Angeles. Taking umbrage to the trite citation that describes Indian women as 'a strange mix of submission and dominance', many X-crusaders – like Dubey – choose only to go by the text. In the annual din on the selection process for the Oscars, one thing that gets lost is that the Academy Award for Best International Film is bestowed on the country and not an individual. The natural follow-up question is what idea of India do we want our films to represent at the Oscars? This brings the government of the day and the politics of aesthetics into the mix.

On choosing a nominee

The Film Federation of India (FFI), which picks the representative feature out of a competitive pool through a jury, is the apex body of the film industry that works with the government to promote, support, and protect the interests of the film industry. Therefore, the sentiment that seeks safety over sensitivity remains ambient. Whether the deciding authority can process the winds of change, where a Malayalam film gets short-listed by France and *Santosh*, a multi-national collaborative Hindi crime drama set in rural north India becomes the U.K.'s shot

at the Oscars, and appreciate the spirit of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* seeping into cinema, remains questionable. For now, it seems keen on saving the notion of sovereignty in cinema by leaning on what appears to be less adamant of the female voices that populated the list as *Kottukkaali*, *Ullazhukku*, and the National Award winner *Aattam* were also in the fray.

Read in context, the seemingly fossilised view expressed in the citation, that needed some serious proofreading, indicates the jury chose to reduce *Laapataa Ladies* to a story of two young girls, one happily desiring to be a homemaker and the other an entrepreneurially inclined rebel. When they get swapped during a train journey, the narrative allows a humorous exploration of identity and social constructs. A deeper reading suggests that the form and expression itself work like a safety pin to hold up the dissenting core of *Laapataa Ladies*.

If one deconstructs the structure of the social satire that turns the mainstream lost-and-found formula on its head, it feels like an onion, where the layers are the story but as long as you don't cut deep, tear ducts won't come into play. Lifting the veil on centuries of everyday patriarchy, it questions the practice of women covering their face among the majority community at a time when outside the theatres, power brokers are desperate to build a narrative around the hijab of Muslim women. Rao chooses to underline how patriarchy seeps through religious divides as a passing sequence captures a Muslim man talking of preserving identity while his wife's face is completely covered.

Abdul, the disabled beggar on the platform, is an observation of Muslims in

the country, caught between persecution and persecution complex. Abdul is not what he looks like but that is his survival mechanism, not an insidious ploy.

Beyond mainstream politics

On the surface, the film is safely set in a fictitious place which feels like on the border of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar where a young Deepak has to get over his male ego to express his love for his wife Phool. One can feel how he pulls his entire weight to utter those simple three words in English.

The period is 2001 when Narendra Modi took over as the Chief Minister of Gujarat. In the opening train sequence, a passenger is reading a Hindi newspaper with the headline of PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee visiting Bhuj implying the period of the devastating earthquake. Had it been 2002, another debilitating event for our democracy would have been on the cover. This is not the first time that co-producer Aamir Khan has steered clear of Gujarat riots, in recent times. His last film *Laal Singh Chaddha* conveniently erased the episode even when creative honesty demanded otherwise.

It is not that the star with a voice has fallen silent. Along with Kiran, he has found newer ways to subvert. An independent filmmaker and the government share a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law type relationship. In the film, when an ageing daughter-in-law asks her mother-in-law whether they can be friends, the older lady tells her to give it a try. The film offers a hand by promoting organic farming and *beti padhao*, *beti bachao* but also shines a light on darkness beneath the slogans.

Through Manju Mai, the tea stall owner in the film who serves feminism in a *kulhad*, the film tries to save us from a

fraud sold to young women in the name of tradition. But in its universe, some of the cynicism of the feminist Manju melts away when the 'submissive' Phool enters her space with the recipe of sweet *kalakand*.

Phool doesn't wilt because she has been trained in making someone else's kitchen her own. However, Manju is no lawyer or social worker – noble professions that are seen with suspicion these days. She is an entrepreneur who has been hardened by the vagaries of life. Manju and Phool don't just develop a covalent bond but an electrostatic attraction – where they give and take. Like Kiran and Ravi Kishan, the BJP lawmaker and socially aware actor cast to portray the malleable system in the film. Or like Aamir and Jio Studios.

According to reports, the media and content arm of Mukesh Ambani-led Reliance Industries has garnered ₹700 crore at the box office in 2023-24. With 11 theatrical releases, 35 direct-to-digital releases, and eight original web series across languages and genres, the six-year-old company's output is bigger than any other film production company in the country. But, for now, they are just numbers. The Oscar nomination brings the credibility that the group seeks in the intangible space of culture. Its deep resources and network provide the small film the legs to last the expensive campaign to attract Academy voters and possibly explain the cultural nuances in storytelling.

After the *Lagaan* and *Taare Zameen Par*'s experience, Aamir is wiser in making his investments. The audiences, meanwhile, are advised to take the message of the *Jagte Raho* call of the retired chakudai of *Laapataa Ladies* seriously.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

K. Subrahmanian
Upendran

"Surprise!"
"Hi!"
"Do I see tears of sorrow or tears of joy in your eyes?"
"Neither. I was cutting onions and..."
"How many times do I have to tell you, it's onions! The first syllable 'on' is not pronounced like the word 'on'. It's pronounced like the 'un' in words like 'bun' 'sun'...."
"Fun' and 'run'. I know that. But you see, a lot of people pronounce the first syllable like the word 'on'. So when I say the word, I automatically say 'on', instead of 'un'."

"Avoid making such a mistake."
"I'll try, but it's very difficult."
"Nothing is difficult if you put your mind to it. Why were you cutting onions, anyway?"
"My mother needed it for the salad..."
"The what?"
"The salad. Oh, I'm sorry. The word is pronounced 'salad', right? The first syllable 'sa' is pronounced like the 'sa' in words like 'sand', 'sad' and 'sat'."
"And in the second syllable..."
"The 'a' is pronounced like the 'a' in 'China'. The stress is on the first syllable, 'sa', right?"
"Excellent."
"Thanks. By the way, what are you doing here?"
"No, my parents want to see the newly constructed theatre tomorrow, so..."
"You thought it would be a good idea if I came along with you. After all, I'm..."
"I didn't come here to invite you."

"No, I didn't?"
"No, I didn't. I came to see your mechanic. I wanted him to give our car the once-over before..."
"The 'once-over'? What does it mean?"
"When you give something the 'once-over', you look at or examine it very quickly. The principal, gave the plans the once-over before approving them."
"Once-over" can be used with people.
"Did the mechanic give your car the once-over?"
"Yes, he certainly did. Hey, what's the wonderful smell?"
"Must be the cake in the oven."
"You mean oven. The 'o' does not sound like 'oh'. It's pronounced like the 'u' in 'gun', 'bun' and 'nun'. It is pronounced like the 'o' in 'onion'."

"So its oven, with the stress on the first syllable."
"Could I have a piece of that cake?"
"Certainly not!"
"There's no point in asking you. I'll ask your mother."
"She's not here. She's gone to buy ice cream. You see, we're having guests tonight. And we'll have cake and ice cream for desert."
"Which desert? The Gobi or the Sahara? Hal Hal!"
"What's so funny?"
"The word you're looking for is not 'desert', but 'dessert'. The stress is on the second syllable 'ert'. The 's' is pronounced like the 'z' in 'zip', 'zoo' and 'zebra' and the 'rt' sounds like the 'urt' in words like 'hurt' and 'cure'. The first syllable 'de' is like the 'di' in 'dip', 'ditch' and 'dish'.
Published in *The Hindu* on August 3, 1993.

THE DAILY QUIZ

On October 1, Jimmy Carter became the first President of the United States to turn 100. How well do you know Carter and the events that he has lived through?

Radhika Santhanam

QUESTION 1

In 2002, Jimmy Carter received the Nobel Peace Prize. According to the Nobel Committee, he ought to have received it earlier, in 1978. Why did it think so?

QUESTION 2

The end of Carter's presidency is often seen as a disastrous period in U.S. foreign policy. Among other events, U.S. diplomats and citizens were taken hostage in country X. The citizens of country X were furious that the U.S. had granted admission to a recently deposed leader for medical treatment and wanted him back to stand trial for alleged abuses. Name country X and the leader.

QUESTION 3

A few days ago, it was reported that the site of the worst nuclear accident in U.S. history, which took place during the Carter regime, will reopen by 2028 and sell power to a multinational company. What is the site called?

QUESTION 4

This village in Haryana was renamed on the instructions of Moraji Desai in 1978. As Carter's mother had visited a haveli in the village often, he too visited the village, along with his wife. What is this village called?

QUESTION 5

In 1978, Carter was warned by a politician that Ted Kennedy might run against him in 1980. Name the politician.



Visual question: This is one of the weirdest monuments to a politician. This goofy statue is said to even have helped Carter win the election in Georgia 1976. Why does the statue show a peanut?

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz: 1. This historic event symbolically brought to an end the eastern bloc of Germany.

Ans: The fall of the Berlin Wall

2. This particular movement in Germany, often included as one among the Revolutions of 1989, led to the downfall of the eastern German bloc.

Ans: Peaceful Revolution

3. This agreement decided that Germany would be divided and ruled between the main allied powers post World War II. Ans: The Potsdam Agreement

4. The first person to use the term 'Iron Curtain' during the Cold War. Ans: Winston Churchill

5. This Chancellor of West Germany released a 10-point programme which called for the eventual reunification of the two Germanies. Ans: Chancellor Helmut Kohl

Visual: Identify this checkpoint. Ans: Checkpoint Charlie

Early Birds: Piyali Talui | Tito Shildadya | Abhyuday Singh Bhaduria | K.N. Viswanathan | Bharath Viswanathan

Word of the day

Gavage:

Feeding that consists of the delivery of a nutrient solution (as through a nasal tube) to someone who cannot or will not eat

Synonym: forced feeding

Usage: Two of the main compounds were administered by oral gavage.

Pronunciation: newsth.live/gavagepro

International Phonetic

Alphabet: /gəˈvɑːʒ/, /gəˈvɑːʒ/

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

Should EC ensure internal democracy in political parties?

