



A wake-up call

Policymakers must not make light of underwhelming growth numbers

Even the most pessimistic economic forecasters did not anticipate the sharp downturn in economic momentum reflected in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) estimates for the July-September quarter. From a five-quarter low of 6.7% in the first quarter (Q1), most independent economists expected GDP growth of 6.5% in Q2, citing slackening urban demand indicators such as moderating GST revenue growth, and weak consumer durables and non-durables sales. The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), in its October review, pegged Q2 growth at 7%, while RBI officials projected a 6.8% uptick in an article soon after. That the actual number came in at just 5.4% — the slowest since the third quarter of 2022-23 — with the Gross Value-Added (GVA) in the economy rising at a marginally better 5.6%, is, therefore, a significant shock. From a robust 8.2% GDP uptick last year, expectations of another year of 7%-plus growth in 2024-25 now appear precariously poised if not overly optimistic, with the first half clocking just 6% growth.

The RBI's MPC, which meets again this week, would certainly have to reorient its 7.2% growth forecast for the year, and may find it tougher to keep its focus on reining in inflation amid recent calls from Ministers to cut interest rates to support flailing growth impulses and investments. With inflation at a 15-month high of 6.2% in October, the RBI, which is committed to wait for a durable decline in price rise before switching gears on rates, is unlikely to accede to these calls just yet. It may, at best, unveil measures to ease tight liquidity conditions. Mint Street czars have a tough tightrope walk ahead in the face of the growth slump. North Block officials have, however, sought to downplay the recent streak of weaker economic indicators, and termed the Q2 growth print a 'one-off' number due to an urban demand slack that should dissipate in the months ahead. While rural demand is expected to perk up the economy in the second half of the year, along with a relative ramp-up in public capex that has suffered so far this year — thanks to a Q1 pause due to the general election and tepid Q2 spends amid an extended monsoon — it may be too complacent to assume that urban consumption will rebound on its own and interest rates are the only constraint for growth. Poor wage increases and persistent price rise have caught up on urban wallets, and cannot be wished away. The Centre must shed its 'all is well' approach, and ring in fiscal measures, including cuts on fuel taxes and high GST rates on some items, to ease living costs and revive demand.

New crimes, old tools

Fraudsters thrive when they do not fear prosecution; they must be put on notice

At the Conference of Director Generals of Police last weekend, Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the growing menace of cybercrime in India, particularly digital frauds and non-consensual intimate deepfakes. Unlike traditional crimes like petty theft, organised digital frauds are not merely the work of financially desperate individuals; they represent a new class of criminals equipped with a variety of tools. Vulnerable telecom infrastructure — ill-prepared for the overwhelming volume of calls and messages from malicious fraudsters — creates fertile ground for cybercrime. These criminals also employ ingenious techniques that constantly stay a step ahead of underprepared law enforcement and security systems. More troubling is the strong network of relationships these fraudsters cultivate with local police in key hotspots, which enables them to carry out their activities with a sense of impunity. The consequences of this rampant cybercrime are grave. Thousands of ordinary citizens face the constant threat of losing their life savings after a single ill-advised phone call or message. It is therefore encouraging that the highest levels of government are addressing this critical issue and pushing for action from those most equipped to combat it.

But talk alone will not solve the problem. It is crucial to pursue aggressive prosecutions with integrity, transparency, and wide publicity. The growing number of these criminals is both a threat and an opportunity: while their continued operations reflect poorly on the law enforcement and public safety apparatus, it also provides a window for significant breakthroughs in investigations and successful convictions. Holding these fraudsters accountable sends an important message — this is not a simple 'call centre job' with questionable ethics, but a serious crime that is not worth the risk. Public awareness is another powerful tool in combating cybercrime. Cyber fraudsters constantly evolve their methods and adopt new personas to deceive unsuspecting victims. Alerting the public — repeatedly, creatively, and patiently — that they are at risk of losing money to fraudsters is an essential policy intervention. A little healthy scepticism could prevent many people from falling prey to scams. As the government pushes for universal banking and greater access to digital services, it is critical that these advances do not become vulnerabilities for ordinary people. The issue of non-consensual intimate imagery is also pressing. With advances in artificial intelligence, criminals can now use deepfake technology to place ordinary individuals' faces into pornographic content, causing great harm. But it is a matter of some comfort that though these crimes are new, the tools to combat them remain familiar: a mix of awareness and preventive measures.

A focus on 'International Day of Persons with Disabilities' (December 3), on the Editorial and Opinion pages

Citizens with disabilities, making their rights real

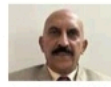
The data from the 2011 national Census of India indicate that persons with disabilities constitute 2.1% of the total population. This is a grossly underestimated figure. According to the 2019 Brief Disability Model Survey conducted by the World Health Organization across India, Tajikistan and the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the prevalence of severe disability among Indian adults is 16%. India ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on October 1, 2007 and one of the immediate measures expected out of the state parties to the convention is to ensure alignment of the national disability legislations in line with the principles of the convention. Accordingly, Parliament passed the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 (RPWD Act) that came into force on April 19, 2017 to replace the earlier Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995, which fell short of promoting a social and a human rights model of disability rights.

The role of the State Commissioner

One of the unique points of the RPWD Act in comparison to many disability legislations of the developing countries is the provision for the constitution of the office of the State Commissioners for Disabilities at the State level with a combination of review, monitoring, and quasi-judicial functions to ensure effective implementation of the disability law. According to Section 82 of the RPWD Act, the State Commissioners, for the purpose of discharging their functions under the Act, shall have the same powers of a civil court under the Civil Procedure Code 1908 while trying a suit, and every proceeding before the State Commissioner shall be a judicial proceeding within the meaning of Sections 193 and 228 of the Indian Penal Code (45 of 1860).

Despite the legislation providing far-reaching quasi-judicial powers to the State Commissioners in safeguarding the rights and fundamental freedoms of persons with disabilities, the State Commissioners in many States have fallen short of the expectations of citizens with disabilities. This dismal functioning of the office of the State Commissioners is largely due to the lax attitude on the part of the State governments to invigorate the statutory office in discharging its functions in accordance with the law. This reality has been aptly highlighted in the writ petition WPC 29329/2021, *Seema Gijri Lal vs. Union of India*, in which the delay in appointment of the state Commissioners has also been highlighted.

Among various reasons for the failure to fulfil the statutory role by the State Commissioners is the manner in which the commissioners are appointed. The RPWD Rules provide an opportunity for persons with substantial



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State Commissioners have a vital role in safeguarding the rights and fundamental freedoms of persons with disabilities, but in many States, their statutory role has fallen short of expectations

experience in law, human rights, education, social work and rehabilitation and with a non-governmental organisation background to be appointed to the position of State Commissioner. In reality, a majority of the commissioners, either independent or holding additional charge, are civil servants from the nodal ministry. According to the latest report (2021-22) of the Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities, only eight States have appointed commissioners who are not part of the mainstream civil service. Having civil servants from the nodal ministry is in conflict with the purpose of having an impartial and independent office that can exercise oversight over the executive and hold them accountable for not implementing the provisions of the disability law.

Some of the progressive States in terms of disability inclusion have appointed representatives of civil society organisations as State Commissioners and the State governments should consider appointing qualified women with disabilities as commissioners as they will be in a better position to address intersectional forms of discrimination that women and girls with disabilities in India currently experience.

The State Commissioners have a substantive role including powers to intervene *suo motu* to identify and inquire about any specific policy, provision, programme and laws that contravene the provisions of the RPWD Act and recommend appropriate corrective measures.

There are many contraventions of the RPWD Act that are highlighted by aggrieved persons with disabilities and by certain proactive organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) and the State Commissioners have not been able to intervene *suo motu* to address discriminatory policies and practices which has led to an erosion of faith in the statutory offices created under the disability law to uphold the rights of citizens with disabilities. The State Commissioners should interact consistently with persons with disabilities and their representative organisations to understand which are those policies, guidelines, executive orders that contravene the provisions of the law and initiate necessary remedial action.

The example of Karnataka

It is vital for State governments and the office of the Chief Commissioner for Disabilities to build the capacity of the State Commissioners in performing their quasi-judicial role and in functioning as a civil court. As done by the State Commissioner's office in Karnataka, collaborating with law schools and legal experts in strengthening their respective capacities could be a viable option. While some States such as Karnataka and Delhi have been able to infuse confidence among persons with disabilities to register complaints with regard to a deprivation

of their rights, it is equally important for State Commissioners to look into complaints and dispose of them expeditiously. The websites of the office of the State Commissioners should — on the dashboard — indicate the number of cases received, disposed of and those pending for action along with other vital information such as annual reports and special reports submitted to

the government on implementation of the law by the government with concrete recommendations. Mobile adalats (mobile courts), as practised years ago by the Karnataka

Commissioner's office, could be a good practice for other States to emulate in reaching out to persons with disabilities in remote areas and to look into a deprivation of their rights. Adalats were organised in the State with prior notice to persons with disabilities through the nodal disability office in the districts for aggrieved individuals or institutions to get their grievance redressed.

Often, these grievances would be resolved on the spot for persons with disabilities and their families. Designating District Magistrates as Deputy Commissioners for persons with disabilities — as done in the case of Karnataka — is a promising way to make local governance disability inclusive.

The RPWD Act enables State Commissioners to monitor the implementation of various pieces of legislation, programmes and schemes that impact persons with disabilities. To maximise the effectiveness of this critical role, the District Disability Management Review (DDMR) undertaken by the Karnataka State Commissioner's office could be one of the preferred practices for State Commissioners. The DDMR has become an inclusive governance tool for the State Commissioner in Karnataka to have sight of how development and welfare programmes and policies have been implemented by the relevant departments at the district level, and to what extent the quotas earmarked for persons with disabilities have been fulfilled.

Research as a function

One of the key functions of the State Commissioners is to undertake and promote research in the field of disability rights. This opens up opportunities for the State Commissioners to collaborate with United Nations entities which have a mandate to promote disability inclusion on the basis of the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy in undertaking research in areas such as disability inclusive social protection, disability inclusive care economy and the impact of climate change on persons with disabilities. The findings could pave the way for more inclusive policies and in advancing the rights of persons with disabilities in India.

Frontline nutrition workers foster disability inclusion

December 3 is International Day of Persons with Disabilities. It is a day dedicated to advocating the rights of people with disabilities by creating awareness and highlighting the inclusion and the needs of persons with disabilities who are among one of the most marginalised and under-represented communities in the world.

In recent years, there has been growing recognition, globally and nationally, of the significant connection between nutrition and disability. Various studies are increasingly underscoring this relationship. There are reports that illuminate the profound impact of nutritional status on overall health and well-being.

Nutrition, health and disability

Research indicates that countries with high levels of malnutrition tend to exhibit not only poorer health outcomes but also higher rates of disability among their populations. This correlation has far-reaching implications, suggesting that inadequate nutritional intake can lead to a range of health issues that contribute to disability. For instance, malnutrition may weaken the immune system, hinder physical development, and exacerbate chronic health conditions — all of which can significantly impair an individual's ability to function effectively in daily life.

As governments and health organisations strive to improve public health, addressing malnutrition becomes increasingly critical. This is not only for enhancing individual quality of life but also for reducing disability rates on a broader scale. The link between nutrition and disability underscores the need for integrated health policies to improve dietary practices and ensure access to nutritious food for vulnerable populations.

Maternal malnutrition can lead to prenatal disability, malnutrition can contribute to developmental delays and disabilities at different



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Anganwadi workers have a vital role in the early identification of children with disabilities and also serving as a referral for children and adults with disabilities

points in the life cycle — for example, vitamin A deficiency can cause blindness, and some disabilities, such as cerebral palsy and Down syndrome, can put persons at risk of nutritional deficiency. There is a real need to make nutrition services, benefits, and information more accessible to persons with disabilities.

In 2023, the Ministry of Women and Child Development introduced the 'Anganwadi Protocol for Divyang Children', a national guideline for frontline community nutrition workers in India regarding disability inclusion. Anganwadi workers are crucial as community nutrition providers, executing and manifesting India's most ambitious development programmes. They engage deeply with the communities, offering vital nutrition services and driving social and behavioural changes related to gender equality, social inclusion, nutrition, and early childhood development. The Protocol for Divyang Children equips them with comprehensive instructions for the early identification of disabilities, monitoring developmental milestones using the POSHAN Tracker, and ensuring referrals in partnership with Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers.

The experience in Haryana

The Haryana government's Department of Women and Child Development is committed to promoting disability inclusion using Mission Vatsalya and the Integrated Child Development Scheme. It has introduced the Divyang Protocol and a unique podcast initiative, 'Nahne Farishtay', to educate communities about disabilities and enhance awareness at Anganwadi centres for the early detection and inclusion of children with disabilities.