**O. P. Rawat**
Former Chief
Election
Commissioner**M. R. Madhavan**
co-founder and
President of the
PRS Legislative
Research

PARLEY

India's multi-party democracy thrives on diversity but often sees political parties driven by individual charisma rather than internal democracy. Despite their role in upholding the nation's democratic framework, many parties struggle to maintain democratic structures. Can the Election Commission (EC) ensure these organisations practise internal democracy? Former Chief Election Commissioner O. P. Rawat and PRS Legislative Research President M. R. Madhavan discuss this question with **Sreeparna Chakrabarty**. Edited excerpts:

The EC has been thinking of nudging political parties on the issue of internal democracy. But how can they do it?

O. P. Rawat: The EC is the registering authority for all the political parties in our country. As such, the EC monitors whether they are functioning according to their Constitution, by-laws, etc. And in the process, they also oversee whether the elections to their office bearers are taking place regularly.

But there has been one important point in this whole issue. This was the 2002 ruling of the Supreme Court which says that the EC cannot go into the political process and anything which is part of the political process per se. That is why it has no power to de-register a political party based on any violation of these things.

They can de-register if registration has been obtained on the basis of fraud or other things, but they cannot de-register a party if they don't have periodic elections. Otherwise, to whatever extent the laws permit, the EC is doing it.

M. R. Madhavan: I have a slightly different way of looking at it: what is the EC's core mandate according to the Constitution? Their mandate is to conduct elections for Parliament, State Legislatures, and the posts of President and Vice President of India. They have to maintain electoral rolls and under Article 103, they advise on disqualification of any MP. There is a similar one for MLAs other than the anti-defection disqualifications, which is decided by the Speaker and not by them. That is their limited mandate.

And the question is are they carrying out this mandate well or not? So, any institution, should first do its core job and then take on more things. And my argument is that the EC has deteriorated in its core job and they are unable to do even that.

So before giving any institution an extra mandate, I would require them to do their core job first. That is my limited point and I would not give them anything more because they are not competent enough to do what they are supposed to do in any case.

**Fair process:** A boy walks past a painting made for voter awareness by EC at Jalore in Rajasthan on April 18, 2024. SHASHI SHENKAR KASHYAP

What would be your views on whether the EC should have the power to de-register parties at all?

OPR: I would like to say that the EC does whatever is mandated to it with efficiency. The only thing is that when it comes to the de-registration of parties, it will have many different directions or dimensions.

You know, elections are challenged only by way of election petitions according to our Constitution. We have been monitoring this and find that these disputes are much less every time over the years. If you compare us with the democracy in the most developed country as well, they had a storming of their legislature when the results were against one candidate.

This kind of thing, we never witnessed in our country after any election, and political acceptance of the election results is beyond imagination for all democracies which is borne by international conferences which I attended and which my colleagues attended everywhere. Election Commissioners from different countries say that India is a golden example where acceptance of election results by all political parties is enormous.

With these credentials, if the EC is made to go into the internal process, the political process for de-registering, we will be running the risk of getting the poll body into a model where even the main stakeholders – the political parties – will start developing suspicion. So, I think we have to take a view in totality not only in the context of political parties about registration and regulation but also about the delivery of elections time and again on the stipulated time and in a free fair manner.

MRM: So, I am not going to talk about the EC's reputation, which has been very high, but it has, in my opinion, faltered in the rating bit.

But back to the idea of political parties being regulated by them, I would agree with Mr. Rawat in saying that they should not get into that. Because then the EC becomes political, and susceptible to various political pressures, it should maintain its distance from the politics of



Election Commissioners from different countries say that India is a golden example where acceptance of election results by all political parties is enormous

O. P. RAWAT

the day. So, I would say whether parties hold internal elections or not, you cannot regulate them because even today they are required to hold. But what do they do? There is somebody who manages it so that somebody is contesting unselected or it is managed so that the people know who is going to get elected. I would say the discipline of political parties should come from the electorate. If people think that this party is not democratic and you want a democratic party, don't vote for them. If people want them, they will vote for them.

Is there any existing legal ground on which elections can be mandated within political parties?

OPR: No, I feel there is nothing except for this registration of political parties by the EC and the periodical review of compliance with their Constitution, their by-laws, and all those things. But in the end, it is a very kind of loose compliance which is visible.

Probably the most well-known instance of EC intervening in the lack of democracy issue was when they rejected the YSRCP proposal to make Jagan Mohan Reddy permanent president of the party. They said that such a step was inherently anti-democratic. Was this within its mandate?

OPR: Actually, the EC does not have that kind of mandate, but within the framework of the political party registration rules, the EC is overseeing the compliance with their Constitution and their by-laws. Now amending that is contrary to the democratic idea of periodic elections and that is the point at which the EC took shelter to reject the move.

MRM: Does it matter? Because let them make that intervention. The party re-elects the same person again, who will contest unopposed. I mean the whole thing is that what we are talking about is not the reality but what could be in the letter of the law and what can they do. But if in reality, political parties are being essentially dominated by one personality who controls the whole thing, then there is nothing that stops them from having an election with one candidate who will get selected for a post. So, it will tick the boxes, but there is absolutely no difference in practice.

In a situation where we want or think that the EC should regulate internal democracy in political parties, how can such a law be brought in?

MRM: My simple answer is that it is not needed. So, the question should not arise.

OPR: I agree with Mr. Madhavan. We should leave this kind of decision to the people who are the sovereign electorate and therefore I personally feel that one should not think of that.

Why this question arises again and again, is that the EC has made certain observations in many of the cases where parties are split.

OPR: Actually, these issues fall under the political party's symbols order, 1968, Paragraph 15. And under that, EC goes by four tests when there is a split, whether every faction has been following the party Constitution, whether they have been having the majority of the party the organisation whether they have been having the majority of the legislature wing or they are proceeding according to the by-laws.

All these four tests are applied every time starting from Sadiq Ali case. It always comes down to the legislative majority, because all other tests fail.

The only test which is amenable to the summary inquiry is the number of legislatures with the splinter group. So, whoever has the majority of a number of legislators with the splinter group gets the party symbol and the party name and that has been the case with the EC. In the text arguments are there where the arguments cover the aspects that since this group which was in command did not hold elections, did not sort of follow these by-laws, and therefore whatever orders they have passed for disqualifying are invalid all those things are just for by way of explanation.

MRM: I will just add one thing, which is that I mean, I am looking at it as a citizen, right? I mean, it is in our interest that EC has a very high credibility on whatever it does, so that we trust the process.

They need to have an objective way of making the decision and as Mr. Rawat said, if you are counting the number of legislators supporting, there is an actual number there and you can count if number A is greater than number B or is number A less than number B and make that decision. So, that is a fairly wise way of doing it without getting politically entrapped and I think they have been smart at doing that.



To listen to the full interview
Scan the code or go to the link
www.thehindu.com

NOTEBOOK

Endless tides in reporting
Maharashtra's GPS

It is a dynamic political arena marked by constant engagement, where reporting on governance, politics, and society is anything but dull

Abhinav Deshpande

Maharashtra, the land of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, is a relentless battleground of political activity. In the two years since I started reporting on the State's GPS – governance, politics, and society – there has not been a dull day. New controversies often arise before the previous ones have even begun to cool down.

The Opposition's vigorous efforts keep issues in the spotlight, while the ruling dispensation is never far behind in delivering rebuttals, whether through traditional media or a post on X.

The political landscape here is markedly different from Telangana, where I reported from 2015 to 2022. In Telangana, the K. Chandrababbar Rao-led TRS (now BRS) government dominated the narrative, leaving little room for dissent, as the Opposition was weakened by defections and had minimal representation in the Assembly. Reporting there felt like covering a monologue, with few challenges to the ruling party's agenda. The Opposition parties struggled to make their presence felt. In contrast, the Opposition MVA in the western State is vocal, challenging the government at every move.

Amid this storm, it is easy to lose sight of the bigger picture. The issues that dominate headlines one day can fade from public consciousness almost as quickly as they arise. This is not just a symptom of the State's volatile political climate, but a reflection of the evolving news cycle.

Grave matters often do not receive the follow-up they deserve. As journalists, we try to keep pace, but the flood of news can sometimes wash away our resolve to revisit stories once they are off the front page. It is a challenge to ensure that important issues are not lost in the noise. I have found myself grappling with this issue more than once. However, we often write long-form pieces on these issues,

hoping to provide the depth and context that gets lost in the rush.

One of the first controversies I covered after shifting to Maharashtra was Vedanta Foxconn's decision to open a semiconductor plant in neighbouring Gujarat instead of Maharashtra. The Opposition criticised the Eknath Shinde-led government for its perceived failure. This story dominated the headlines, and journalists were caught in a whirlwind of press conferences, statements, and counter-statements. But as with so many other issues, the noise died down. The media moved on, as did the politicians, leaving behind a trail of unanswered questions.

The latest issue where we journalists lost track of follow-up is the alleged sexual assault of two kindergarten girls in Badlapur. The streets were filled with angry voices demanding justice, and the media played its part. But then, on August 26, a giant statue of the Maratha warrior king Shivaji Maharaj collapsed. The Opposition was quick to pounce, alleging corruption in the statue's construction. The sexual assault case was suddenly overshadowed. This is a stark reminder of how quickly things can change, and how easily the media's attention can be diverted. The role of the Opposition cannot be overstated, as it keeps the government on its toes and, by extension, keeps us journalists on ours.

Amid the cacophony of daily news, some issues refuse to fade away. Whether it is the ongoing battle over reservations for the Maratha community or the perennial debate over development, these stories keep coming back, demanding attention.

We continue to distil through the noise and deliver what matters while waiting – for the next big event, twist, and revelation. This constant churn is exhausting, but it is what makes reporting on Maharashtra's GPS so rewarding.

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PICTURE OF THE WEEK

A flight to hope



Greek and Greek Cypriot nationals onboard a Hellenic Air Force C130 as they are evacuated from Lebanon, due to ongoing hostilities between Hezbollah and the Israeli forces, in Beirut, Lebanon, on Thursday. REUTERS

FROM THE ARCHIVES



FIFTY YEARS AGO OCTOBER 4, 1974

Many top smugglers
crippled by govt. drive

Madras, Oct. 3: The anti-smuggling crack-down launched by the enforcement agencies has more or less "crippled" some of the top smugglers, and they have lost their "morale" for dealing in contraband gold and other goods, according to Revenue Intelligence authorities here.