The World Food Programme (WFP) has also partnered with the Department of Women and

Child Development for a three-year intervention to transform norms around gender equality and social inclusion, including disability inclusion, by developing the capacity of Haryana's network of 25,000 'Anganwadi' workers.

As part of the collaborative programme, in a recent Needs Assessment Study for its intervention in Haryana, the WFP asked 'Anganwadi workers' across four districts about persons and children with disabilities in the local communities they serve. The study found that Anganwadi workers played an essential role in the early identification of children and referral for children and adults with disabilities. Nearly all the respondents had helped connect persons with disabilities to some form of medical and educational support, register for disability certificates, and help them avail themselves of government-provided benefits, including the National Disability Pension.

Early intervention, accessible medical therapy, and supportive services are crucial for aiding children with disabilities. Anganwadi workers play a vital role in this effort. Alongside building the capacity of Anganwadi workers on the Divyang Protocol, development actors must unite to create supportive services and infrastructure for these children. This includes establishing a group of trained specialist therapists for various disabilities, creating accessible schools and transportation, providing affordable assistive devices, and implementing information-communication systems to promote tailored nutritional well-being practices for individuals with disabilities. Community members and frontline workers can contribute by dispelling the disability stigma.

We all share the responsibility of ensuring that the nutrition and food security of persons with disabilities, particularly children, are at the centre of their rights, equal opportunity and well-being.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Lower courts and suits

One fails to understand why lower courts are admitting invidious suits when the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991 is clear on the status of places of worship as it existed in 1947. The top court should have also pulled up the trial

court for the perfidious manner in which orders were passed. It is a matter of great concern that lower courts are kowtowing to a powerful and regressive political establishment.

Manohar Alembath,
Kannur, Kerala

Merkel book

Former German Chancellor Angela Merkel has joined the list of world leaders to voice concerns over attacks on minorities in India ("In book, Merkel says she had raised concern over attacks on minorities in India with Modi", December 2), We

may expect the government to deny the charges — as it normally does — whenever there are reports of religious intolerance under its watch. The government may feel good. But the reality is very different, as is well known.

V. Padmanabhan,
Bengaluru

December 1984, a rewind

Negligence in Shopal gas still left thousands suffering. India, a proud democracy, failed to hold a corporation accountable, demonstrating how global corporate giants can act with impunity while governments turn a blind eye or even offer support.

The report, "40 years after Shopal gas tragedy, Union Carbide's toxic waste yet to be removed" (inside pages, December 2), is a stark and ugly reminder of the unfulfilled promises of justice.

Faisal Bava,
Malappuram, Kerala

Enabling a level playing field

As Harmanpreet Kaur went out to bat during the 2024 ICC Women's T20 World Cup at Sharjah, millions were glued to their screens, including Sanskriti's 86-year-old grandfather, a former player who once captained India's deaf cricket team. While he always marvels at the action on the field, something else caught his attention this time: a sign language interpreter at the corner of the screen, translating every nuance of the game. For the first time, he could follow the commentary and post-match speeches without relying on us. Earlier this year, on Global Accessibility Awareness Day, Star Sports and Disney+Hotstar incorporated features that made live cricket accessible to India's 63 million hearing impaired and five million visually impaired citizens. Finally, the sport Sanskriti's grandfather loved was truly within reach.

As we approach the 20th anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2026, we must strive for better implementation of the Convention at the national level, particularly through the recognition of the linguistic human rights of hearing impaired people. This is crucial because, for most Indians, cricket is more than just a sport; it cultivates a sense of national belonging. Yet, this camaraderie unintentionally leaves many behind, especially the 90 million persons with disabilities.

A sense of isolation

Despite progressive endeavours, such as the Accessible India Campaign and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, glaring gaps remain in the lived experiences of people with disabilities. They feel isolated not because of their condition, but because of social barriers. The world is unfortunately designed for able-bodied people and the exclusion of persons with disabilities persists in the way buildings, sidewalks, stadiums,



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While ongoing state efforts towards inclusivity in the education and health sectors are relevant, the private entertainment sector also requires attention

movie theatres, seating areas, and even washrooms are built. Legal mandates such as ramps and tactile paving are either absent or are merely tokenistic gestures.

The same accessibility can be seen in cricketing infrastructure too, whether in stadiums or on live broadcasts. While ongoing state efforts towards inclusivity in the education and health sectors are relevant, the private entertainment sector also requires attention. Persons with disabilities are not just citizens with capacity-building requirements; they are also individuals with the need to explore recreational avenues. That this has not been recognised by entertainment providers begs the question of whether our collective idea of leisure is inherently ableist. In theatres, where cricket matches are increasingly being screened, we rarely pause to consider access for assistive devices for visually impaired people. This highlights the need to integrate accessibility into popular culture so that every person can reclaim their right to leisure.

However, enabling people to exercise their right to leisure does not end with making infrastructure accessible; it also demands showcasing inclusive stories in popular entertainment. Films such as *Margarita with a Straw* (2014) and *Srikanth* (2024) led great depth and sensitivity to the representation of disability in cinema. Such films challenge the public's unidimensional perspective on disability, while also making persons with disabilities feel seen and heard. They help shed light on the state of accessibility, prompting slow but steady public shifts towards making future entertainment infrastructure more inclusive.

Steps in the right direction

The government is also increasingly aware of the intersection between

entertainment and inclusivity. A recent ruling by a Supreme Court bench, headed by former Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud, stated that stereotyping differently abled persons in visual media and films perpetuates discrimination. The Court said that creators ought to provide an accurate representation of disabilities rather than mocking them. This is a step in the right direction.

Private players are also widening the scope for accessibility in subtle ways. We now have subtitles and audio descriptions on OTT platforms. These measures are convenient for everyone, including able-bodied persons, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. As technology continues to permeate our society, especially with the rise of Artificial Intelligence, we may soon see many more such measures.

Building disability friendly ecosystems is no longer about philanthropic leanings. Globally, the total spending power of 1 billion persons with disabilities, including their family and friends who are likely to make accessibility-based choices, is estimated at \$13 trillion, an untapped opportunity. Investing in one's business to serve potential consumers and to build million-dollar revenues in the process is a strategic decision. These endeavours signal the recognition of individuals with disabilities as valued consumers and as crucial contributors to our economy.

Accessibility initiatives undertaken by different platforms in recent times offer a glimpse of what the future can be — a world where persons with disabilities are active participants in the entertainment industry. These efforts redefine the identities of persons with disabilities and give them both respect and a sense of belonging. This shift reminds us that a true community leaves no one behind.

Breaking barriers with the help of tech

ICMR has been unlocking opportunities through assistive technology innovations

Rajiv Bahl

In this International Day of Persons with Disabilities, we celebrate the strength, determination, and boundless potential of individuals who constantly push the boundaries of what is possible. It is a moment to reflect on our collective responsibility to build a world where everyone can thrive, regardless of their ability.

This year, India's Paralympians made history at the 2024 Summer Paralympic Games by bringing home 29 medals. Sheetal Devi with her impeccable precision in archery, Sumit Antil with his extraordinary javelin throws, Sharad Kumar with his triumph in high jump, and many others exemplified excellence and resilience.

While the medals are a result of their determination and talent, we must also acknowledge the role that assistive technology (AT) plays in enabling such success. From advanced prosthetics to precision tools, AT provides the support that athletes need to push past boundaries. The journeys of these sportspersons symbolise the powerful synergy between human resilience and technological advancement.

AT is not just a game-changer in sports; it also empowers individuals to shine in education, employment, and other walks of life. However, the World Health Organization reports that globally, 90% of persons with disabilities lack access to AT. While India has done tremendous work to close the gap, there is an increasing need for such technology given the rising incidence of non-communicable diseases and injuries. Universal access to such technology must become a cornerstone of



healthcare systems if we want true inclusivity.

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has been unlocking new opportunities for millions through AT innovations. Recently recognised by the United Nations for its pioneering work, the ICMR has developed life-changing devices such as SmartCane, a mobility aid for the visually impaired, and TextCread, an affordable digital text reader. Created in collaboration with IIT Delhi, these empower individuals to live with greater independence and dignity.

To bridge the gap between innovation and accessibility, ICMR has launched the National List of Essential Assistive Products, standardising and improving access to AT across India. Complemented by awareness efforts such as the public launch of assistive devices at IIT Delhi's National Centre for Assistive Health Technologies, these initiatives foster empowerment and dignity for persons with disabilities.

The journey from idea to implementation is often challenging, with many promising innovations struggling to secure funding. I once met a dedicated group of educators who had developed an interactive learning app for students with learning disabilities. Despite their passion and

vision, they faced significant challenges in securing the funding to bring their idea to life. Fortunately, programmes such as the BIRAC-Social Alpha Quest for Assistive Technologies and the Atvaran India accelerator play a vital role by supporting startups focused on AT solutions. These initiatives not only provide funding but also offer mentorship to help refine and bring innovative ideas to the market. They ensure that financial constraints do not stand in the way of progress.

The possibilities for AT are immense. New frontiers such as Artificial Intelligence and other emerging technologies offer opportunities to create smarter, more adaptive solutions that cater to diverse needs. Moving beyond a one-size-fits-all approach, India is investing in customised, user-centric designs that empower individuals and communities alike. As we stride towards our vision of Viksit Bharat 2047, inclusivity and empowerment must guide our development agenda. Integrating rehabilitation into our health systems will not only enhance support for individuals with disabilities but also transform how they are perceived and valued.

The medals won by India's Paralympians show how athletic excellence can be assisted by the transformative power of science. The reminder of the science behind the medals and of the possibilities it offers. They inspire us to build a future where every person has the tools to achieve their dreams.

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Joy, fear and anger the BJP and INC's digital playbook

Decoding the emotional strategies shaping voter engagement in the digital age of Indian elections

DATA POINT

Abhishek Sharma
Vandita Gupta

Social media platforms have been transformed into political battlegrounds, where the battle for the national and Assembly elections is not only fought in rallies and speeches but also through the emotions and grammar of social media posts. Though the role of all social media platforms such as X and Instagram in shaping voters' decisions is still being debated, several studies have suggested a positive link between the use of Meta (formerly Facebook) for political campaigning and electoral victory. To examine the currency of political communication on social media, i.e., emotions, we examined the captions of the social media posts of the BJP and the Congress (INC) in the Haryana and Maharashtra Assembly elections in 2024. This study analyses the emotions and keywords in the captions of posts in the State-specific pages of both parties on Meta. The captions of social media posts are a clear highlight of their key messaging. The captions of 292 posts by the INC and 705 posts by the BJP from their Haryana pages, and the captions of 647 posts of the INC and 508 posts of the BJP from their Maharashtra pages, posted over a 20-day period (which ended on the day of polls in each State), have been examined. The analysis involved manually scraping Facebook posts followed by emotion classification using Hugging Face's Transformers library with the pre-trained model. To ensure accuracy, the results were manually cross-checked before further analysis.

Both parties strategically evoked and utilised various emotions through their posts on Meta. The captions of 2,152 posts across both parties and States were analysed for seven distinct types of emotions (Table 1). Posts that did

not convey any emotion were classified as neutral. Neutral posts, primarily routine updates, were most prominent for the BJP in Haryana, at 43%. Joyful posts and anger featured moderately, while fear was at 9%. In Maharashtra, neutral posts dropped significantly, while joyful posts increased by 9%, signalling a focus on achievements. Anger rose slightly by 4%, and fear doubled to 18%, indicating a more emotionally charged and confrontational strategy (Table 1).

For the INC, neutral posts and joyful posts dominated in Haryana, with anger at 15% and fear relatively low. In Maharashtra, joyful posts saw a sharp 12% decline, while anger rose to 21% and fear increased by 6%. This shift highlights a stronger emphasis on criticising the BJP and alarming voters (Table 1).

Overall, the BJP adopted a more emotionally charged strategy in Maharashtra, while the INC balanced its tone in Haryana but became more combative in Maharashtra, highlighting strategy in each regional political landscape. For instance, the BJP used terms such as 'jihad', 'Naxals' and 'Hindutva' in Maharashtra while these were noticeably absent in their Haryana campaign. This highlights the communal and polarising rhetoric that the BJP employed in Maharashtra, while in Haryana, the party's focus was on 'farmers' and 'women'. To examine how the parties used three emotions — fear, anger, and joy — we analysed the caption keywords (Table 2). For fear, the BJP in Maharashtra evoked women's issues and often evoked concerns about 'vote jihad' while in Haryana, it emphasised Dalit issues, youth and development. The INC relied on references to the Constitution, in Maharashtra, while in Haryana, it focused on the youth and unemployment. Under anger, the BJP highlighted farmers and Dalit issues in Haryana, while in Maharashtra, it leaned on women and development. The INC invoked an-

ger through women and farmers issues in Maharashtra whereas the focus remained on Dalit and farmers in Haryana. Joy was primarily conveyed by the BJP through a focus on farmers in Maharashtra, while in Haryana, development and women were dominant. The INC laid emphasis on the youth in Haryana, and youth and farmers in Maharashtra to underscore joy.