Some of the lesser known persons engaged in gold smuggling have lost their heart and expressed their desire to branch off into other

legitimate activities, these sources said.

Some of the top smugglers detained under MISA in the South are said to have had an all-India network. Recent raids on residences, godowns, etc., of persons known to be their close associates resulted in a catch of Rs. 70 lakhs worth of primary gold. These men are known to have dealt mainly in smuggled gold from Sri Lanka. The gold from Sri Lanka was mainly melted from ornaments. Some of the seized gold bore the markings "People's Bank of Sri Lanka." The gold brought from Dubai and other areas was smuggled into convenient landing places along the west coast between Kasaragod and Jamnagar and transported to key distribution points like Bangalore, Madras, Madurai, Rajahmundry and Vijayawada.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO OCTOBER 4, 1924

Government Committee.

Simla, Oct. 3: The Government of India announce through a resolution in the Gazette of India the appointment of two officers to enquire into the question of the amalgamation of the Oriya-speaking tracts. Mr. Sachidananda Sinha moved in the old Imperial Council a resolution recommending that a mixed Committee of non-officials and officials be appointed to formulate a scheme for the amalgamation of Oriya-speaking tracts at present administered or controlled by the Governments of Madras, Bengal, and the Central Provinces with the existing Orissa Division of the Province of Bihar and Orissa; and in accordance with the promise then made on behalf of the government, much information on the subject has been collected.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

The number of cases registered under the NDPS in H.P. last year

2,147 According to police data, 3,118 people, including six foreigners, were arrested in Himachal Pradesh under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act in 2023. **PH**

Amount released by the UN for Nigeria flood victims

5 in \$ million. The country's monsoon has killed more than 300 people and it has affected more than 1.2 million people in at least 31 out of its 36 States, according to the National Emergency Management Agency. **APF**

The total cost of the PM Internship scheme in 2024-25

800 in crore. On Thursday, the government rolled out an internship programme that will provide financial assistance of ₹60,000 per annum to 1 crore youth over five years. **PH**

Number of Lebanese people killed in Israel-Hezbollah crossfire

1,928 This figure includes those who have been killed since the Gaza war erupted on October 7, 2023, according to Lebanon's disaster management agency. **APF**

The loan approved to support Himachal tourism

162 in \$ million. The Asian Development Bank has approved a loan to support sustainable tourism development projects in Himachal Pradesh. **PH**

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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On SIPCOT and Tamil Nadu industries

When was the State Industries Promotion Corporation of Tamil Nadu Limited (SIPCOT) formed? Has it generated job opportunities? Where was the first ever SIPCOT industrial park established? How has it improved the State's industrial sector? What about startups?

EXPLAINER

Sangeetha Kandavel

The story so far:

In September 28, Tata Motors Group, producer of commercial and passenger vehicles, held the groundbreaking ceremony of its new, world-class production facility to manufacture cars and SUVs, at the State Industries Promotion Corporation of Tamil Nadu Limited (SIPCOT) industrial park at Panapakkam in Ranipet district, Tamil Nadu. This is Tamil Nadu's 50th SIPCOT industrial park and the 27th SIPCOT park of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) government. The Tamil Nadu government has set a target of becoming a \$1 trillion economy by 2030 and SIPCOT will play a crucial role in helping the State reach this goal.

Why was SIPCOT formed?

SIPCOT was established on March 25, 1971 with the objective to plan, develop, operate and promote industrial growth in Tamil Nadu. It was started with a vision to promote medium and large scale industries in Tamil Nadu, as the State was in the nascent stage of its industrial growth with the initial success of the MSME sector. The first industrial park was established in Ranipet in 1973, with the land extent for the first phase here being 729.79 acres. Thirumal Chemicals Pvt. Ltd (47.25 acres), Ultra Marines & Pigments Ltd. (89.40 acres) and SRP Tools Ltd (13.5 acres) were the initial firms that booked space at the first SIPCOT park.

How did SIPCOT distribute itself?

According to details provided by SIPCOT Managing Director K. Senthil Raj, in the initial years, two industrial parks were established — Ranipet and Hosur, with the former focussing on leather, chemicals and pharma industries while the latter focused on automobiles and the general engineering sector.



Quick rise: The SIPCOT industrial estate in Ranipet, Tamil Nadu. **FILE PHOTO**

Further information shared by SIPCOT shows that Kanchipuram was developed as an auto and electronics cluster, due to its proximity to the capital Chennai, and because of the presence of companies like Hyundai Motors, Yamaha, Eicher, Renault Nissan, Daimler, Foxconn, Flextronics and Samsung among others. Chengalpattu was developed as an IT cluster due to the presence of IT majors like TCS, CTS, Syntel and Hexaware to name a few and has now emerged as a data centre hub. Additionally, Hosur in Krishnagiri district was developed to have a SIPCOT park to take advantage of the human and intellectual capital of Bangalore. To promote the development of industrially backward districts, Manamadurai, Nilakotai, Pudukottai, Gangakondan etc were also developed.

Currently, Tamil Nadu has 50 SIPCOT industrial parks. Around 17 more parks

will come up in the next one year while many of the existing parks will be expanded. Mr. Senthil Raj stated that the data showed that SIPCOT has been instrumental in the establishment and growth of 3,290 industrial units with a cumulative investment of about ₹1.85 lakh crore over the past 53 years, generating over 8.20 lakh job opportunities.

What efforts is SIPCOT taking to improve industrial growth in T.N.?

Currently, SIPCOT is focusing on promoting sector specific industrial parks such as an international furniture park at Thoothukudi; a medical devices park at Oragadam; electronic manufacturing clusters at Manallur and Pillaipakkam; mega food parks at Manappara, Tindivanam and Theni; a future mobility park and a e-vehicle park at Shoolagiri and Manallur respectively. Efforts are also

being taken to provide accommodation to the workforce, with SIPCOT developing an industrial housing facility with 18,720 beds at Vallam-Vadagal. Apart from this, it has also formed a Special Purpose Vehicle called the Tamil Nadu Industrial Housing Private Limited (TNIHPL) to provide affordable and sustainable housing for industrial workers. Currently, TNIHPL is developing a 807-bedded working women's hostel in the SIPCOT Industrial Park, Siruseri.

Additionally to manage water, Tertiary Treatment Reverse Osmosis (TTRO) water is being supplied to industries located in the Kanchipuram district from the 45 MLD TTRO plant established by the Chennai Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board (CMWSSB) in Koyambedu. SIPCOT is also establishing a 20 MLD TTRO plant at Kelavarappalli to cater to the water requirements of industries located in the Hosur area.

What is SIPCOT trying to do in the startup eco-system?

SIPCOT Industrial Innovation Centres (SIIC) have been established in SIPCOT industrial parks at Hosur and Sriperumbudur at a project cost of ₹33.46 crore by availing a grant of ₹14.20 crore from the Tamil Nadu Innovation Initiatives (TANIIL) scheme under the State Planning Commission, Government of Tamil Nadu.

According to Mr. Senthil Raj, these centres are envisioned as world-class incubation centres capable of nurturing and accelerating industrial innovations and technology powered startups, boosting the growth of the high-technology sector in Tamil Nadu and further strengthening the productivity and competitiveness of the manufacturing sector. SIPCOT envisages to evaluate over 1,000 innovative ideas, over 200 prototypes and promote 30 startups' graduation till the seed investment stage. SIPCOT is also developing a state-of-the-art skill development centre in SIPCOT Industrial Park, Shoolagiri, Krishnagiri district.

THE GIST

▼ SIPCOT was established on March 25, 1971 with the objective to plan, develop, operate and promote industrial growth in Tamil Nadu.

▼ Currently, Tamil Nadu has 50 SIPCOT industrial parks. Around 17 more parks will come up in the next one year while many of the existing parks will be expanded. SIPCOT has been instrumental in the establishment and growth of 3,290 industrial units with a cumulative investment of about ₹1.85 lakh crore over the past 53 years, generating over 8.20 lakh job opportunities.

▼ SIPCOT envisages to evaluate over 1,000 innovative ideas, over 200 prototypes and promote 30 startups' graduation till the seed investment stage.

What is the status of the Swachh Bharat Mission 2.0?

What are the various health and environmental risks arising from legacy waste dumpsites?

Sreeparna Chakrabarty

The story so far:

India has more than 3,000 legacy waste dumpsites, with 2,424 of them having a waste load of more than 1,000 tonnes. The Central government launched the legacy waste management project as part of the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) 2.0 in October 2021, for a period of five years till 2026. However, more than half way through the time period, only 471 out of the 2,424, that is 19.43% of dumpsites have been completely remediated.

What are legacy waste dumpsites?

Legacy waste dumpsites are dumpsites that contain solid waste that have been collected and stored for years in an unsanitary and uncontrolled manner. Municipal solid waste generation in India is estimated to be around 1,50,000 tonnes per day, according to the State of India's Environment 2023 report. With almost no installed facility in India for handling solid

waste, the municipal corporations, municipal councils and nagar (city) panchayats have traditionally opted for creating man-made garbage hills.

These dumpsites originally developed on the outskirts of the cities. However, with the expansion of cities, these sites are now often found in the heart of cities on barren land or in landfills. According to estimates of the Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry, approximately 15,000 acres of prime real estate is buried under nearly 16 crore tonnes of legacy waste across the country.

What are the health hazards?

Legacy waste dumpsites can pose a number of health hazards for citizens. Exposure to emissions from hazardous waste can irritate the mouth and throat. Inhaling methane from landfills can cause nausea, vomiting, and loss of coordination. Ragpickers who work at landfills can develop skin allergies from years of exposure to waste. People who live near landfills may be prone to

developing tuberculosis, asthma, diabetes, depression, cholera, malaria, and other diseases. They are also a source of greenhouse gas emissions, such as methane and carbon dioxide.

What is the Swachh Bharat Mission?

The Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) or Clean India Mission is a country-wide campaign launched by the Central government on October 2, 2014 to eliminate open defecation and to create Open Defecation Free (ODF) villages. The mission aimed to achieve an "open-defecation free" India by October 2, 2019 coinciding with the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi through the construction of toilets.