It is also essential to examine how these emotions were perceived by those on the other side, as this might ultimately influence and shape the narrative. To gauge the potential impact, average engagement was calculated by adding up total likes and shares on posts that conveyed a particular emotion. The data highlight sharp differences in emotional engagement across parties and States. In Haryana, the INC's posts expressing sadness had the highest engagement, while the BJP's posts on surprise performed exceptionally well. In Maharashtra, the BJP led across all emotions, with joy, fear, and anger receiving significantly higher engagement compared to the INC. Notably, the INC's emotional posts in Haryana generally outperformed those in Maharashtra, while the BJP's emotional strategy in Maharashtra proved more effective, especially in driving impressions for joy, fear, and anger (Table 3).

The likes and shares today are often precursors to votes tomorrow. By analysing these digital footprints in over 2,000 social media posts, we uncovered the tactical use of emotions to drive engagement and influence voter sentiment. This shows how social media has transformed not only how elections are being fought but also how voters are being emotionally engaged and mobilised.

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Digital emotions

The tables are based on a study that analyses the emotions and keywords in the captions of posts in Meta by two major parties across two State Assembly elections



Table 1: Emotions in posts of the BJP and INC on Meta. Figures show % of posts

Party	State	Neutral	Anger	Joy	Fear	Disgust	Sadness	Surprise
BJP	Haryana	43	12	26	9	7	2	1
	Maha.	27	16	35	18	1	2	1
INC	Haryana	36	15	30	8	6	4	1
	Maha.	42	21	18	14	3	1	1

Maha. = Maharashtra

Table 2: Percentage of keywords associated with different emotions in posts

Party	Fear		Anger		Joy	
	Women	Haryana	Maha.	Haryana	Maha.	Haryana
BJP	Women (26%)	Youth (22%)	Women (29%)	Farmers (38%)	Farmers (37%)	Development (42%)
	Progress (20%)	Development (22%)	Development (21%)	Women (12%)	Development (22%)	Women (23%)
	Jihad (17%)	Dalit (29%)	Constitution (17%)	Dalit (23%)	Women (27%)	Farmers (15%)
	Constitution (11%)	Farmers (11%)	Progress (6%)	Youth (10%)	Progress (11%)	Youth (12%)
	Farmers (6%)	Women (9%)	Dalit (9%)	Development (9%)	Hindutva (2%)	Dalit (4%)
	Constitution (57%)	Youth (50%)	Women (34%)	Dalit (22%)	Youth (24%)	Youth (23%)
INC	Women (16%)	Unemployment (20%)	Farmers (27%)	Farmers (19%)	Farmers (20%)	Women (18%)
	Farmers (11%)	Dalit (10%)	Inflation (15%)	Youth (16%)	Constitution (16%)	Progress (15%)
	Hindutva (6%)	Inflation (10%)	Constitution (12%)	Progress (12%)	Women (15%)	Farmers (12%)
	Inflation (9%)	Constitution (10%)	Youth (4%)	Inflation (9%)	Progress (9%)	Development (9%)

Table 3: Average engagement across emotions in posts

Party	State	Sadness	Joy	Neutral	Fear	Anger	Disgust	Surprise
BJP	Haryana	434	296	260	301	327	444	595
	Maha.	1218	3781	3611	3259	3232	3074	1218
INC	Haryana	1561	93	111	882	441	82	54
	Maha.	366	294	117	165	178	226	588

FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu.

FIFTY YEARS AGO DECEMBER 3, 1974

Lok Sabha told of accord on Cauvery waters

New Delhi, Dec. 2: The Union Deputy Minister for Agriculture and Irrigation, Mr. K.N. Singh, informed the Lok Sabha today that a consensus was reached at the recent conference of Chief Ministers of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala on the setting up of the Cauvery Valley Authority to regulate supplies from the Cauvery and also monitor schemes for effecting savings and allocation of waters so agreed amongst the various States on an agreed basis. A broad consensus also emerged regarding the quantum of water which can be saved and the manner in which it may be apportioned, he added.

The Deputy Minister did not give any further details but according to the draft agreement which is under study by the State Governments, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka have agreed to effect a saving of 100 tmc ft. and 25 tmc ft. respectively from their present use, in a phased manner over a period of 15 years.

The 125 tmc ft. thus saved will, according to the draft agreement, be apportioned on the following basis: 2 tmc ft. each for the three States to meet industrial and domestic water supply needs and out of the balance 119 tmc ft. Tamil Nadu will get 2 tmc ft., Karnataka 85 tmc ft. and Kerala 32 tmc ft.

The present use has been assessed as 489 tmc ft. in Tamil Nadu, 177 tmc ft. in Karnataka and 5 tmc ft. in Kerala. The quantity of water surplus to the actual needs, based on the present use, in good years and deficit, in lean years will be shared pro-rata of their present use among the three States.

The proposed Cauvery Valley Authority will collect data on availability of water at various points and regulate the available supplies among the three States in such a way as to ensure most equitable distribution of waters without adversely affecting the needs of existing ayacuts.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO DECEMBER 3, 1924

Mail steamers

Bombay, Dec. 2: The Anchor Line "Olympia" sailed for Liverpool from Bombay on the 28th ultimo. P. and O. Mail Steamer "Naldara" with mails from Bombay of the 22nd arrived Port Said at 9 p.m. on the 30th ultimo and left there at 1 a.m. the following day. Ellerman's City and Hall Line Steamer "City of Manchester" is due in Bombay on the 11th December.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Number of migrants arrested at the U.S. borders

47,700 The number of migrants caught illegally crossing the U.S. borders with Mexico and Canada fell in November, part of a months-long trend that undercuts Donald Trump's claim that illegal immigration is out of control. *Reuters*

The lawyers covered under CM Advocates Welfare Scheme

31,000 The AAP government extended its ₹10 lakh health insurance coverage to 3,330 new lawyers under Chief Minister Advokates Welfare Scheme. The government is providing health insurance to over 27,000 lawyers in Delhi. *PTI*

Number of days of judicial remand for Imran Khan

14 An anti-terrorism court on Monday sent former Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan on a 14-day judicial remand in connection with seven cases related to the recent protests by his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party. Khan was presented before the anti-terrorism court judge at Adiala jail. *PTI*

Individuals arrested in Shimla under the NDPS Act so far

557 Till November this year, the Shimla police had arrested 557 individuals in 237 cases under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985. This includes 21 females, 142 interstate drug operatives, and 35 Nepalese nationals. *PTI*

The people killed in a football match stampede in Guinea

56 At least 56 people were killed in "deadly stampedes" at a football match in Guinea's second-largest city of N'Zerekore. Protests of dissatisfaction with the referee's decisions led to stone-throwing by supporters. *AP*

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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India's 'One Nation, One Subscription' plan

Is the global research ecosystem increasingly embracing open access publishing away from subscription-based models? What is an article processing charge? Do researchers own the copyrights of their work after it has been published in a journal? What are open access repositories?

EXPLAINER

Moumita Koley

The story so far:

The Union Cabinet approved the Indian government's 'One Nation, One Subscription' (ONOS) scheme on November 25. The ONOS promises to provide equitable access to scholarly journals in all public institutions.

What does the ONOS entail?

First mooted around 2018-2019, the scheme's ambitious rollout comes with a substantial financial outlay of ₹6,000 crore over three years (2025-2027), to be paid to 30 major international journal publishers. For perspective, the Indian public and its academic institutions collectively spend around ₹1,500 crore every year on journal subscriptions. This is a rough estimate and probably includes the cost of subscription to databases as well; if so, the current total public expense to access journals will be well lower than ₹2,000 crore per year.

At the outset, ONOS's promise to offer equitable access to research articles, irrespective of an institution's prestige or financial capacity, which seems like a step towards democratising knowledge. But a closer examination reveals complexities that call for deeper analysis.

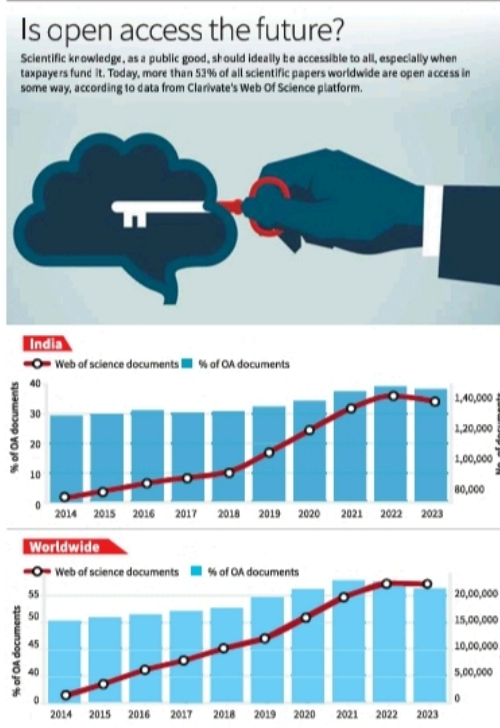
Is ONOS swimming against the tide?

The central question is: why is India investing heavily in a subscription-based model at a time when the global research ecosystem is increasingly embracing Open-Access (OA) publishing?

In the subscription model, a journal receives manuscripts from scientists (about their studies, etc.), evaluates them through peer review, and accepts (or rejects) them. Once a paper is accepted, the journal publishes it and makes money by charging people and institutions to access it. OA refers to papers that are published to be freely accessible. There are different kinds of OA. A common type is called gold OA, where the journal makes money by charging authors an article processing charge (APC) to publish papers in the journal. The APC for a single paper has been known to be thousands of dollars. For example, *Nature Communications* charges \$6,790 per paper. Scientific knowledge, as a public good, should ideally be accessible to all, especially when taxpayers fund it. The COVID-19 pandemic showed why it is important to have immediate and unrestricted access to research, not just for scientists but also for the people at large: to combat misinformation and drive informed decision-making.

Today, more than 53% of all scientific papers worldwide are open access in some way, according to data from Clarivate's Web Of Science platform. This is a significant increase since 2018-2019, when ONOS was first conceptualised, and raises questions about ONOS's financial prudence. If more than half of the research articles are freely accessible, should India not be paying significantly less for subscriptions than before? ONOS risks draining taxpayer money to achieve an obsolete goal.

Some international developments further complicate the picture. The U.S. Office of Science and Technology Policy has mandated that from 2026, all publicly funded research articles must be freely accessible without any delay. Similarly, Horizon Europe, the European Union's flagship funding program, requires peer-reviewed publications resulting from



Source: Web of Science* The data only covers science, technology, engineering, and mathematics papers.

its funding be made freely available online. Considering these moves, in another year a significant fraction of research produced worldwide is likely to be freely accessible to everyone.

This timeline raises questions about ONOS's relevance beyond 2025.

What are the challenges of global scholarly publishing?

The global scholarly publishing system is dominated by a handful of commercial publishers based in Western countries, and they have long been criticised for excessive subscription fees, inefficiencies resulting in delays in publishing articles, and resistance to innovation.

The scholarly publishing industry is built on publicly funded research. Researchers generate new knowledge, write their findings, and perform peer reviews – all without direct compensation from publishers. In the subscription model, these publishers charge exorbitant fees for access, creating a situation where public institutions must pay to access work they have already supported. Publisher profit margins often exceed 30%, revealing the exploitation implicit to scholarly publishing systems.

Even the shift towards OA has been dominated by gold OA and its high APCs. Many prominent journals in a few disciplines, such as biological science, have transitioned to become fully OA. Indian researchers wishing to publish in these journals will have to pay APCs since the allocation for ONOS doesn't provide for this fee. Moreover, most subscription journals are now hybrid, so researchers – especially from the U.S. and the EU – are

paying APCs to publish their articles to be OA in these journals.

India, with its immense pool of talent and resources, has the potential to reimagine this publishing ecosystem, fostering innovation in the workflow. Especially when most of the backend work in the publishing industry is outsourced to India, the infrastructure and knowhow definitely exist in the national ecosystem. But ONOS risks entrenching the status quo by reinforcing reliance on Western publishers.

What about copyright transfers?

Another significant issue with the subscription model is the need for researchers to surrender their copyrights to publishers. This allows publishers to use their work without considering the authors' rights or consent. A recent controversy involving *Taylor & Francis* (T&F) and Microsoft exemplifies the extent of this problem. In early 2024, T&F had signed a deal allowing Microsoft to use its journal content to train artificial intelligence (AI) models. Since authors don't hold the copyright of their work, there is no need for permission from authors – yet they objected because the use of their work to train AI models was going unpaid. There is an urgent need for policies that protect researchers' intellectual property.

There are ways to address copyright violation concerns. Harvard University pioneered a policy in 2008 that granted the university a non-exclusive, irrevocable right to disseminate the work of university researchers. Researchers retained the right to self-archive their

work in OA repositories. Many institutes like the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the University of Oxford followed suit. ONOS has the opportunity to emulate these models by incorporating a nationwide 'rights retention' policy, enabling Indian researchers to deposit their work in institutional repositories immediately after publication – a practice known as green open access.

India's own 2014 Open Access Policy requires researchers funded by the Departments of Biotechnology and of Science & Technology to make their work openly accessible – but its implementation has been lacklustre. The ONOS could have been the ideal platform to enforce this mandate, ensuring Indian research becomes globally accessible through open repositories immediately after publication.

Is digital content preserved?

Another issue is the long-term preservation of research articles, now that almost all major journals are published online. A recent study in the *Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication* reported that 28% of articles with Data Object Identifiers (DOIs) – unique IDs to identify published papers – aren't preserved, exposing gaps in current practices. The discontinuation of *Heterocycles*, a journal published by the Japan Institute of Heterocyclic Chemistry, in 2023 left around 17,000 articles inaccessible, highlighting the risks of relying solely on publishers to preserve scientific knowledge. In this case access was eventually restored, but the delay illustrates the need for solutions like self-archiving through green OA.

Is self-reliance possible in publishing?

In an era where self-reliance is a national priority, it has been overlooked in scholarly publishing. While Indian researchers may continue publishing in journals like *Nature*, *Science*, *Cell*, etc., significant potential exists to elevate Indian journals to world-class standards. India has the resources and expertise to build a robust indigenous publishing ecosystem. Preprinting and data sharing should also be considered as an integral part of the publishing workflow (preprinting refers to a paper being published online before it has been peer-reviewed). By investing in infrastructure, editorial processes, and global visibility for Indian journals, the country can reduce its dependence on Western publishers and attract high-quality submissions from across the world. This is not just about the money being drained from our ecosystem; it's also about establishing India as a leader in science and innovation.

What could ONOS have done?

ONOS can be lauded for its ambition to democratise research access, but it should have addressed deeper structural issues plaguing scholarly publishing. There should have been parallel efforts to allow authors to retain copyright, implement OA through institutional repositories, and, importantly, improve self-reliance in scholarly publishing.

Given the allocation ONOS has received from the Indian government, it certainly had the potential to set a precedent for equitable and innovative publishing by addressing all the issues in parallel – yet it chose to overlook them. Without addressing these challenges, ONOS risks becoming a costly short-term fix. It is time to re-evaluate whether this initiative is a step forward or an expensive detour. Moumita Koley is a senior research analyst at Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru.

THE GIST

In the subscription model, a journal receives manuscripts from scientists (about their studies, etc.), evaluates them through peer review, and accepts (or rejects) them. Once a paper is accepted, the journal publishes it and makes money by charging people and institutions to access it.

Open Access (OA) refers to papers that are published to be freely accessible. There are different kinds of OA. A common type is called gold OA, where the journal makes money by charging authors an article processing charge (APC) to publish papers in the journal. The APC for a single paper has been known to be thousands of dollars. For example, *Nature Communications* charges \$6,790 per paper.

ONOS can be lauded for its ambition to democratise research access, but it should have addressed deeper structural issues plaguing scholarly publishing. There should have been parallel efforts to allow authors to retain copyright, implement OA through institutional repositories, and, most importantly, improved self-reliance in scholarly publishing.

KEYWORD



ISTOCKPHOTO

Proudhon's theory of mutualism: a critique of capitalism and authoritarianism

Mutualism is seen as a form of libertarian socialism, balancing individual freedom with collective well-being. It offers a radical alternative to both capitalism and state socialism, promoting voluntary cooperation and mutual respect

Rebecca Rose Varghese

Mutualism is an economic and social theory that emphasises voluntary cooperation, reciprocity, and the fair exchange of goods and services. It advocates for a society where individuals and communities engage in cooperative ownership, decentralising and collectively managing productive resources like land or tools for the benefit of all. Such systems would be free from central authority and capitalist exploitation.

While property itself is not inherently exploitative in this theory, ownership of tools or land is acceptable, provided it does not lead to exploitation of others. Unlike capitalism, which profits from labour exploitation, mutualism envisions a system where individuals and communities own resources for personal and collective benefit. It also promotes the idea of workers controlling the means of production through cooperatives or other voluntary associations, ensuring that production is driven by need, not profit. This model seeks to eliminate hierarchical power structures and promote equality and fairness in economic relations.

Origins of the theory
The term "mutualism" was coined by French philosopher Pierre-Joseph Proudhon in the mid-19th century as part of his broader critique of capitalism and authoritarianism. While Proudhon is often remembered for his declaration, "Property is theft!" in his seminal work *What is Property?* (1840), his philosophy was more complex. Mutualism was not a call for the outright abolition of property but for its reimagining into a system that serves collective well-being and fairness.

Proudhon was influenced by a secret society of weavers, known as the 'Mutualists', who he encountered during his time in Lyon in 1843. These workers advocated for worker-led cooperative production, envisioning a society where factories and resources could be run by associations of workers. They believed in transforming society through peaceful

economic action rather than violent revolution, challenging the centralised political traditions of Jacobinism. Deeply inspired by their ideas, Proudhon adopted the term "mutualism" as a tribute to these working-class visionaries. His adaptation of their ideals sought to build a decentralised society where cooperation and reciprocity replaced exploitation and domination.

Mutualism and property
Proudhon's approach to property is central to mutualist philosophy. While he condemned capitalist property for enabling exploitation and monopolisation, he did not call for the complete elimination of ownership. Instead, he distinguished between "property," which allowed control over others, and "possession," where individuals could use resources for personal benefit without infringing on others' freedoms. This distinction is crucial to understanding mutualism, as it emphasises a form of ownership based on usage rather than accumulation and profit.

Mutualism rejected property rights imposed by the state that perpetuated inequality and exploitation. It advocated for a decentralised system of voluntary and equitable exchanges rooted in reciprocity. Mechanisms like worker cooperatives and shared resources were central to aligning ownership with fairness and collective well-being. By balancing individual freedom with collective solidarity, Proudhon's theory sought to challenge the entrenched hierarchies of both capitalism and the state.

Mutualism and anarchism
Rejecting state-enforced property rights, mutualism also connects closely with anarchism, particularly in the debate between individualist and social anarchism. Individual anarchists emphasise personal autonomy and freedom, focusing on the liberation of the individual from state control, while social anarchists advocate for the collective management of resources and the

organisation of society to promote equality and fairness. Proudhon's work occupies a unique space between these two schools of thought.

While some early anarchists saw mutualism as a form of individualist anarchism, emphasising personal freedom and the right to possess one's tools and land, others interpreted it as a more socialist form of anarchism, in which mutual cooperation and the collective management of resources were key. The tension between these interpretations arose from Proudhon's view that the state, by its very nature, was coercive and counterproductive to the freedom of the individual. However, Proudhon was not opposed to all forms of collective organisation. He argued that a mutualist society could be organised without a state, based on cooperative principles where people freely enter into contracts and mutual exchanges, thus blending both individual freedom and collective responsibility.

The collective and the individual

The emphasis on cooperative associations, mutual credit systems, and workers' control over production demonstrates the connection between mutualism and the collective. These ideas aim to foster economic and social environments based on mutual aid and cooperation, rather than competition and exploitation. Mutualism is also inherently tied to the human need for cooperation. By organising society and the economy on the basis of shared interests and reciprocity, mutualism seeks to build a society where individuals are free to pursue their own interests while maintaining a sense of community and mutual respect.

In *General Labour History of Africa: Workers, Employers and Governments, 20th-21st Centuries*, Stefano Bellucci and Andreas Eckert discuss how traditional African societies embodied mutualistic principles. In these communities, communal land ownership and collective labour were the norms, with resources shared and production aimed at the collective good. This reflects mutualism's

focus on reciprocity and equitable distribution. The chapter on African mutualism contrasts it with neoliberalism, noting that mutualism promotes shared ownership, fair compensation, and cooperation, while neoliberalism fosters inequality. It also explores the role of governments in either supporting or hindering mutualistic practices across the continent.

Mutualism was also seen as a form of libertarian socialism, balancing individual freedom with collective well-being. It offered a radical alternative to both capitalism and state socialism, promoting voluntary cooperation and mutual respect without centralised power or hierarchy.

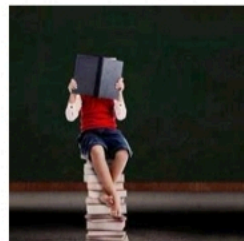
Critiques of the theory

While mutualism holds significant revolutionary potential, it has faced critiques on several fronts. One major critique is that its reliance on small-scale property ownership may not sufficiently challenge the capitalist system's broader structural inequalities. Critics argue that mutualism fails to address the concentration of wealth and power that is intrinsic to modern capitalist economies. Furthermore, some question the feasibility of creating an egalitarian society based on voluntary cooperation, suggesting that it may be too idealistic or difficult to implement on a large scale.

Marxist critics contend that mutualism does not sufficiently address the core issues of capitalism, such as exploitation and inequality, and fails to dismantle capitalist relations of production. They argue that Proudhon's defence of small property owners and opposition to collectivism overlooks the realities of class struggle, where small producers are squeezed out by larger corporations.

Despite these criticisms, mutualism remains a radical theory that offers an alternative to both capitalist exploitation and authoritarianism. While it may not have fully resolved the challenges of inequality and exploitation, it continues to be a significant concept in the history of anarchist and socialist thought.

The writer is a freelance journalist.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

K. Subrahmanian
Lipendran

"Tendulkar is such an excellent cricketer. I often compare myself to him."

"Really? Do you think you're as good a player?"

"Certainly not. He's far superior."

"In that case, you're not comparing yourself 'to' him, but 'with' him."

"You mean there's a difference between 'compare to' and compare with?"

"Yes. When you say that you're comparing something or someone 'to' something or someone, it means that you think they are in the same class. You're suggesting that there is a likeness between the two objects or persons."

"So when I compare myself to Tendulkar, it implies that I think I'm as good as Tendulkar?"

"Exactly. Here are a few more examples. Rajeev's running style is compared often to a cheetah's. As a writer, he is frequently compared to Wodehouse."

"So 'compare to' indicates similarities. What about 'compare with'?"

"When you look for both similarities and differences, you compare something with something else."

"I see. When you compare X 'with' Y, it means they are in the same league?"

"No, it doesn't. X can be better or worse than Y. You can, for example, compare Milton's style with Wordsworth's. You can compare the media in India with the media in the United States. Barun captures the distinction between 'compare to' and 'compare with' beautifully. 'Any writer can compare himself with Shakespeare and discover how far he falls short: if he compares himself to Shakespeare, then he had better think again.'"

"That's a wonderful example. I think I'll copy it down and give it to Gopal. He thinks he's the next Shakespeare."

"He does?"

"He sure does. That good-for-nothing thinks he knows..."

"Stop it. Stop it. I don't want you to bad-mouth Gopal!"

"Bad-mouth Gopal! What does it mean?"

"If you bad-mouth someone, it means you deliberately say uncomplimentary things about him in order to damage his reputation. Because of intense competition, cinema stars often tend to bad-mouth one another."

"And you are one of those who think it's not good to bad-mouth people."

"That's right. Besides, why is it that every time Gopal's name is mentioned, you fly off the handle?"

"Fly off the handle?"

"Fly off the handle" is an informal expression meaning to 'suddenly and completely lose your temper'. Whenever his team lost, the coach flew off the handle. When Saritha heard she hadn't got the raise, she flew off the handle."

"And whenever I see Gopal or hear his name mentioned, I fly off the handle."

Published in *The Hindu* on April 12, 1994.

THE DAILY QUIZ

The second Test between India and Australia, at the Adelaide Oval, starts on December 6. Here is a quiz on the 22 Day and Night Test matches played so far

Soorya Prakash.N

QUESTION 1
Which country has hosted the most number of Day and Night Test matches after Australia?

QUESTION 2
Which non-Test playing country has hosted Day and Night Test matches?

QUESTION 3
Which country has played in most Day and Night Test matches after Australia?

QUESTION 4
Who has scored the most runs and most hundreds in the 22 Day and Night Test matches held so far?

QUESTION 5
Who has picked up the most wickets in the 22 Day and Night Test matches held so far?

QUESTION 6
Who holds the best bowling figures in an innings?

QUESTION 7
Who is the only bowler to pick up five or more wickets in each innings of a Day and Night Test match and thus holds the best bowling figures in a test match?