In 2021, the Government launched its second edition — the five-year Swachh Bharat (Clean India) Mission-Urban 2.0 (SBM-U 2.0), committing to making all cities "garbage-free cities" by 2026, while maintaining ODF status across 4,372 Urban Local Bodies (ULBs). It also has a vision of 100% source segregation, door

to door collection and scientific management of all fractions of waste, including safe disposal in scientific landfills. The SBM 2.0 aims to remediate all legacy dumpsites and convert them into green zones. The mission has also made provisions for scientific landfills to dispose of untreated inert waste and process rejects, in order to prevent fresh dumpsites being created.

Action plans amounting to ₹3,226 crore of Central Share (CS) assistance on remediation of legacy waste dumpsites has been approved so far. An advisory has also been issued to the States/Union Territory administrations on landfill reclamation. As per financial norms of centrally sponsored schemes, State/ UT governments are required to put in a matching share from their own side, while disbursing the funds to respective ULBs.

What has been the progress so far?

According to the dashboard of the Swachh Bharat Mission website, as on September 24, out of the 2,424 dumpsites, 471 sites have been remediated, remediation in 1,226 has been approved and is on-going, and 727 sites have been untouched. As far as area is concerned, of the total 17,039.71 acres, 27 % has been reclaimed and 73% is yet to be reclaimed.

Among States, Tamil Nadu has the maximum area reclaimed from dumpsites at 837 acres (42%). Gujarat is the best performing State with 75% area (698 out of 938 acres) of landfills reclaimed.

THE GIST

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THE IDEAS PAGE

DIS/AGREE
THE BEST OF BOTH SIDES

A fortnightly column, which offers not this-versus-that, but the best of both sides, to inform the debate



CR Sasikumar

In the season of university elections, the question is: Is student politics relevant to national politics today?

Student politics is future facing

I am its product.
It shaped the role I have
played in public life ever since



LALIT PRASAD

DEMOCRACY THRIVES ON the active participation of its citizens. But a democracy without student politics is incomplete, a mere farce. I say this from my experiences — I am a product of student politics. It shaped me, my understanding of the world, and the role I have played in politics ever since. For me, student politics is not just an element of democracy — it is its lifeblood.

When young people, especially those in universities, engage with politics, they bring fresh perspectives. Their ideals are sharp and they can see society with a clarity that we, the older generation, may sometimes lack. It is this clarity and idealism that makes students capable of understanding the struggles of society and charting out the vision to take it forward.

I was born and raised in a poor, backward-class family where education was almost non-existent. My parents and ancestors were illiterate, as were most people in my village. My life could have followed the same path, but everything changed when I joined B N College at Patna University in the late 1960s. At the time, I had no idea that entering the university would shape my life in such profound ways. But it was here, under the tutelage of my guide, guru, and philosopher Jayaprakash Narayan, that I was introduced to student politics.

Through my activism on campus, I became deeply sensitive to the issues of poverty, deprivation, social inequality and economic injustice. The university had little to no representation from marginalised communities. Those from backward classes who managed to make it to university struggled — many didn't have enough to eat or a means to commute to campus, let alone focus on their studies.

This stark inequality angered me, and I knew something had to be done. My activism started with small protests — demanding free college buses, more hostels, better food in the mess. These may seem like simple issues, but for students like us, they were essential. And it was there where my politics truly began.

Fast forward to today, and I can proudly say that my party, the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), remains deeply rooted in students' politics. Our existence as a political force would be unimaginable without the foundation laid by students and their activism. And this commitment to nurturing young political leaders continues. Priyanka Bharati, Jayant Jigyasu, and Kanchana Yadav — all three have been students at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) and were recently appointed as national spokespersons of our party.

These are not random nominations. Priyanka Bharati led fierce protests against fee hikes at JNU, Delhi University, and IITs, and was even injured during these protests.

Jayant and Priyanka contested JNU's presidential elections on Chhatra RJD tickets in 2018 and 2019. Now, they are putting forth our party's vision and stand on national platforms. The youth we support have the energy and courage to challenge the status quo, and I couldn't be prouder of how they represent us.

I want to emphasise that these are not isolated examples. Afroz Alam, another bright activist from a poor background, contested the JNU presidential poll in 2023. Tejashwi Yadav, my son, is carrying forward our party's vision to nurture and support these young leaders. Even our leader, Nawal Kishore, has been instrumental in strengthening our presence at Delhi University, Jamia Millia University, and other campuses.

All of this is to highlight one simple truth: Student politics is essential to shaping not only the future of individual leaders but the future of our democracy as a whole. Democracy thrives when it is nourished by the wisdom, passion, and energy of young minds. Every era presents new challenges, and it is the youth who must rise to meet them. That is why it is so important for political parties and leaders to encourage and promote students' politics. Without this, democracy itself risks stagnation.

Today, we face a grave threat. The current government led by the BJP is doing everything in its power to destroy our education system. It is no secret that they are working to privatise educational institutions. This is a direct attack on democracy because it blocks access to education and opportunities for the majority of India's population, who come from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The RSS, the ideological parent of the BJP, is also working to infiltrate campuses with its divisive communal agenda. They are altering our history, culture, and even the Constitution itself, promoting the ideas of M S Golwalkar and V D Savarkar, figures whose views are dangerous for our democracy. Golwalkar's writings are full of venom against minorities, and Savarkar was accused of conspiring in Mahatma Gandhi's assassination.

In such a situation, it is even more urgent to promote students' politics, especially those rooted in the principles of Mahatma Gandhi, B R Ambedkar, Jayaprakash Narayan, Ram Manohar Lohia, Periyar, and Jyoti Basu. These leaders fought for an inclusive, democratic India, and it is their teachings that should guide us today. We need students to be actively involved in politics if we want to purge campuses of divisive forces.

India is a poor country, largely inhabited by farmers and labourers. But with rising educational awareness, more and more students from marginalised communities are entering universities. It is essential that political parties rooted in the nationalist spirit of Gandhiji support these students.

By supporting and promoting students' involvement in politics, we are investing in the future of our country and ensuring that our democracy remains strong, vibrant, and inclusive.

The writer is president of the Rashtriya Janata Dal

A tale of narrowing ambitions

In post-1991 India, student politics has taken a back seat. Students are caught up, not in a larger calling, but in immediate aspirations



MANISH TEWARI

THE ANSWER TO the question — "Is student politics relevant to national politics?" — necessitates traversing student politics from its evolution to organisations across decades to where it stands currently vis-à-vis national politics.

An all-India conference of student activists was convened in Karachi in March 1931, under the presidency of Jawaharlal Nehru to establish an All India Students' Federation (AISF). Over 700 delegates attended it. The objective was to mobilise young people against British imperialism.

It took five years of intensive ground work before the first conference of the AISF could be held in Lucknow in August 1936. Ironically, Nehru inaugurated the proceedings and Muhammad Ali Jinnah presided over the conference. Speaking on the occasion, Nehru administered a note of caution, "When you are trying to build up a student's federation, you cannot afford to make it narrow and shut out persons holding different views."

The sage advice was but in vain. It took less than two years for the national students' movement to splinter along religious and political lines. The Muslim Students Federation, under the patronage of Jinnah and Muhammad Iqbal, came into existence in 1937 itself.

In December 1940, at the Nagpur session of the AISF, the students' movement split on the question of what came first — the question of Indian Independence or the larger solidarity against the global struggle against fascism. It led to the formation of the National Congress Student Organisation (NCSO), also known as the All India Student Congress (AISC). The first conference was held in Patna in 1943 and Ram Sumer Shukla was elected as its first president. He was succeeded by Ravinder Verma in 1946.

After independence, at the initiative of the RSS, the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad was established in July 1949. Balraj Madhok and Yashwantrao Kulkarni were behind its inception. Its main objective was to counter communist influence in university campuses. An all-India socialist youth conference was held in Varanasi in April 1953 under the presidency of Ram Manohar Lohia. When Lohia formed his own socialist party in December 1955, a student organisation called Samajwadi Yuvan Sabha was concurrently constituted. Finally, under India Gandhi, the National Students' Union of India (NSUI), the student organisation of the Indian National Congress was established in April 1971.

It is thus evident that the doyens of the liberation struggle and the new leadership of Independent India were responsible for founding student organisations to harness the energy, creativity and potential of students for larger national purposes. Those were the decades when ideological cleavages

were sharp across the world and great debates, if not outright disagreements, animated university campuses globally. It produced leaders who went on to play prominent roles in national politics in various countries.

It was also the era of student movements and struggles, some secular, others sectarian. The Paris student movement in 1968 caught the imagination of young people globally. It represented a universal yearning for a change in status quo. It mainstreamed left-wing politics, anti-war sentiments, the thrust for civil rights and the institutionalisation of a counter culture that found resonance in the hippie movement of the 1970s.

The anti-Hindi agitation in 1965 in south India and the anti-English agitation in north India in 1967 were linguistic in character but soon gave way to more pluralistic student agitations such as the Navnirman Andolan that convulsed Gujarat in 1974 and the Sampoorna Kranti protest by Jayaprakash Narayan in 1974-75. The last major students' agitation was against the recommendations of the Mandal Commission in 1990 in north India.

The reset of the economy in 1991, coupled with the global collapse of communism as manifested by the fall of the Berlin Wall, the dissolution of the Soviet Union and political transformations in eastern Europe suddenly brought an era of ideology-driven debates — a staple of student politics — to a close.

Globalisation, the liberalisation of the Indian economy and its alignment with the Washington Consensus opened up new vistas for young people. No longer were medicine, engineering, civil service, and student politics as a stepping stone to national politics, the only road to careers that were intellectually challenging, materially satisfying or providing public visibility.

The opening up of the broadcasting space to private enterprises in 1992 and the advent of cable and satellite television provided an avenue to young people who craved for the latter. Student politics started taking a backseat, given the new opportunities that post-1991 India had to offer. The average young student now thought that unnecessary activism was but a waste of time.

Except for the ideologically blinkered far left and the bigoted far right, the space at the centre gradually became an "apolitical space" where you still had young people with political aspirations but no buoyancy in terms of a community willing to be mobilised for causes, or a larger calling that went beyond their own immediate aspirations.

As the national president of the NSUI for five years between 1988 and 1993, and as the only Asian who was elected as the president of the International Union of Students in a post-communist world in 1992, I saw these transitions — trends that have held the field for the last three-and-a-half decades now — play themselves out in front of my eyes rather rapidly.

The writer is lawyer, third-term MP and former IAS minister

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The responsibility for restoring the court's writ lies with the senior-most judges of the Supreme Court. They must prioritise their institution over their personal differences and make a sincere, concerted effort to resolve their problems."

—DAWN, PAKISTAN

The American alternative

US's International Development Finance Corporation, unlike China-backed projects, is in the long-term interest of emerging economies



AMI BERA

CHINA'S BELT AND ROAD Initiative (BRI), referred to as "Yi dai yi lu" in Chinese, has reshaped global infrastructure financing and investment. It promotes a "China-centred model" of development, which often does not set terms with regard to human rights, transparency or Western legal and market-based principles. BRI emphasises flexible, voluntary cooperation without the stringent legal frameworks and infrastructure financing that host governments might find beneficial in the short term to start projects. Such a model comes with risks for participating countries. As we navigate this landscape, the US must offer a compelling alternative that prioritises transparency, rule of law and sustainable economic models.

Projects associated with BRI have frequently led to substantial financial obligations for participating countries. These arrangements typically involve long-term repayment commitments to Beijing, creating financial dependence on the People's Republic of China (PRC or China) and giving the PRC significant leverage over host nations. This influence extends beyond loan terms and project implementation to broader political pressures China may exert on these countries.

China frequently prefers to extend or renegotiate loans rather than offer debt forgiveness, thereby maintaining or even increasing its economic and political sway over host governments. In contrast, institutions like the World Bank and IMF have shown greater willingness to forgive debt, particularly for highly indebted poor countries.

The Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka has become a focal point in discussions about China's lending practices and the stress they place on recipient countries. Here's what happened: In 2017, Sri Lanka leased a 70 per cent stake in the Hambantota Port to China Merchants Port Holdings Company Limited for 99 years in exchange for \$1.12 billion. This deal was not a debt-equity swap or debt cancellation, but a separate transaction from the original loans used to construct the port. Facing a dire financial situation, the Sri Lankan government used the \$1.12 billion to strengthen its foreign reserves and make short-term foreign debt repayments, rather than pay off PRC loans for the port's construction.

This decision reflected Sri Lanka's broader economic problems, stemming from persistent trade and budget deficits, low foreign direct investment, and sluggish export growth. While the PRC monies for the lease provided immediate financial relief, they did not address Sri Lanka's underlying economic challenges and did not provide a sustainable solution to its debt problems. Instead, the loans contributed to the transfer of a strategic Sri Lankan asset to a PRC entity, raising concerns about Sri Lanka's sovereignty and the effectiveness of such PRC deals in addressing underlying economic challenges.

The Hambantota Port, strategically located in the Indian Ocean, is part of China's

broader geopolitical strategy to secure essential trade and energy supply routes. It is one of many PRC port projects in the Indian Ocean Region including Pakistan, Bangladesh, the Maldives and Burma.

According to estimates by the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), as of September 2023, China had active investments in 101 port projects globally. Among these, 10 are strategically located around the Indo-Pacific and can potentially be used for naval purposes. The Hambantota port is one of them. The development of these ports not only enhances China's economic interests — it also extends its geopolitical influence.

To counter China's influence, the US International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) has emerged as a vital player. Last year, it committed half a billion dollars toward the development of the West Container Terminal in the Port of Colombo, which is the largest and busiest transshipment port in the Indian Ocean. Unlike China-backed lenders, the DFC supports projects by the private sector that are strategically and economically sound. Shipping and logistics are expected to contribute significantly to Sri Lanka's GDP, sustaining more than 40,000 jobs and bolstering the country's status as a global logistics centre.

The US-backed terminal will not serve as a panacea to Sri Lanka's economic and development issues. However, it is emblematic of how the US does business in countries looking to develop their infrastructure and other critical sectors — advancing America's strategic interests, as well as theirs, and promoting stability and prosperity. US investments prioritise transparency, high standards, and strategic interests, contrasting with the opaque opaque terms and potential long-term dependencies associated with some China-backed projects. Sri Lankan leaders didn't need to appeal to Washington for support or worry about falling into debt traps. Instead, the DFC offers high-quality, transparent projects and assurances of continued partnership.

But America's ability to continue countering the harmful effects of China's international lending practices is not guaranteed. Five years after it was formed, Congress needs to reauthorise the DFC next year to continue its work. This process serves as an opportunity to strengthen and expand DFC's tools, which I believe — and many of my colleagues from across the political spectrum agree — have been highly effective in promoting sustainable investments that adhere to high standards for environmental protection, human rights, and worker rights. DFC's mission is to mobilise private capital to address development challenges, advance US foreign policy, and catalyse economic growth in emerging markets. This commitment sets it apart from other development finance models. We also must send an essential message to our partners around the world: America remains committed to transparent, sustainable, and mutually beneficial development.

As we navigate the complex landscape of global infrastructure investment, the US must continue to offer a viable alternative that upholds our values, promotes economic growth, and ensures stability. By doing so, we can strengthen our strategic partnerships and contribute to a more prosperous and secure world.

The writer is a Democratic Member of the US House of Representative

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

REJECTING HUSTLE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "The slow life" (IE, October 3). Gen Z aims to adopt a deliberate, mindful pace in their professional lives instead of meeting others' expectations of modern work culture. This thought encourages individuals to prioritise well-being, balance, and sustainability over endless productivity. Sustainability in organisations thrives with quality work culture and not by glorifying long working hours. Slight flexibility can lead to remarkable accomplishments by nurturing people rather than encouraging the hustle.

Manmeet Kaur, Noida

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "The slow life" (IE, October 3). When it comes to corporate life, the older and younger generations' views are poles apart. The "70-hour work week" outlook, and the consequent burnout in the young are proof. With a constant decline in nutritional quality and an increase in mental health issues, choosing to run on the hamster wheel is a recipe for disaster. A healthy workforce can lead to more transformational outputs.

Abirami S, Chennai

AGAINST THE LAW

THIS REFERS TO the article, "Taking Sanatan out of dharma" (IE, October 3). Criticism must indeed be context-based. But the claim that the application of Sanatan Dharma's knowledge remains relevant is ironic. If everything is so virtuous in Sanatan Dharma, how has the dehumanising practice of caste system persisted? Even Hindutva icon V D Savarkar was critical of Sanatan's reluctance to abolish any custom regarded as Sanatan even if it is clearly harmful in practice.

LR Murmu, New Delhi

A REALITY CHECK

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "Atul goes to IT" (IE, October 2). It draws attention to the struggles faced by middle-class families and daily-wage workers in our country. It is heart-breaking to see that many families find it difficult to gather even Rs 17,500 for their children's education. The government often speaks of GDP growth, of becoming a developed nation by 2047. But the reality is that it is difficult for a daily wage to make ends meet, let alone save money. This is how our nation desires to progress?

Sandhya Yadav, Dherkulal

Unscapable, inevitable: Why North Bihar sees floods every year

YASHEE & SANTOSH SINGH
NEW DELHI, PATNA, OCTOBER 3

SOME 15.76 LAKH people in 17 districts have been affected by the ongoing floods in North Bihar, the state Disaster Management Department said on Thursday. North Bihar is flooded every monsoon, crops and livestock are destroyed, and people are driven from their homes, forced to survive on air-dropped food and relief materials.

What makes North Bihar so prone to flooding each year? The reason this year is extremely heavy rainfall and floods in Nepal, and the release of 6.6 lakh cubic from the Birtpur barrage on the Kosi river, there, the largest volume in almost six decades.

In general, the reason for the recurrent floods lies in the geography of North Bihar — and attempts at finding a solution that has instead made the problem worse.

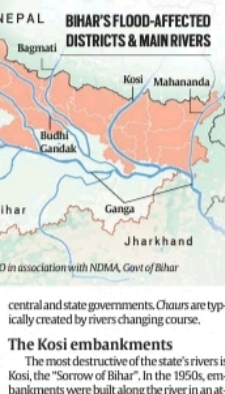
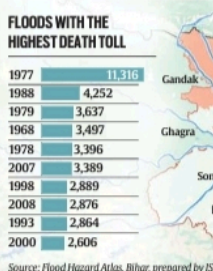
Geography of the region

Numerous snow- and rain-fed rivers criss-cross Bihar, the state which the government's

Flood Management Improvement Support Centre describes as 'India's most flood-prone' with about 76% of North Bihar's population living under the "recurrent threat of flood devastation". The Disaster Management Department identifies four kinds of floods.

(i) Flash floods that occur due to rainfall in Nepal have a short lead time (between forecast and flood) of eight hours, but the water recedes quickly; (ii) river floods have a lead time of 24 hours, but it could take more than a week for the water to recede; (iii) "drainage congestion in river confluence has a lead time of more than 24 hours, but the flood could last throughout the monsoons; (iv) there are some 'permanent water-logged areas'".

The first three types of floods are mainly due to Bihar's location immediately to the south of Nepal, from where Himalayan rivers carry massive volumes of loose soil and sediment downstream. As rains swell rivers like the Kosi, Gandak, Burhi Gandak, Bagmati, Kamla, Balan, Mahananda, and Aghwara, they overflow their banks easily. The fourth category, permanent waterlog-



tempt to contain it, and their height was raised in 1987 and 2008. These were meant to be a lasting solution; however, they have been breached repeatedly — this year, seven breaches have been reported in four districts — and have created a problem of their own.

"The embankments narrowed the river's section. The Kosi could earlier distribute its sediments; it was now put in a straitjacket. The mass of accumulated sediment has been raising the river's bed by about 5 inches annually, making it more prone to overflowing," Dinesh Kumar Mishra, convener of the NGO Barh Mukti Abhiyan, who has spent decades working in the Kosi belt, told *The Indian Express*.

"The embankments were built for a flow of 9.5 lakh cubic. But they are being breached even with lesser discharge because the river is now shallower. As many as 380 villages, home to at least 15 lakh people, lie within the embankments. They have no escape from the annual floods. The government gave them land for rehabilitation, but almost half of that was waterlogged land," Mishra said.