QUESTION 8
What is common to the Day and Night Test matches held between South Africa and Zimbabwe at Port Elizabeth in December 2017 and between India and England at Ahmedabad in February 2022?

QUESTION 9
Ashad Shafiq in December 2016 and Jason Holder in June 2018 won Player of the Match award in the respective Day and Night Test matches. What is the connection between their achievements?



Visual question:
Identify the players and the connection between their feats. AP, AFP

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz: 1. This physicist was the scientific leader of Chicago Pile-1. **Ans: Enrico Fermi**
2. This person was the only woman present when the Chicago Pile-1 went critical. **Ans: Leona Woods**
3. Otto Frisch and this scientist explained a phenomenon in 1938. **Ans: Lise Meitner**
4. American efforts to develop an atomic weapon succeeded because they realised the graphite shouldn't have any atoms of this particular element. **Ans: Boron**
5. Until 1957, the University of Chicago had a football field called the _____. **Ans: Stagg Field**
Visual: Name the world's second artificial nuclear reactor. **Ans: X-10 Graphite Reactor**
Early Birds: K.N. Viswanathan| Bharath Viswanathan| Navtosh Arun| Arun Kumar Singh| Parimal Das

Please send in your answers to
dailyquiz@thehindu.co.in

Word of the day

Victuals:
a stock or supply of foods; a source of materials to nourish the body; any substance that can be used as food

Synonyms: alimant, nourishment, nutrition, sustenance, provisions

Usage: I cooked up some victuals for them.

Pronunciation: /nɛwʃt.lɪv.ɪkʃənlz/

International Phonetic Alphabet: /vɪtʃəl/

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

When a DNA analysis reveals a closely guarded family secret...

DNA analysis can create a 'narrow biologised notion of inheritance', to use the words of Projit Mukharji, for no reason other than that the molecule can reveal more than what we wish to tell. If this isn't a problem enough, consider what it means for laws we have, or don't, to protect our privacy

D.P. Kasbekar

The Centre for DNA Fingerprinting and Diagnostics (CFD) is a government laboratory in Hyderabad. It provides DNA-based investigative services to the police, the judiciary, and to hospitals that offer organ transplant procedures. Recently, the CFD handled the case of a family in which the father offered to donate an organ to his ailing son. CFD technicians generated DNA profiles of the donor, the patient, and also the patient's mother.

While the DNA profiles of the mother and the son were consistent with their claimed mother-son relationship, those of the father and his son were not. The DNA showed that the woman's husband was not the actual father of the patient but a close paternal relative, possibly a brother of the actual father. These findings didn't preclude the organ transplant procedure but by revealing the practice of levirate they created a potentially awkward situation for the family.

Levirate is the custom in some families in which a woman who is widowed or one whose husband is mentally or physically incapacitated has children fathered by her husband's brother. Understandably, the family would prefer to keep such knowledge private. The report from the CFD was meant to tell doctors they could proceed with the transplant operation because the donor and the recipient belonged to the same family. But by explicitly revealing the woman's husband was not her son's father, it created the risk of an unwanted breach of the family's privacy.

What are DNA profiles?

Every cell in our body has a nucleus that contains two copies of each of the 23 chromosomes, numbered 1 to 23. This 1-23 lump is our genome. One chromosome of each pair is inherited via the mother's egg and the other via the father's sperm.

When we make our own reproductive cells – eggs or sperm – each egg or sperm receives only one chromosome from a pair, i.e., one genome set. When a sperm cell and an egg fuse, they create a cell with two genome sets. This cell, called the zygote, divides to produce all the other cells of the body.

Every chromosome contains a single DNA molecule that runs from end to end. A DNA molecule has two strands. Each strand is a long, linear sequence of four chemicals: adenine (A), cytosine (C), guanine (G), and thymine (T). The As on one strand form bonds with the Ts on the other, while Gs bond with the Cs. The As, Cs, Gs, and Ts on one strand are called the DNA's bases and the A-T and G-C combinations are the DNA's base-pairs.

The largest chromosome in humans, chromosome 1, has more than 240 million base-pairs; the shortest, chromosome 21, has more than 40 million. The 23 chromosomes together have 3.2 billion base-pairs.

At several locations, or loci, on each of the 23 chromosomes, some short DNA sequences are repeated multiple times. These loci are called simple tandem repeats (STRs). For example, one strand of an STR locus might have multiple repeats of GGCA (GGCAGGCCAGGCCA...). These are

When DNA creates a privacy issue

DNA has unwittingly opened a Pandora's box where the family skeletons could tumble out of the closet. You offer your DNA to further something that needs to be done and open a gaping wound



DNA analysis has the potential to cause very unpleasant situations. Illustrative image.

AUTOSOMAL STR DNA PROFILES OF THE INDIVIDUALS

Locus	Link Person	Patient	Donor
D3S1358	16,16	16,16	15,18
vWA	14,17	14,14	15,18
D16S539	11,12	11,12	11,12
CSF1PO	10,13	12,13	11,12
TPOX	8,11	8,11	8,11
YinDel	-	2	2
D8S1179	13,14	14,15	13,15
D21S11	29,33.2	29,33.2	28,32.2
D18S51	14,15	15,17	14,14
DYS391	-	10	10
D2S441	9,10	10,10	10,11
D19S433	13,13	13,13	13,13
TH01	7,8	7,9	6,9
FGA	24,24	24,27	23,27
D22S1045	11,17	11,17	11,17
D5S818	10,12	12,15	12,15
D13S317	8,12	12,12	11,12
D7S820	8,12	11,12	11,13
SE33	13,29.2	13,29.2	19,29.2
D10S1248	13,15	14,15	14,14
D151656	14,14	14,17.3	8,15.3
D12S391	21,24	17,21	17,17.3
D2S1338	19,22	21,22	19,21
AMELOGENIN	XX	XY	XY

Y-CHROMOSOMAL STR DNA PROFILES OF THE INDIVIDUALS

Locus	Patient	Donor
DYS576	17	17
DYS389I	13	13
DYS635	23	23
DYS389II	29	29
DYS627	19	19
DYS460	10	10
DYS458	16	16
DYS19	14	14
YGATAH4	11	11
DYS448	21	21
DYS391	10	10
DYS456	17	17
DYS390	23	23
DYS438	9	9
DYS392	11	11
DYS518	40	40
DYS570	16	16
DYS437	14	14
DYS385	12,16	12,16
DYS449	31	31
DYS393	12	12
DYS439	11	11
DYS481	23	23
DYF387S1	36,39	36,39
DYS533	11	11

paired with complementary CCGGT repeats on the other strand (CCGGTCCGGTCCGGT...). The repeat number of STR loci can differ in the two chromosomes of a pair. For example, a particular chromosome derived from the father might have 30 repeats while the same one from the mother may have 35.

The DNA profile of a person is simply the number of times the simple sequences are repeated in the STR loci. This number can be found by first creating lots of copies of DNA from a sample (using the polymerase chain reaction, PCR), then segregating the DNA fragments by size using a technique called

Levirate is the custom in which a woman who is widowed or one whose husband is mentally or physically incapacitated has children fathered by her husband's brother

capillary gel electrophoresis. It is sensitive enough to both accurately and precisely establish the number of repeats in an STR.

For example, the table below shows the number of repeats of the father, the mother, and the son in the case illustrated above – i.e. their DNA profiles.

According to the table, the mother's versions of locus D18S51 had 14 and 15 repeats, while the son's versions had 15 and 17 repeats. But the father's versions of D18S51 had 14 and 14. The son received his 15-repeat version from his mother and the 17-repeat version from his father. But the woman's husband didn't have a 17-repeat variant, so this man couldn't be the actual father. Likewise, for three other STR loci, the son received paternal variants that were absent from the donor.

The son and the man still had identical Y-chromosome profiles, plus identical variants in 19 of the 23 non-Y STR loci. This indicated that the woman's husband is closely related to the biological father – possibly a brother. Thus the marriage is levirate.

Levirate marriages in India

Projit Mukharji, a historian of science at the University of Pennsylvania and Ashoka University in Haryana, ably discussed the practice of levirate marriage in India in his 2022 book 'Brown Skins, White Coats Race Science in India, 1920-66'.

Mukharji cited the pioneering anthropologist and writer Irawati Karve (1905-1970) when he wrote that she spoke "of the three debts that any Hindu man owed and upon the repayment of which his ultimate liberation depended. These debts were respectively to the gods, the sages, and the ancestors."

Each of these ... required the making of regular offerings. These offerings could only be made by a son. Hence, the function of a son was the making of ancestral offerings, rather than the maintenance of a biological or genetic lineage."

This pushed families to explore all possible ways, including levirate, to beget a son.

Mukharji added that families are reluctant "to divulge information... not simply... by a modern desire to avert scandal. Rather, it was because, within an older customary framework of kinship, 'descent' itself worked differently and to other ends. ... The refusal... to share sexual information was tacitly rooted in a more radical refusal to accept a narrowly biologised notion of inheritance."

Unfortunately, in the end, DNA analysis appears to have allowed the "narrow biologised notion of inheritance" to win for no reason other than that DNA just doesn't know when to shut up. And if this isn't a problem enough, consider what it could mean for the laws we have – or don't – to protect our genetic privacy.

(D.P. Kasbekar is a retired scientist.kasbekardp@yahoo.co.in)



A photo taken on July 5 by the New Zealand Department of Conservation shows rangers beside what appears to be the carcass of a rare spade-toothed whale after it was discovered washed ashore on a beach near Taiari Mouth, New Zealand. AFP

Scientists in NZ gather to decode puzzle of rare whale

Associated Press

It is the world's rarest whale, with only seven of its kind ever spotted. Almost nothing is known about the enigmatic species. But on Monday a small group of scientists and cultural experts in New Zealand clustered around a near-perfectly preserved spade-toothed whale hoping to decode decades of mystery.

"I can't tell you how extraordinary it is," said Anton van Helden, senior marine science adviser for New Zealand's conservation agency, who gave the spade-toothed whale its name to distinguish it from other beaked species.

Van Helden has studied beaked whales for 35 years, but Monday was the first time he has participated in a dissection of the spade-toothed variety. In fact, the careful study of the creature, which washed up dead on a New Zealand beach in July, is the first ever to take place.

None has ever been seen alive at sea. The list of what scientists don't know about spade-toothed whales is longer than what they do know. They don't know where in the ocean the whales live, why they've never been spotted in the wild, or what their brains look like. All beaked whales have different stomach systems, and researchers don't know how the spade-toothed kind processes its food.

Over the next week, researchers studying the 5-metre male at a research centre near Dunedin hope to find out.

"There may be parasites completely new to science that just live in this whale," said van Helden, who thrilled at the chance of learning how the species produces sound and what it eats. "Who knows what we'll discover?" Only six other spade-toothed whales have ever been found, but all those discovered intact were buried before DNA testing could verify their identification.

The dissection will be slower than usual, because it is being undertaken in partnership with the Maori, for whom whales are a precious treasure, and the creature will be treated with the reverence afforded to an ancestor

New Zealand is a whale-stranding hotspot, with more than 5,000 episodes recorded since 1840, according to the Department of Conservation. The first spade-toothed whale bones were found in 1872 on New Zealand's Pitt Island.

Another discovery was made at an offshore island in the 1950s, and the bones of a third were found on Chile's Robinson Crusoe Island in 1986.

DNA sequencing in 2002 proved that all three specimens were of the same species and that it was distinct from other beaked whales. But researchers studying the mammal couldn't confirm whether the species was extinct until 2010, when two whole spade-toothed whales, both dead, washed up on a New Zealand beach.

On Monday, the seventh of its kind, surrounded by white-aproned scientists who were measuring and photographing, appeared relatively unblemished, giving no clue about its death. Researchers pointed out marks from cookiecutter sharks – normal, they said, and not the cause.

The dissection will be quiet, methodical, and slower than usual, because it is being undertaken in partnership with Maori, New Zealand's Indigenous people. To Maori, whales are a precious treasure, and the creature will be treated with the reverence afforded to an ancestor.

For feedback and suggestions for 'Science', please write to science@thehindu.co.in with the subject 'Daily page'

THE SCIENCE QUIZ

Forty years since the Bhopal disaster...

Vasudevan Mukunth

QUESTION 1

X leaked from the Union Carbide India, Ltd. (UCIL) plant in Bhopal on the night of December 2 and early on December 3, killing more than 4,000 people and injuring upwards of 5.7 lakh. Name X.

QUESTION 2

The UCIL facility in Bhopal was built in 1969 to manufacture a pesticide called Sevin, the brand name of a compound called 1-naphthyl methylcarbamate. The facility did so by reacting X (from Q1) with Y. Name Y. Y is also used to make the antidepressant sertraline.