The Kosi embankments

The most destructive of the state's rivers is Kosi, the "Sorrow of Bihar". In the 1950s, embankments were built along the river in an at-

tempt to contain it, and their height was raised in 1987 and 2008. These were meant to be a lasting solution; however, they have been breached repeatedly — this year, seven breaches have been reported in four districts — and have created a problem of their own.

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Non-engineering solutions

A dam on the Kosi was proposed decades ago, but in the absence of an agreement with Nepal, the plan has not progressed. On September 30, Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary met Union Jai Shakti Minister C P Patel in Delhi to ask for "an additional barrage" on the river. The state is also considering building barrages at Dugma (Supaul) on the Kosi, at Avera on the Gandak, and a third barrage on the Bagmati. But engineering solutions may not be enough.

Anil Kumar Sinha, who served as the former vice-chairman of the Bihar State Disaster Management Authority from 2010 to 2016, said: "There are two ways to deal with floods — through structural solutions such as dams, embankments, etc., and through non-structural solutions, which include laws, policy, risk reduction, mitigation, etc. Since the geography of Bihar can't be changed, there is a great need to work on aspects like adequate warnings, quick reaction times, awareness and training in dealing with floods, etc."

The Flood Atlas says: "Minimising the risk and damage from floods may be a more rational way of flood management than formulating structural measures along dynamic rivers such as the Kosi."

HOW CYCLONES LEAD TO LONG-TERM INCREASES IN HUMAN MORTALITY

THE UNITED STATES' southeastern coast was rocked by Hurricane Helene over the past week. More than 200 people are confirmed dead. Hundreds are missing. But the toll of the tropical cyclone (TC) — referred to as hurricanes in North America — is likely to be much higher. A study published in the journal *Nature* on Wednesday found that these storms lead to a "robust increase in excess mortality" for almost 15 years after they strike.



A gas station in North Carolina, US, destroyed by Helene. Reuters

Calculating excess mortality

Stanford researchers Rachel Young and Solomon Hsiang tracked the effects of 501 historical storms that hit the US between 1930 and 2015. Specifically, they analysed how mortality rates within a state changed after it was hit by a TC.

"A big storm will hit, and there's all these cascades of effects where cities are rebuilding or households are displaced or social networks are broken. These cascades have serious consequences for public health," Hsiang, professor of environmental social sciences at Stanford's Doerr School of Sustainability, said.

But these effects are hard to calculate in detail. This is why the researchers chose the excess mortality method. "If mortality systematically rises after TCs, conditional on other factors, we may infer that it was plausibly caused by the TCs," they wrote. This approach allowed the researchers to study the long-term impacts of TCs on mortality, without having to model every single pathway.

Drawing from pre-existing analysis on the long-term economic impacts of TCs, the researchers decided to study changes in monthly mortality rates in states for a period of 20 years after they were hit by a TC. They took into account the effects of previous TCs, and other miscellaneous factors such as state health care systems and demographics into their analysis.

Long-term impacts

The study found that states' mortality

systematically increased for almost 172 months (14.3 years) following a TC. This excess mortality "resulted in 7000–11,000 excess deaths" per TC on average, much more than what official tallies record. Between 1930 and 2015, these excess deaths amounted to anywhere between 3.6 million to 5.2 million "extra deaths" — more than the combined fatalities caused by motor vehicle accidents, infectious diseases, and war in the same period.

"The results show deaths due to hurricanes persist at much higher rates not only for months but years after floodwaters recede and public attention moves on," Young told *The New York Times*.

Why the long-term impacts? The researchers point to a few notable factors.

First, economic loss caused by TCs may lead to families exhausting their financial resources, leaving less money available for future healthcare. Second, TCs also lead to families dispersing, and thus weaken social networks that are crucial to maintain one's health. Third, in the aftermath of TCs, government spending on healthcare may be diverted towards recovery.

These factors particularly impact infants, children, and young adults, the researchers found, resulting in a quarter of all infant deaths in the US.

PAPER CLIP
NEW RESEARCH

ing, is the result of factors including "spilling of silted sand rivers, encroachment of drainage channels, embankment-induced waterlogging, and presence of saucer-type depression locally called *Chours*", according to the Flood Hazard Atlas of Bihar, prepared by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) with the

central and state governments. *Chours* are typically created by rivers changing course.

The Kosi embankments

The most destructive of the state's rivers is Kosi, the "Sorrow of Bihar". In the 1950s, embankments were built along the river in an at-



SHUBHAJI ROY

FOR THE second time since April, Iran and Israel are on the brink of all-out war. On Tuesday, Iran fired almost 200 missiles at Israel, which has vowed to respond.

India has high stakes in the West Asian region, and the Ministry of External Affairs has said "It is important that the conflict doesn't take a wider regional dimension and we urge that all issues be addressed through dialogue and diplomacy."

Could India play a role in the crisis that goes beyond its appeal for "restraint" by "all concerned"?

Friend to both sides

New Delhi has so far not offered to play a mediatory role. However, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has spoken to both Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu over the last 10 days.

Modi met Abbas on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly on September 23, expressed "deep concern" at the humanitarian situation in Gaza, and reaffirmed India's support for the early restoration of peace and stability in the region.

In October last year, Modi had spoken to Abbas to convey condolences at the civilian deaths at Gaza's al-Ahli Hospital, and reiterated India's "long-standing principled position on the Israel-Palestine issue".

On September 30, the Prime Minister spoke to his Israeli counterpart to underline that "terrorism has no place in our world". The priorities were to "prevent regional escalation", the "safe release of all hostages", and "early restoration of peace and stability", Modi told Netanyahu.

But to play any meaningful role as a possible mediator, India will need, apart from communication channels with both sides, significant leverage with them as well.

Relationship tightrope

Six months ago, India had launched a swarm of drones, ballistic missiles, and cruise

EXPLAINED STRATEGY & FOREIGN POLICY

India and the W Asian crisis

India has high stakes in the West Asian region, and communication channels with all sides in the conflict. But could it play a meaningful role that goes beyond appealing for 'restraint' by 'all concerned'?

OTHER PLAYERS IN THE REGION

QATAR: Hugely influential

Qatar has been a consummate navigator of regional faultlines. It has engaged with all sides, given billions of dollars as aid to Palestine, hosted the leaders of Hamas, and pumped money into Gaza. Both the US and Israel have depended on Qatar for mediation efforts. Al Jazeera, which is part funded by the Qatari government, wields tremendous influence in the Arab world.



Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani with India's President Masoud Peshkian. Reuters

EGYPT: Israel's neighbour

Egypt borders both Gaza and Israel. It lost the Sinai Peninsula to Israel in the 1967 war, but recovered it in 1982 after the 1979 peace treaty. When President Mohamed Morsi was in office (2012–13), there was apprehension that Cairo might be colluding with Hamas, but under President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, it has focused strongly on countering terrorism and Islamist movements. Worried about a refugee influx from Gaza, Egypt has put forth ceasefire initiatives.

TURKEY: Key back channel

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has criticised Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu; yet, after Iran's April 13 attack on Israel, Turkey was among the key back channels between Tehran and Israel's western allies. Turkish officials are among the few who speak directly to the US, Israel, Hamas members, and Iran.

SAUDI ARABIA: Peace stake

Saudi Arabia views itself as the leader of the Islamic world and, under Prince Mohammed bin Salman, has been trying to advance connectivity initiatives in the region. However, Riyadh's relationship with Shia Iran has a complicated history. Progress on the Saudi-Israeli peace talks have been frozen for now.

US: Traditional arbiter

The US has been the traditional international mediator in the region, and its envoy Amos Hochstein has been trying to prevent escalation. "We continue to believe that a diplomatic resolution is achievable," he has said. However, there is no trust between the US and Iran, and Washington is squarely on Israel's side.

UAE: With eye on its future

The UAE, too, is keen to see stability and peace in the region in order to build on its own prosperity and to future-proof itself. Under its ruler Mohammed bin Zayed, it wants to drive the IMEC initiative. The UAE signed a normalisation agreement with Israel in 2020.

CHINA: Positioning itself

As Washington's influence and credibility wanes, Beijing has tried to cast itself as a possible mediator and peace-maker. China's attempts to forge a Saudi-Israel deal and facilitate Hamas-Fatah talks are driven by its geo-economic and geo-political interests in Iran, Saudi, and UAE. They are also an indicator of its rising global profile.

missiles at Israel in response to a suspected Israeli strike on an Iranian consular building in Damascus in which a senior Iranian general was killed.

The wave of aerial attacks on Israel this week was in line with the Iranian response

seen both in April and in January 2020, when it responded to the assassination of Quds Force chief Qasem Soleimani by firing ballistic missiles at a US military base in western Iraq.

Neither of Iran's two attacks on Israel caused much damage, probably by design.

Israel responded to the April attack with a limited strike near Isfahan a week later. But a stronger response this time could tip the region into full-blown war.

This is a major worry for India, which has strategic ties with both Israel and Iran.

The strategic relationship with Israel, especially the defence and security partnership, has grown and deepened under the Narendra Modi government. The two sides have strong shared concerns over extremism and terrorism. Israel has emerged as a major defence supplier alongside the US, France, and Russia — and New Delhi remembers that the Israelis had stepped up at its time of crisis during the Kargil war in 1999.

Iran, on the other hand, has been a major supplier of crude to India. Also, the two countries share concerns on terrorism emanating from Pakistan and Afghanistan, and on the Taliban's treatment of minorities and lack of an inclusive and representative government in Kabul. The Chabahar port is a project of great strategic and economic importance to India.

Past tensions between Israel and Iran — after, for example, the attack on an Israeli diplomat's wife, allegedly at Iran's behest, in Delhi in February 2012, and verbal jousting between the ambassadors of the two countries to India — have brought discomfiture to New Delhi. Widening of the conflict in the Middle East will make it difficult for India to stay ambivalent.

India's own stakes

An escalation of tensions could impact India with regard to its people living in the region, its economic interests, and its strategic needs.

■ There are about 18,000 Indians in Israel, about 5,000–10,000 in Iran, and some 90 lakh in the region as a whole. A wider conflict will put this huge Indian community at risk.

■ The West Asian region provides India with 80% of its oil supplies. A wider war will almost inevitably raise energy prices. Also, major Arab countries have been keen to invest in the Indian economy; those plans will likely be disrupted in the event of a wider conflict.

■ India has invested in its relationships with major Arab countries, Iran, and Israel. New Delhi sees the region as its extended neighbourhood, and has been working with all sides to push for the India-Middle East Economic corridor, which promises both strategic and economic benefits. It is keen to see that the consensus around peace is not unravelled by war.

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Why Chagos Islands matter, why UK keeps Diego Garcia after Mauritius deal

RISHIKA SINGH
NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 3

THE UK on Thursday said it would cede sovereignty of the strategically important Chagos Islands to Mauritius.

British Foreign Minister David Lammy said the deal settled the contested sovereignty of Britain's last overseas territory in Africa, while securing the long-term future of the Diego Garcia military base, jointly operated by the UK and the US.

India to work in newly-established coconut plantations. In 1814, France ceded the islands to the British.

In 1965, the UK constituted the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT), of which the Chagos Islands were a central part. Chagos was attached to Mauritius, another British colony in the Indian Ocean, for administrative purposes.

When Mauritius gained independence in 1968, Chagos remained with Britain.

The UK government gave the newly-independent country a grant of 3 million pounds over the "detachment" of the Chagos archipelago.

Strategic military base

Behind Britain retaining sovereignty over the Chagos Islands was its strategic location. In 1966, Britain signed an agreement with the US which made the BIOT available for the two countries' defence needs. Land



was acquired in 1967, and four years later, the plantation on Diego Garcia — the largest in the archipelago — was shut down.

The BIOT administration then enacted an Immigration Ordinance, which made it unlawful for a person to enter or remain in Diego Garcia without a permit, and enabled the removal of those who remained on the island. Around 2,000 civilians were subsequently kicked out — an issue that has been central to the dispute between the UK and Mauritius.

Diego Garcia became a fully operational military base in 1986. According to an article in the *Foreign Policy* magazine, "Thanks to its vital location, the island houses a military base that served as a critical node for American air operations during the Gulf War and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Post-9/11, it has also been allegedly used as a detention centre by the [US intelligence agency] CIA."

Given the ongoing tensions in West Asia, maintaining a presence in the Indian Ocean remains critical for US interests.

Diego Garcia also gives the Americans an outpost to monitor the Malacca Strait, a chokepoint for world trade that is especially vital to China.

Treaty's significance

Mauritius has long claimed that the UK illegally occupies Chagos, and has raised the matter many times in international fora.

In 2017, the UN General Assembly voted to ask the International Court of Justice to examine the legal status of the Chagos archipelago. Two years later, the UNGA adopted a resolution welcoming an ICJ advisory opinion, demanding that the United Kingdom "unconditionally withdraw its colonial administration from the area within six months".

Then ICJ President Abdulqawi Ahmed Yusuf had said the detachment of the Chagos archipelago in 1965 from Mauritius was not based on a "free and genuine expression of the people concerned".

The agreement between the UK and Mauritius strikes a balance. The UK has ceded claims over the islands, and Mauritius is now "free to implement a programme of resettlement on the islands of the Chagos

Archipelago, other than Diego Garcia". The UK has also promised to create a new trust fund "for the benefit of Chagossians".

However, the agreement allows the Diego Garcia base to remain operational for an "initial period" of 99 years. The UK will continue to exercise sovereign rights over the island.

The resolution of the dispute has broader implications. As the *Foreign Policy* article noted: "If left unresolved... the issue could drive countries such as Mauritius to seek redress with alternative partners like China."

As a nation formerly colonised by Britain, India has maintained steadfast support to Mauritius' claims over the Chagos Islands. It voted in favour of the island country at the UNGA in 1999. In recent years, India has attempted to deepen its ties with Mauritius amidst China's ever increasing assertiveness in the Indian Ocean. Earlier this year, an Indian-built airport and a jetty was inaugurated at Agalga, a two-island dependency of Mauritius in the Western Indian Ocean.



● TOWARDS VIKSIT BHARAT Union minister Jitendra Singh India 2047 requires us to transcend rigid rules and adopt a flexible, role-based approach that enhances our global competitiveness

West Asia jitters

Besides costlier oil, India's exporters fear an impact with disruption to shipping and trade

A FULL-BLOWN WAR in West Asia is in prospect following Iran's ballistic missile strike on Israel to avenge the killing of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, and its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps commander in Beirut. Israel will certainly retaliate at the time of its choosing even as it has expanded its military objectives to take on Hezbollah — the most powerful non-state actor — by invading southern Lebanon. A multi-arena conflict has opened up as the year-long war in Gaza still rages and Israel has also launched strikes against Houthi forces in Yemen. Israel's imminent attack on Iran for supporting Hezbollah, Hamas, and the Houthis has ratcheted up tensions in the region amid speculation on the likely targets of its retaliation.

Will it be a tit-for-tat response on Iran's military and airbases or its oil facilities? For a long time, Israel has eyed taking out the country's nuclear enrichment facilities in Natanz. There is no telling exactly how much global oil prices will spike upwards if the US does give a go-ahead for an Israeli strike on Tehran's oil or nuclear facilities which can turn West Asia into a ball of fire.

The prospect of costlier oil is bad news for India that imports the bulk of its energy requirements. Brent spot prices rose to \$75-plus a barrel after softening last month amid fears of weakening oil demand, especially in the world's second largest economy, China. Although they still remain lower than the average of \$82.60 a barrel from January to September, the markets are extremely jittery about the prospects of strikes on Iran's oil facilities and supply disruptions through the Red Sea and Strait of Hormuz. More consequential for India is that less than half of its supplies were sourced from West Asia through the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz through which a fifth of global oil supplies passes through daily. An Israeli strike on the facilities of the third largest Opec producer would take out 4.32 million barrels a day or 4.2% of global crude oil supplies. And if Tehran retaliates by blockading the Strait, all bets then will be off as oil prices would zoom and adversely impact the highly energy import-dependent Indian economy.

Indian exporters, too, are nervous about the escalating tensions in West Asia as they confront rising shipping costs and further disruptions to trade. Attacks on container shipments by Houthi forces in the Red Sea have been going on since last October-November and could further intensify with full-blown hostilities. The Suez Canal is the quickest way for goods to transit between Asia and Europe, accounts for 30% of all container ship traffic, and is a vital conduit for crude oil shipments. The Houthi attacks have forced our exporters to reroute their vessels around Africa via the Cape of Good Hope, which inflates costs as journeys take two weeks longer. India's exports to Israel, Jordan, and Lebanon have witnessed contractions in the first seven months of this year. As if all this weren't bad enough, exporters could also be hit by the ongoing workers' strike in the East and Gulf Coast ports of the US, India's largest trading partner. For such reasons, India's ministry of external affairs has expressed deep concern over the likelihood of a wider regional conflict and urged all parties to exercise restraint and address issues through dialogue and diplomacy.

THE GLOBAL LANDSCAPE of work is undergoing a profound transformation driven by artificial intelligence (AI) and Industry 4.0 technological advancements, shifting demographics, and evolving social and economic expectations. The World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2023 provides a view of these drivers, highlighting their impact on the way we work, where we work, and who does the work, presenting both opportunities and challenges. The thoughts outlined here build on my presentation at the Asian Development Bank Institute (ADBI), Japan, and serves as a guide to the document published by ADBI titled "The Future of Work, Artificial Intelligence, and Digital Governance: Policy Perspectives for Asia" that delves deeper into these themes and provides a road map to reflect on the future of work.

Drivers of change

The world of work is influenced by a variety of supply- and demand-side drivers. On the supply side, factors such as demographics, migration, public health, cost of living, and social trends are reshaping the availability and expectations of workers. For instance, ageing populations in many countries are leading to labour shortages, especially in care sectors, while migration patterns are shifting as people seek greater economic stability and security. The increasing cost of living is also forcing workers to reconsider wage norms and social protection, while growing recognition of work-life balance is influencing how people approach work.

On the demand side, technology is playing a pivotal role. AI and automation are taking over routine tasks, making roles that require cognitive, creative, and emotional intelligence more important. Other drivers such as cybersecurity concerns, sustainability, and geopolitics are further shaping the demand for labour force, as businesses reassess global supply chains and operational practices. Moreover, globalisation continues to create new markets,

S RAMADORA

Chairperson, Karmayogi Bharat, and former CEO and MD, Tata Consultancy Services



but at the same time, requires organisations to adapt to the diverse regional expectations and challenges.

Impact of AI

The large-scale adoption of AI and automation is reshaping production and processes becoming more agile, cost-effective, and high-yielding. These effects, along with increased consumer demand for high-value products and services, are likely to act as a catalyst for economic growth and innovation that will create higher-order jobs. For example, in industries like finance, healthcare, and logistics, AI is helping us achieve unprecedented efficiency in data analysis and decision-making, but human oversight remains crucial in areas requiring ethical judgement.

The increasing impact of technology is also leading to new work models in the form of remote work and gig economy — creating a shift towards more flexible and inclusive labour markets. However, they also raise important questions about the need for worker empowerment and the adequacy of social protection, as these new models do not come with traditional employment benefits like healthcare and retirement savings.

Competency development

In this evolving world of human productivity, competency will be the currency. As traditional roles get disrupted, workers will need to consistently upskill and reskill. Lifelong learning must be embraced as a way of life. Those who

embrace continuous learning will thrive in the future workplace. This is underscored by the Skill Disruption Index published by the Boston Consulting Group, which highlights the extent of transformation that jobs will undergo. There is an urgent need for upskilling and broadening our interdisciplinary capabilities. The workforce of the future needs to possess a mix of domain expertise, technological skills, leadership acumen, and emotional intelligence to navigate the complexities of an increasingly automated and AI-driven world. For workers in the lower end of the value chain, as is the case in the gig economy, peer learning networks and avenues for credentialing skills must be created to ensure expertise is translatable to other opportunities and long-term career growth.