QUESTION 3

A different way to make carbaryl is

to react Y (from Q2) with a large quantity of Z to produce naphthylchloroformate, which, when it reacts with methylamine, creates carbaryl. Name Z – which France used to kill more than 85,000 people during World War I as a chemical weapon.

QUESTION 4

X (from Q1) is a gas that's very toxic to humans even at very small concentrations. Although it doesn't have a specific smell even at a concentration of 5 ppm, it is strongly _____. Fill in the blank with the name of a property that induces tears in eyes.

QUESTION 5

The trigger for the Bhopal disaster was personnel at the UCIL plant

adding a large quantity of _____ to a tank containing X (from Q1). Fill in the blank with a compound whose reaction with X produces heat, which can cause more of the X to react and eventually to boil.

Answers to November 28 quiz:

- Material of which ATOM1996 is made – **Ans: Gravel**
- Antarctic ice shelf abutting southernmost piece of open ocean – **Ans: Ross ice shelf**
- Western terminal of longest motorable straight line on land – **Ans: France**
- Mountain whose peak is farthest point on land from earth's centre – **Ans: Mt. Chimborazo**
- World's largest city located below sea level – **Ans: Baku, Azerbaijan**

Visual: Ojos del Salado

First contact: Jose Joji | Rahul Nair | Anmol Agrawal | K.N. Viswanathan



Visual: Name this comet. Ten years ago a robot touched down on it, and, a year later, scientists used the data it collected to report the first presence of X (from Q1) on a comet. ESA (CC BY-SA 4.0)

Please send in your answers to science@thehindu.co.in

12 THE EDITORIAL PAGE

WORDLY WISE
THE LESS THERE IS TO JUSTIFY A TRADITIONAL
CUSTOM, THE HARDER IT IS TO GET RID OF IT.

—MARK TWAIN

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

RBI's CHALLENGE

As differences emerge with government on growth and inflation, it will need to draw on multiple policy tools

OVER THE NEXT few days, the RBI's monetary policy committee will hold its last scheduled meeting for this calendar year. So far, the central bank's "resilient" growth outlook provided the committee the space to keep the policy rate unchanged and focus on "attaining a durable alignment of inflation with the target". However, since the last committee meeting in October, the macroeconomic scenario has changed dramatically — inflation has edged upwards, while growth has slowed down. In this changed environment, questions are being asked, including by the government, about whether the RBI has kept interest rates too high for too long, not anticipating the economic slowdown.

As reported in this paper, the government has raised questions over the stance of monetary policy, calling into question the central bank's assessment of the underlying growth momentum and price dynamics in the country. On growth, it viewed the RBI's exuberance — the central bank had raised its growth forecast to 7.2 per cent for the year in June — as out of sync with other signals. Thereafter, even when economic indicators subsequently pointed towards a slowing growth momentum, the central bank continued to exude confidence about the economy's growth prospects, retaining its growth forecast in the October MPC meeting. Its assessment was also at odds with some segments of India Inc who have spoken frankly about the pain points in the economy. The economy grew at 5.4 per cent in the second quarter, compared to the RBI's assessment of 7 per cent in the October MPC meeting. There is also disagreement with the central bank's assessment of the underlying price pressures in the economy. The RBI is worried about the second round effects of high food inflation spilling over to core inflation. But as per government officials, there are no second round effects. Excluding gold and silver, core inflation is stable. Moreover, the surge in headline inflation over the past two months has been largely due to food inflation, which in turn is driven by vegetables. Analysts expect vegetable prices to show some moderation in the coming days.

RBI's inflation targeting framework of 4 plus/minus 2 per cent has a degree of flexibility that gives the committee the space to look through such transient supply side shocks. Monetary policy works with long lags. With the RBI's forecasts now showing inflation at 4.2 per cent in the fourth quarter of this financial year, and 4.3 per cent in the first quarter of next year, real interest rates remain at levels that former MPC members have characterised as excessively restrictive. The question now, after the recent GDP data, is whether the MPC will continue to attach primacy to inflation, or will growth considerations also dominate its thinking, or will the currency now also be a factor. The RBI has multiple policy tools at its disposal. It will need to draw on them as it navigates the rapidly changing environment.

THE APATHY MUST END

Express investigation of manual scavenging highlights continuing failures and abdications at several levels

SINCE 1993, INDIA has had a law to ban manual scavenging. Since 2013, employers are required by law to provide 44 types of protective gear to labourers engaged in cleaning septic tanks and sewers. Yet, according to the Union Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment's data, 443 workers died between 2018 and 2023, while undertaking this hazardous task. This, by all accounts, is a conservative estimate. Several independent surveys have talked about the continued reluctance on the part of state governments to admit that the practice prevails under their watch. Unable to provide safety equipment, municipalities lie in denial. Employers are rarely held accountable when manual labourers succumb to the perils of their jobs. An investigation by this newspaper has revealed only one conviction for 75 sewer deaths in Delhi in the past 15 years. From the police being unable to trace the culprits to the investigating officers not cooperating with the judiciary or failing to appear before the courts, it reveals the apathy of law-enforcing agencies. That several sewer deaths happened at high-profile locations at the national capital, including prominent malls, hospitals and hotels only shows that the abidance is unabashed and pervasive.

The Manual Scavengers and Their Rehabilitation Act, which came into force in 2013, asks state governments and municipalities to identify workers who clean sewers and provide them with alternative employment options. A year later, the Supreme Court also asked states to abolish manual scavenging and rehabilitate the workers. However, local bodies outsource sewer cleaning to private contractors, who do not maintain proper rolls of manual scavengers. Investigations often come to a dead end because the police cannot find written orders from contractors asking workers to enter sewers. Located at the margins of society, the families of the deceased do not have the resources to fight lengthy legal battles.

Government initiatives to end manual scavenging have fallen short of their objectives because they do not adequately account for the social conditions that force people to plumb toxic cesspools. Civil society groups have, for long, argued that fixing the problem is difficult without acknowledging that it operates at the intersections of caste, economic inequalities and the deficits of the country's sewerage networks — most septic tanks are not amenable to new technology and machines are too big to operate in the narrow bylanes of dense urban areas. The failings, as this newspaper's investigation shows, are at multiple levels. A government that counts the Swachh Bharat Mission among its successes needs to do more for the safety and well-being of the workers at the frontlines of its cleanliness projects.

WHOSE DRESS

If some see the graduation cap and gown as a colonial relic, for others it represents empowerment and choice

FROM THE VANTAGE point of the present, there is something faintly absurd about certain traditions of dressing that came as part of the baggage of colonialism — such as the wigs that members of the legal fraternity were once forced to wear. Time and context wore out any extra dignity that they conferred on the wearer, and they felt hot and uncomfortable to boot. A similar argument made against the graduation ceremony cap and gown by the UGC — which issued an advisory to the effect in 2015, with follow-ups in 2019 and January this year — has led to several central institutions easing out the outfit. As a report in this newspaper revealed, they have replaced it with "Indian attire" to boost the country's handloom traditions, ostensibly as part of a decolonisation exercise.

But what does the government have here? If it's as if its education to do list is not weighty enough. Among the several ongoing concerns — such as ensuring equity and access to learning resources and infrastructure — the matter of what a ceremonial outfit should look like seems out of place. In any case, practical concerns regarding the synthetic fabrics used to make the gown and mortarboard, as well as a desire to promote "traditional" clothing, had led some institutions to ease out the uncomfortable gown and mortarboard even before the UGC put out its advisory — just as a sentimental attachment to another kind of tradition, one handed down during the Raj, made others retain the ceremonial wear.

The matter of clothing presents a peculiar problem, being deeply imbued with meaning not only at a personal level, but also at the level of community, institution and state. In 2019, at Lucknow's Babasaheb Ambedkar University, the Dalit Students' Union sought permission to wear formal Western attire, instead of the mandated Indian wear, as a tribute to B.R. Ambedkar. Clearly, what is seen as a "colonial relic" by some, represents empowerment and choice for others.



PRATAP BHANU MEHTA

SOUTH ASIA is at a precipice. India, Pakistan and Bangladesh are now vulnerable to the fatal kiss of religious nationalism destroying both democracy and decency in their societies. It is anathema for an Indian audience to think of these three countries on the same plane. But, with varying degrees of intensity, they are now displaying symptoms of the same political disease. Each of the three countries seems to already have, or is in the process of creating, the background conditions for significant religious conflict. Each of them seems to be now determined to reopen the settlement of 1947, not in the direction of freedom and human rights, but the denouement of targeted conflict, almost as if to complete the logic of partition, not to undo it. And their ideological fates are intertwined. India may, with all its arrogant bluster, claim to be a big power that transcends its region. But its fundamental insecurities, its domestic politics, and increasingly its identity, is so tied to its neighbourhood that this claim is almost laughable.

Let us start with Bangladesh. Sheikh Hasina had lost popular legitimacy, or at least deprived herself of the means to establish it. But it is still an open question what kind of successor regime will be institutionalised in its wake. Bangladesh may still overcome its present hurdles, but there are three ominous signs. The first is that the strategy of the new regime seems to be moving not towards building an inclusive democracy, but to keep on engaging in the same cycles of recrimination between the Awami League and its opponents that have marked Bangladesh's history, a cycle of recrimination that never ends well for democracy. Second, Islamists seem to have gained much more visible space, and there is no political force that can marginalise them. There is greater risk to minorities, especially Hindus in Bangladesh. The Bangladeshis elites deny this charge as simply Indian disinformation, used to discredit the regime and used by the BJP for domestic politics in India.

It is true that the Indian state has a vested interest in exaggeration. But the response in large sections of Bangladesh's

Ironically, in a deep ideological sense, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh are once again joined at the hip

For good or for ill, Sheikh Hasina's authoritarianism collapsed under its own weight. It is in India's interest not to use Bangladesh to flame sectarian fires, but to find a solution. And no solution will be forthcoming if India is ex-ante openly hostile to what, for good or for ill, is the de facto government of Bangladesh. In fact, it will only jeopardise the fate of Hindu minorities. India is right to be concerned about the fate of minorities in Bangladesh. But our interest in them is not humanitarian, it is also cut of a deeper communal cloth. India's concern at the fate of minorities at this point is a bit like the US being concerned about the fate of international law.

elites to a genuine concern is dispiriting because it has all the elements of a familiar South Asian play book. When it comes to communal targeting, it goes something like this: Claim that reports are exaggerated (though exaggeration might be less of a sin than denial), or whataboutery (nothing has fundamentally changed) or root causes (they were not targeted as Hindus but were collateral damage in the violence against Awami League supporters) or pretexts (there are genuine non-communal reasons to be worried about some of the ISKCON figures). Or finally a performative secularism, where the leader gives a statement that ticks a box, while not addressing fundamental insecurities. All of our societies are masters at this playbook. It is the way we do communalism without thinking of ourselves as communal.

India, for its part, is doing the utterly myopic thing. For good or for ill, Sheikh Hasina's authoritarianism collapsed under its own weight. It is in India's interest not to use Bangladesh to flame sectarian fires, but to find a solution. And no solution will be forthcoming if India is ex-ante openly hostile to what, for good or for ill, is the de facto government of Bangladesh. In fact, it will only jeopardise the fate of Hindu minorities. India is right to be concerned about the fate of minorities in Bangladesh. But our interest in them is not humanitarian, it is also cut of a deeper communal cloth. India's concern at the fate of minorities at this point is a bit like the US being concerned about the fate of international law.

Its ideological orientation is now towards majoritarianism and creating the conditions for conflict. The government literally finds a new pretext to needle minorities: Lysing, bulldozers, hate speech, normalising of prejudice, claiming more mosques and now the Waqf issue. The Waqf Board may need reform but that is not the point. The modus operandi of the government is to keep pushing minorities into disempowerment and marginalisation. This is an open playbook.

Ayodhya was not the satiation of Hindu

nationalism. Because it was a victory achieved through sheer power, and not a political settlement, that playbook will now be generalised. The legitimisation of violence and the degree of communal suffocation in India is at unprecedented levels. If those concerned about Bangladesh would admit this, their concern would come across as more sincere.

The Pakistan story is, of course, familiar. In part, Hindutva takes inspiration from that story. Pakistan is an example of what happens when the meaning of religion becomes subordinated to maintaining the religious character of that state. The need for benchmarking a religious identity will constantly put all minorities at risk. In Pakistan all minorities are at risk, including Ahmadiyyas and Shias. The recent massacre in Kurram has a regional dimension, but it has a deep overlay of Shia-Sunni schism.

Pakistan has reached a point where the ideological basis of its state is bound to fail, or at best just stutter along. Overlay on top of that the gap between popular sentiment and the military's legitimacy and you have the makings of a perpetual crisis. The need to benchmark the state to a religious identity, once it runs out of other minorities to target or cleanse, will turn on other groups. The only thing one can say about Pakistan is that its dark humour about its own potential dystopian state seems to be more potent and more openly critical than most people in India's elites dare to be.

So, ironically in a deep ideological sense, these three countries are now once again joined at the hip. They are all potentially caught in a spiral where the identities they seek to craft as states will exacerbate conflict. India uses the fires in Pakistan and Bangladesh to shore up the claims of a Hindu state, and the "India" card is still a potent defining feature of their identity. There is only one abiding lesson in South Asian history: State sponsored religious nationalism will always turn authoritarian, and it will always destroy democracy and humanity.

The writer is contributing editor, The Indian Express



OM DAMANI AND ANSHUL AGRAWAL

SHALAJA CHANDRA'S ARTICLE, 'Leaner, Faster, Fairer' (IE, November 22), highlights several reasons behind the high number of pending cases across Indian courts and proposes two main solutions — measuring judge's performance by the case disposal rate and recruiting retired officials. It also pointed out the absence of video conferencing facilities in several district courts.

We started the project 'System dynamics modelling of the pendency of undertrials' with a focus on speeding up the disposal of cases. However, after talking to several stakeholders in the judicial system for a year and a half, we realised that a fair trial is as important as a speedy trial. One must be careful while talking about faster case disposal since reducing the number of pending cases requires a delicate balance. The pursuit of speed should not come at the cost of fairness.

Categorising judges, on their disposal performance, could push them to choose cases that have a high likelihood of faster disposal. This might negatively impact the hearings of sensitive cases where judges might not have enough time left on the listing days. Hasty judgments can increase the likelihood of appeals, further clogging the judiciary.

The article also mentions, "In an average district or subordinate court, about half of the 90 cases listed daily reportedly get adjourned." Keeping the fairness aspect in mind, we need to ask why are there such frequent adjournments. Which type of cases are adjourned frequently? Is it justified to put

FAIRNESS, NOT JUST SPEED

A sensitive judicial system maintains a delicate balance between the two

Each case passes through multiple stages: Charge sheet filing, charge framing, trial (evidence presentation), arguments, and judgment. Each stage has a different source of delay. For example, investigation officers can take time to gather evidence; police and public prosecutors usually keep issuing summonses instead of a non-traceable report if a witness is not responding; the 'roznama' has inaccurate or misleading information about the case stage.

a permissible limit for adjournments? During our research, multiple advocates told us that they demand adjournments to get more time to gather evidence, research the law, file motions, or wait for certain events that can have a significant impact on the verdict. Refusing these adjournments in such cases could be unfair.

The judicial system is complex with numerous actors — with judges, lawyers, litigants, and court employees having their own mental models. Delegating administrative tasks to retired officials who are not familiar with and sensitive towards judicial procedures, might create new inefficiencies and increase the unfairness. A system's behaviour is a function of its structure. Delayed disposals and high pending case counts are due to the justice-system structure and cannot be improved by tweaking without addressing structural issues. Each case passes through multiple stages: Charge sheet filing, charge framing, trial (evidence presentation), arguments, and judgment. Each stage has a different source of delay. For example, investigation officers can take time to gather evidence; police and public prosecutors usually keep issuing summonses instead of a non-traceable report if a witness is not responding; the 'roznama' has inaccurate or misleading information about the case stage; case files get misplaced or are not available since the case has been pending for long. It is necessary to identify the critical stages where there are bottlenecks and focus on reducing

the delays in those specific stages. Several experts we spoke to raised concerns about video proceedings. During such proceedings, the accused are often surrounded by jail officers creating an environment of intimidation. If they are mistreated in jail, say they have been tortured, they fear saying so; judges cannot see their physical condition clearly. During the physical trial, the accused are under the custody of judges, not jailers. Coming out of jail to the court for free trial is the only chance for an accused to breathe free air. They can meet their family members and talk to their lawyers confidentially. Video conferencing trials take away these particularly important rights of undertrials.

Accessing prompt legal advice and assistance is critical for ensuring a fair trial and the rule of law. However, researchers at National Law University Delhi's Project 39A have shown that undertrials from poor socio-economic backgrounds cannot get the desired legal assistance due to unawareness of free legal aid, and the poor quality of the legal aid system. We urge allocating more resources to strengthen the legal aid system to ensure that the judicial system is both efficient and fair.

Damani is with the Department of Computer Science and the Center for Policy Studies at IIT Bombay. Agrawal is a research associate at IIT Bombay



DECEMBER 3, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO

MILITANTS KILL 11

11 SINHALESE FISHERMEN were killed when Tamil militants attacked two villages in Sri Lanka's north-eastern Mullaitivu district on December 1. He said people had fled the villages and taken shelter at the district headquarters. This was the second attack by militants on Sinhalese civilian settlements since November 29, when they attacked settlements of ex-convicts at Padaviya, killing 65 people.

ASSASSINATION PLOT

BEANT SINGH, KILLED by ITBP commandos, had taken an oath on October 20 at the Akal

Takht in the Golden Temple complex, to kill Indira Gandhi. This was disclosed by Kehar Singh, Beant Singh's uncle, who was arrested in Delhi on November 30, intelligence sources revealed. Beant Singh, who was gunned down by ITBP commandos on October 31, had confessed the conspiracy to Kehar Singh.

PM ON DIVISIVENESS

PRIME MINISTER RAJIV Gandhi, on December 2, vowed to stamp out "forces of destabilisation" which he said had their roots outside India. These forces were behind the assassination of Indira Gandhi and were financed by outside sources. He said these

forces were trying to divide the nation based on caste, religion, and region. To root them out, he said, a new movement was necessary.

PAKISTAN'S REFERENDUM

A PRESIDENTIAL ORDER on December 1 barred all courts, tribunals or any authority from questioning the conduct of the referendum to be held on December 19. The Pakistani government made it compulsory for all those 21 and above to exercise their verdict in the referendum. The referendum order put to the nation the question of whether it endorses the process of Islamisation initiated by Gen Zia-ul-Haq.

13 THE IDEAS PAGE

What kind of India do we seek?

In Kachchh, at a gathering of organisations, this and other big questions, and a daring to imagine alternatives to modern 'development'



DESHKAAL
BY YOGENDRA YADAV

KACHCHH INVITES YOU to ask big questions. This is the site for a fusion of horizons. Here, sea meets desert under an uncluttered sky. Shifting topography, recurring earthquakes, the intermingling of races and cultures from Gujarat, Sindh and Rajasthan to Afghanistan, Iran, and East Africa and a line in the sand that marks the boundary of nation-states serves to remind you of the transient nature of everything. Kachchh releases you from the prison of the here and now, from the cycles of breaking news, election results, scandals and wars, and lets you sit back and reflect.

So, we asked big questions: What does our future look like? What should it look like, if we could shape it? What kind of India do we seek? Can we envision something beyond the stale dream of a modern, developed, superpower with cutting-edge technology and an x-trillion dollar economy — a mirage that we have been chasing, breathless and mindless? Is another world possible?

"We", here, meant a group associated with Vikalp Sangam, a confluence of over 90 organisations and movements that share a quest for transformative alternatives. These are activists, scholars and development practitioners who do not merely complain and protest; they actively seek alternative "ways of meeting human needs and aspirations, without trashing the earth and without leaving half of humanity behind". And they do not seek it just on paper, but on the ground. This was the 10th anniversary of Vikalp Sangam, a moment to remember the journey and to reflect on the future.

Kachchh provides stark options to think about our future. From an outsider's gaze, this largest district of India is a backward wasteland — vast swathes of unproductive arid land unfit for cultivation — waiting to be reclaimed for "development". Following the earthquake of 2001, all kinds of modern, multi-storied buildings and industries (led by, who else, but Adani!) have come up here. From a different point of view, however, Kachchh is diverse and vibrant, home to many ecological practices, crafts and art that we need to learn from. When I read that someone called Kachchh a "museum of environmental hardship" (the first image that flashed in my mind was the breathtaking museum of Kachchh embroideries that at extraordinary LDC complex at Bhuj), Professor Bagchi, it was his metropolitan museums to shame. Kachchh is a museum of human resilience and creativity under conditions of hardship.

More than high-rise buildings and factories, for me the symbol of modernity in Kachchh is a thorny tree that you see everywhere. The scientists call it *Prosopis juliflora*. Locals call it *gundo* (havel) (or *khuro* (babul)), the mad tree. Native to Mexico, this tree was imported to India and showered on to Kachchh — literally, thanks to government helicopters — ostensibly to prevent desertification. Today, this invasive and impenetrable up-to-uproot tree is omnipresent in Banni,



CR Sasikumar

the largest grassland of India, displacing other native trees and grasses, extracting the scarce underground water, besides harming animals who consume its leaves. This is what we call development.

Are there alternatives? Are there ways to support local farming practices and pastoral communities like Maldharis? Kachchh is also home to many experiments in alternatives. As many as 13 organisations hosted this decennial Vikalp Sangam. Sahjeevan is involved in organising the Maldhari community in demanding community forest rights that they are entitled to under the Forest Rights Act. They have also initiated a project to replant native (*meetha*) *babul* to replace the invader tree. Khmiri, whose campus hosted the confluence this time, is involved in the promotion of traditional handicrafts and the preservation of culture, community and local environments. They have revived cultivation of and weaving in Kala cotton, a local variety destroyed by industrialisation. Other organisations are involved in increasing the participation of women in decision making and making self-governance a reality.

The deliberations in this decennial meeting were obviously not limited to Kachchh. A team from Gadchiroli in Maharashtra and another from Karnataka shared the success stories of how Adivasi communities acquired community forest rights and have managed their common resources for collective good. Activists from all over the country discussed alternative experiments, success stories and challenges in ecological agriculture, water, environment, energy, health, education and democracy.

Over the last 10 years, Vikalp Sangam has documented nearly 2,000 such stories from all over the country on its website <https://vikalpsangam.org> and showcased some of these in a documentary "Churning the Earth". These stories include a Goa-based couple (who else but Sikhs from Jalandhar) that grows their veggies and fish without using soil and any chemicals, a successful off-grid, small-scale, rooftop, solar experimentation around Kolkata, revival of traditional architecture in Spiti and Ladakh, recharging of "dead" rivers in Alwar district of Rajasthan, an alternative hospital run for and by Adivasis in Tamil Nadu, models to

integrate hawkers and street vendors in urban planning, and *hunarshala* to promote craft learning in mainstream education. A similar initiative, ASHA (Alliance for Sustainable and Holistic Agriculture) has held five Kisan Swaraj Sammelans to bring together successful models in alternative agriculture. Just last week, a People's Festival of Innovation was held in Delhi that showcased a wide range of affordable, grassroots innovations. We are not short of alternatives.

You might ask: Are all these really an alternative to modern development? Can they take on the challenge of scale and survive in the face of giant corporations in a globalised market economy? Does the practice of majority-based democracy leave any room for concerns of future generations and nature? Valid questions. But you must also ask another valid question: Can we really ever hope to offer every Indian the lifestyle available to everyone in the Global North? Is this model worth replicating? Can we afford to go on with the destruction of nature, lives and livelihoods?

You might ask: Are all these real alternatives to modern development? Can they take on the challenge of scale and survive in the face of giant corporations in a globalised market economy? Does the practice of majority-based democracy leave any room for concerns of future generations and nature? Valid questions. But you must also ask another set of valid questions: Can anyone seriously think of offering to every Indian the lifestyle available to everyone in the Global North? Is this model worth replicating? Can we afford to go on with the destruction of nature, lives and livelihoods as an inevitable cost of "development"?

Once we recognise the unbearable weight of these questions, a quest for alternatives does not remain an obsession of a mad minority. Once we realise that alternatives are not about going back to our past, but about imagining and shaping our future, this becomes a collective search. How do we make these radical alternatives feasible? Can we think of a "scale out" rather than "scale up" model? What is the roadmap of transition from where we are to where we wish to go? Someone has to be thinking about these questions. Someone has to risk being called "mad" and think of alternatives before all of us are left with nothing to think about. Kachchh invites you to ask these big questions.

Postscript: As I was writing this article, I heard about the passing away of Dr Rakesh Sinha, an engineer and a thinker who argued that unemployment was inherent in the modern, large-scale, industrial model of development, who believed in an alternative paradigm of economy and technology.