Lifelong learning must be embraced as a way of life. Those who take it up will thrive in the future workplace

India's digital public infrastructure

As countries navigate these shifts in the labour market, the development and integration of digital and open-source infrastructure remains equally critical as a tool for fostering inclusive growth. In India, we are leading the way with India Stack initiatives. Our public digital platforms such as UPI are not only promoting financial inclusion but also providing a framework for innovation and entrepreneurship. The eGovt Karmayogi is another platform that aims to democratise learning and improve the competencies of public servants, enabling them to remain adaptable to face future challenges. Other nations are now adopt-

ing similar digital public infrastructure at scale and leveraging their potential to drive economic growth and social welfare.

Policy and governance

To cater to these emerging needs, the role of policymakers cannot be overstated. It is essential that governments create frameworks that support both workers and innovation. This includes devising policies that encourage learning and competency building, ensure social protection systems are in place, and foster environments where new industries can thrive. One approach that could prove effective in navigating these changes is the application of the principal-agent theory to public sector governance. It addresses the complexities of delegation and accountability and can help policymakers develop new models of governance that promote transparency, adaptability, and impact measurement. We will require robust frameworks to evaluate how well programmes, platforms, and initiatives are translating to real-world growth and impact.

An invitation to reflect and act

It is imperative that we think critically about the impact of AI and Industry 4.0 technologies, geopolitics, and other drivers of change on the work ecosystem. New work models and lifelong learning will define the path forward, and policymakers must ensure frameworks are in place to support people in this transition. India's technology leadership promises great potential for solutions, offering valuable lessons to the world.

This article is just the beginning of the conversation. For a more detailed exploration of the trends and possibilities, I encourage you to visit the ADBI website and read the policy brief that provides actionable insights for policymakers and other stakeholders to navigate the future of work in a technology-driven world.

To read the full document, please visit: shorturl.at/FxHhL

Boeing's frail finances give strikers all the power

WHILE A STRIKE by East Coast port workers is strangling the flow of goods from Maine to Texas and grabbing headlines, news of machinists at Boeing Co. about to enter their fourth week of picketing near Seattle has receded a bit into the background.

The impact from the port workers' strike will increase by the day as the damage to the economy and consumers begins to bite. That's not the case for Boeing and its workers. The effects won't be visible to the public. Delays of plane deliveries, unfortunately, are nothing new to Boeing customers. They've been grappling with a dearth of new planes for years after the grounding of the 737 MAX following two deadly crashes and the quality snags that had halted shipments of the 787.

The pressure on Boeing, though, is acute. The company is in a dire financial position, burning through billions of dollars of cash and teetering at the edge of having its credit rating cut to junk. The company has floated the idea of raising \$10 billion or more by selling shares, which wouldn't happen until the strike is resolved.

The approximately 33,000 machinists on strike know this. Time is on their side. In fact, many have been preparing for this moment for years, stuffing away savings to stick it to a company that coerced them into signing contract extensions that slowed wage gains and eliminated their defined-pension benefits. Gig-economy jobs also give the union members an outlet to earn money during the strike, as Bloomberg News' Julie Johnsson and Anna Edgerton highlighted.

The workers "seem angrier than in 2008 when the strike lasted 57 days," Cai von Rumohr, an analyst with TD Cowen, wrote in an October 1 note in which he cut his price target on Boeing stock by \$30 to \$200. This strike will hurt Boeing's revenue by more than the \$100 million a day in 2008, he said.

Boeing tried to force a best and final offer last week of a 30% raise over four years, a signing bonus, and a sweeter match to the employee 401(k) savings plan. It didn't work. The machinists lost their company-paid health benefits on October 1, but that hasn't moved the needle, either. This doesn't come as a surprise given that the first offer of a 25% pay raise was rejected by an astounding 96% of the employees who belong to the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers.

Boeing needs to reach a deal with its striking workers and crank up aircraft production. The backlog of aircraft orders is piling up. This is cash and financial relief just waiting to be unlocked. No doubt a hefty pay raise will squeeze future profit margins, but it's unlikely the company, being in such as weakened state, can outlast the determination of its workers. The machinists know they are in the strongest position ever to claw back what they felt forced to give away years ago when the company was threatening to build planes in non-union states.

Not only are Boeing's finances in a precarious position, but the planemaker's smaller suppliers will also begin to feel the squeeze. This is a supply chain that's only now beginning to heal from the sudden drop in volume during the pandemic and the loss of experienced workers whom they have struggled to replace. Meanwhile, airline customers are losing patience, giving more ammunition to rival Airbus SE to add to its lead as the largest commercial aircraft maker.

It's time for new chief executive officer Kelly Ortberg to settle this strike and begin to repair labour relations. Without buy-in from its workforce, the company can't begin to change a factory-floor culture that had eroded on safety and quality to the point where the Federal Aviation Administration had to intervene. The union ended this week urged Ortberg "to truly engage at the proposal-based level and to take the reins" of the negotiations. Ortberg should take up that offer.

Data sovereignty in the age of surveillance



K VATHIRAJAW DEY CHANDRASEKHAR

Respectively founder and researcher at the Centre for Innovation in Public Policy

India must establish a comprehensive regime that includes ownership and control to counter threats of global surveillance, mainly from the US and China

AS INDIA STRIDES towards becoming a digitally empowered society, the notion of data sovereignty becomes not just relevant, but also pivotal. We have so far conceptualised "digital" through infrastructure owned and operated by foreign entities. In light of global surveillance practices being pursued by countries where such infrastructure are created and monitored, it becomes imperative to question the constructs of data ownership, protection frameworks, and control ship of data infrastructure. We must establish a comprehensive regime that includes ownership and control to counter the threats of global surveillance, mainly from the US and China.

In April 2023, US President Joe Biden signed the Reforming Intelligence and Securing America Act, renewing Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA). The legislation authorises US firms to transfer foreign users' communication data to the American government without a warrant for national security purposes. This affects data on popular cloud platforms like AWS, Google Cloud, and Microsoft Azure — widely used by Indian businesses, individuals, and even government entities. As a result, foreign users including from India face the risk of their data being accessed by the US government without their consent or knowledge.

This underscores the urgency for a country like India to overhaul data governance. Given India's population and the rapid expansion of its digital infrastructure, it is a repository of massive quantities

of data. Establishing data sovereignty is vital for safeguarding privacy, as well as bolstering economic and national security.

Data sovereignty means that a country's data should be subject to its own laws and stored within its territorial boundaries. This concept is not only about adhering to legal norms; it represents a strategic necessity as India seeks to assert itself as a technology power. Crucially, it also acts as a bulwark to protect India's democratic principles in an increasingly connected world.

A robust data sovereignty framework can protect Indian citizens from data breaches and secure sensitive government and military operations. But sovereignty should not be conflated with mere data localisation. Simply storing data within national borders, without establishing stringent protection measures or clear ownership rights, is insufficient for guarding against external surveillance threats or domestic misuse.

India can take cues from global frameworks like the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation which grants citizens significant control over their data and sets strict regulations on companies over data access and management. It prioritises safe data handling, privacy, and algorithmic transparency, creating a foundation for digital independence while fostering innovation.

Another relevant model is the UK-US

Data Access Agreement which addresses concerns of surveillance under FISA's Section 702. The bilateral agreement, effective since October 2022, doesn't eliminate the risks of mass surveillance but provides a framework for balancing law enforcement with privacy concerns. It emphasises judicial oversight, data minimisation, and human rights safeguards, prohibiting bulk data collection. However, this approach alone is not enough for India, given the scale of its digital landscape and the complexity of its data needs.

India should consider establishing similar bilateral or multilateral agreements with other nations, such as those of the BRICS group. But for such agreements to succeed, they must be aligned with India's data protection laws. For instance, future Indian data protection laws should establish individual ownership of data, ensuring that citizens, not corporations or governments, hold primary rights over their personal data.

India's vision for true digital sovereignty requires more than regulatory steps; it demands investments in domestic infrastructure. India must develop its own data centres, cloud storage, and processing facilities. A domestically controlled digital infrastructure would also open doors to economic opportunities in high-value, tech-driven industries.

India also needs to control the physical pipelines through which data flows,

especially undersea cables. These cables carry nearly 99% of global internet traffic; yet they are mainly owned by the US-dominated G7 group. China has been aggressively expanding its stake in this space. Allegations of espionage involving Chinese ships repairing undersea cables underscore the geopolitical risks. To mitigate such dangers, India must urgently invest in its own undersea internet infrastructure. India can then safeguard its national security while ensuring resilient and uninterrupted global communication.

India's path to digital sovereignty must be multifaceted. Besides building infrastructure, it is important to nurture domestic digital platforms and ecosystems that can compete with global tech giants. This will contribute to economic growth, job creation, and innovation too. India may also consider adopting industry-specific data localisation measures. This would mean applying stricter controls on highly sensitive data, such as financial or health records, while allowing more flexibility on less sensitive information. Such stratified policies could maintain sovereignty without stifling global commerce and collaboration. Moreover, equipping Indian citizens with knowledge about data vulnerabilities will empower them to make informed decisions. Transparency and accountability must be the cornerstones of India's data policies. Judicial oversight should be mandated for surveillance, ensuring that the right to privacy is protected and citizens are informed when their data is accessed.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

UN and Israel at odds

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' calls for ceasefires in Gaza and Lebanon and an end to the deadly cycle of tit-for-tat violence in West Asia are in sync with the role the organisation that he helms is supposed to play. But Israel holds him biased in favour of the "axis of resistance". Denouncing him as a "friend of Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran",

it has taken the extreme step of declaring him a persona non grata and banning him from entering its "territory". Its open hostility towards Guterres is explicable in terms of its self-righteousness. Israel has justified its killings of Palestinians in Gaza saying it was only "mowing the grass". What West Asia sees and suffers is the demonstration of the principle of "might is right". In speaking against Israel's use of its superior military

strength for the wholesale slaughter of innocent people in Gaza and Lebanon, Guterres has shown great strength of character.

—G David Milton, Maruthanode

Delhi's AQI problem

Apologies of "hazy action plan" (FE, October 3), Delhi's air is not clean, and is a combination of vehicular and industrial emissions, construction activities, and crop residue in nearby

areas. The Delhi government has taken a few measures to tackle these but air quality has consistently worsened. A multi-pronged approach by all stakeholders from media, civil society, educational institutions, state and central government is needed.

They must come out with feasible plans to achieve sustainable results.

—Bal Govind, Noida

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