The writer is member, Swaraj India and national convener of Bharat Jodo Abhiyan. Views are personal

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"To counter the spread of misinformation and disinformation on social media, the government must develop ways to address deepfakes. Countering false narratives, controlling the propagation of disinformation by forces outside the nation may require thought-out strategies." —THE DAILY STAR, BANGLADESH

Choking on smoke

Climate financing that fails to promote transitions from biomass cooking fuels to LPG could leave millions in developing countries vulnerable



KALPANA BALAKRISHNAN, SAGNIK DEY, CHANDRAN VENKATARAMAN, SOUMYA SWAMINATHAN

AROUND THE TIME the COP 29 ended in Baku, some parts of our country, especially the National Capital Region (NCR), witnessed yet another year of predictable deterioration of seasonal air quality to "severe" levels with an air quality index (AQI) of greater than 400. The 2024 report of the Lancet Countdown on Climate Change and Health, while pointing to the need to reduce fossil fuel dependence, also argues for health-centric approaches for climate finance to support public-health interventions aimed at reducing exposure to air pollution through shifts to clean energy sources.

Unhealthy air pollution exposures are neither limited to winter time in the NCR nor attributable to the same mix of sources across the country. It is time for India's National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) to re-examine sectoral priorities that place health at the centre. This would entail re-defining strategic, near-term, clean energy shifts to fossil fuels (LPG) in the residential sector that can reduce net climate warming. This is central to preserving energy equity for the vulnerable poor, while also making attainment of national air quality standards a feasible reality.

Over the last two decades, primary field studies have been undertaken in India to establish that exposure to household air pollution (HAP), resulting from the use of solid cooking fuels, are associated with a wide range of acute and chronic health conditions among adults and children. This includes impacts on chronic respiratory diseases including lung cancer, adult blood pressure and cardiovascular disease, birth weight, child pneumonia, and child growth and development.

Burning solid fuels in inefficient open fires or *chulhas* in poorly ventilated homes can result in dangerous levels of exposure to multiple harmful air pollutants, including fine particulate matter with an aerodynamic diameter of less than 2.5 µm (PM_{2.5}), black carbon, and carbon monoxide, among others. Quantitative HAP measurements performed across multiple states have shown HAP exposures exceeding the WHO's air quality guidelines (AQGs) by several orders of magnitude.

While Indian cities, in particular NCR, come to focus often for ambient air pollution (AAP) and have remained as the focal point for the NCAP, the in-household health damaging HAP exposures experienced routinely by rural populations, have largely been missing from the AQGs (AQGs) by several orders of magnitude.

Until recently, the scale and magnitude of HAP's contribution to AAP has been under-recognised and poorly characterised and the impact of emissions from solid cooking fuels has been largely overlooked. Newly developed emission inventories estimate that primary PM_{2.5} emissions, summed across non-attainment cities of the NCAP, contribute a small fraction of total national emissions (for example, 4 per cent in Uttar Pradesh and 17 per cent in Maharashtra). Further, while the traditional focus has been

on coal as the largest sectoral contributor, residential biomass cooking-fuel use dominates emissions across the cleanest to the most polluted air-sheds in India.

The estimates of the contribution of solid cooking fuels to ambient PM_{2.5} are also getting more consistent with an estimated median national contribution of 30 per cent, with considerable heterogeneity across states. Granular models conducted under the aegis of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MOEFCC) now estimate that indoor residential biomass combustion can reduce average national ambient exposure to fine particulate matter below the national ambient air quality standard (NAAQS) across most districts in India.

Finally, transitioning poor populations from biomass cook-fuels to LPG has often been pitched as being inconsistent with the global "de-carbonisation" and "fossil fuel phase-out" goals. However, the use of biomass cooking fuels punishes the climate agenda twice, on account of non-renewable biomass harvesting and release of short-lived climate pollutants during combustion. These climate pollutants like particulate black carbon (or soot) are nearly 1000-times stronger atmospheric warmers, on a per mass basis, than carbon dioxide. Globally and in India, complete transitions to gaseous cooking fuels such as LPG have been shown to result in drastic reductions in emissions of climate-damaging pollutants with health co-benefits from reductions in HAP and AAP.

India has an unprecedented opportunity to demonstrate the feasibility of a public-health intervention focused on eliminating household air pollution. The Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) has already made hefty infrastructure investments for providing LPG access that cover nearly 99 per cent of households in the country. Recently conducted studies have shown that provision of free LPG results in sustained attainment of the WHO air quality target guidelines within the household and a virtual elimination of solid fuel use even among the poorest of biomass-using households. Since both household and ambient air-pollution exposure are causally linked to a range of child and adult health outcomes, mitigating emissions from residential biomass combustion would reduce overall exposure much faster than any other source, translating to a bigger health benefit.

Strengthening PMUY with additional financial resources including further subsidies to enable poor communities to completely transition to LPG would yield transformative co-benefits for the NCAP and public health in India. Cost effectiveness of such strategies have also been noted in a recent World Bank report on addressing air pollution in South Asia.

Global climate investments shifting away from promoting near-term transitions from biomass cooking fuels to LPG could leave millions across developing countries in the shadow of unjust transitions that leave vulnerable communities bearing the brunt of energy and health inequities.

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Spokesperson for the oppressed

Amiya Kumar Bagchi went against dominant currents in his research, convictions

ADITYA MUKHERJEE

PROFESSOR AMIYA KUMAR Bagchi passed away on November 28 at 88. A legendary Indian academic, teacher and institution builder has left us. Since the 1970s, there would hardly be any historian or economist in any premier institution in India who was not expected to or grappled with his writings, whether they agreed with some of his conclusions or not. He will be sorely missed, particularly in today's times when the academic world is under severe stress in India, with free and non-conformist thought becoming increasingly difficult and even punishable.

If there was one quality that distinguished Professor Bagchi, it was his ability to stand up boldly against the dominant current, however powerful and pervasive it may be, if his own research and conviction pointed the other way. In the discipline of economics, India began to witness by the late 1960s and early 70s a turn away from the study of Political Economy, (which was the hallmark of our early nationalists, like people like Dadabhai Naoroji and R C Dutt, a tradition kept alive by later economists like Bhabatosh Datta, B N Ganguli, K N Raj and several others), towards econometrics, mathematical modelling, game theory, etc. It was at that time that Bagchi, as a doctoral student at Cambridge, switched from being a game theorist to probing issues of political economy,

particularly economic history. Economic history proved critical in making major theoretical breakthroughs, as is evident from the writings of Karl Marx, Dadabhai Naoroji, Maurice Dobb, Ernest Mandel, Andre Gunder Frank, Paul Baran, Daniel Thorner and so many others. Bagchi too used his deep foray into economic history to make important theoretical generalisations.

Bagchi's magnum opus *Private Investment in India, 1900-1939*, published in 1972 was his first major work as a result of his shift in focus to economic history. Based on research from a variety of sources in India and England, the book immediately became a must-read for every student of history and economics and it remains so till today. More than 50 years after it was published, after a deep and thorough study of all major sectors of the Indian economy, Bagchi demonstrates, proving many current supply-oriented hypotheses wrong, that the reason for the lack of industrial investment and overall growth in colonial India was not what economists had been repeating ad infinitum. That is, the lack of supply of capital, or its "shyness", lack of entrepreneurship, unsuitable social traditions and values in contrast to the so-called "protestant ethic" in England, overpopulation and so on, but the imposition of the priorities of British imperialism in India which

constrained demand severely, limiting the profitability or even viability of investment.

Professor Bagchi's foray into the economic history of the modern period led him inevitably to look at the capitalist system as a global phenomenon, which explained the development of some parts of the world and the underdevelopment if not decimation of other parts. Among his numerous publications, the next major contribution came in the form of the book *The Political Economy of Underdevelopment*, published in 1982. It is a study that looks at various parts of the world which became victims of colonialism at different points of time for varying periods, under different colonial masters, but all sharing certain underlying similarities and structural disabilities. The study covered Latin America, Indonesia, China and India.

From here, the logical next step was his masterly overview of the emergence of world capitalism and its impact, not only in the early stages of the rise of capitalism but also its devastating consequences on a large part of humanity up to the current millennium. It was to be his last magnum opus, *Perilous Passage: Mankind and the Global Ascendancy of Capital*, published in 2005. In this work, Bagchi, in his inimitable polemical style backed by huge amount of empirical evidence, demolishes several Eurocentric

myths promoted by the dominant Western world, such as that Europe went ahead of the rest of the world centuries before the Industrial Revolution, or that Europe shot ahead of the rest of the world with the Industrial Revolution because of some intrinsic advantages or capabilities. On the contrary, he shows that the Great Divergence, the rapid rise of the West was in fact predicated upon surplus extraction and decimation of the rest. Through a detailed calculation he shows that between 1871 and 1916, Britain extracted as tribute from India about £3.2 billion while total British investment abroad was about £4 billion, a large part of it going to the White colonies and the US. The blood and sweat of the Indian people thus contributed, in no small measure, to the "peopling of the United States" through massive migrations from Europe "and its rise as the most economically advanced country in the world (and) also helped improve the living conditions of the Europeans left behind." A connection Professor Bagchi brings home so dramatically that our colonised minds did not make.

The world will miss a great spokesperson for the oppressed.

The writer taught contemporary history at JNU. His latest book is *Nehru's India: Past, Present and Future*

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A BAD PRECEDENT

THIS REFERS TO the article, "When court undermines itself" (IE, December 2). It is surprising that civil courts across India have ordered an archaeological survey of various mosques. Such an order violates the Places of Worship Act, 1991 which mandated that the religious status of any place of worship should be maintained as it existed on August 15, 1947. The Gyanpuri mosque in Varanasi and the Krishna Janmabhoomi site in Mathura have received special attention. The Supreme Court has not intervened effectively. The Court's observation that the Act did not bar a survey to find out the nature of a religious place actually encouraged activists and petitioners to intensify their campaign.

Sankar Paul, Nadia

WOMEN'S AGENCY

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "Hit and miss" (IE, December 2). Women seeking fewer work hours is a cause for celebration, not concern. Workers trying to have a balanced work life balance leads to self-enrichment and improve-

ment of mental health. An assured payout encourages women to dream bigger, seek better wages and improve their social standing within family and society. To say that women are less inclined to seek work because of such schemes falls victim to the narrow vision of viewing them as mere "labhritis".

Nimish, Mumbai

BANGLADESH UNREST

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "A time to rebuild" (IE, December 2). Atrocities against minorities continue to be reported in Bangladesh. The Indian government has expressed its concern to the Yamas government. However, this diplomatic push for communal harmony is nuanced. If the BJP has not shied away from religious polarisation targeting Muslims in India — indeed, making it a cornerstone of its politics — why would any party in a similar situation, not exploit polarisation politics? This presents a paradox: Countries whose domestic politics stand at odds with their projected international image.

I R Murnu, New Delhi

Electronic monitoring of prisoners: arguments for and against

AJOY SINHA KARPURAM NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 2

PRESIDENT DROUPADI Murmu last month released a report by the Supreme Court's Centre for Research and Planning, which suggested several measures to address the problem of overcrowding in India's prisons. The report, *Prisons in India: Mapping Prison Manuals and Measures for Reformation and Decongestion*, has a section on 'Electronic Tracking of Prisoners', which discusses the use of tracking technology as a condition for bail to reduce the number of undertrial prisoners who make up the vast majority of prisoners. This July, the Supreme Court had held that bail conditions that allow the police to track the movement of an accused released on bail, violate the right to privacy. However, the report — like the Law Commission of India and the Parliamentary

Standing Committee on Home Affairs — has said that tracking, with the right safeguards, would be beneficial.

The case for tracking

As of December 2022, India's prisons had an overall occupancy of 131.4%, with 5.73,220 inmates against a total capacity of 4,36,266, according to figures compiled by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). More than three quarters of prisoners were undertrials, who had not been convicted of a crime. According to the report, electronic monitoring "could prove to be a cost-effective method to decongest jails". It gives the example of Odisha, where the government spends about Rs 1 lakh annually on each undertrial, while a tracker "would cost around Rs 10,000 to 15,000". A report submitted by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs last year noted that "through the use of [ankle/bracelet]

trackers, administrative machinery or human resources staff involved in keeping track of prisoners who are out on bail can be reduced". (Prisons: Conditions, Infrastructure and Reforms)

Lessons from the US

Several studies have argued that electronic monitoring is essentially incarceration by another name — "e-carceration". In a report published in September 2022, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) noted that "EM (electronic monitoring) serves as an extension of the carceral crisis, expanding the punitive power of jails and prisons beyond their traditional physical walls as a system of 'e-carceration'". The "overuse of government surveillance can create oppressive, criminalizing environments, especially for communities of color", the report, *Rethinking Electronic Monitoring: A Harm Reduction Guide*, said.

Electronic monitoring and restrictions on movement for persons on parole or in the pre-trial stage is common in the US. Like people of colour in the US, members of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) are overrepresented in prison populations in India. The latest NCRB data show almost 70% of prisoners belong to these communities.

The other question is of bearing the cost of electronic monitoring. The Supreme Court's report suggests it should be the government — in the US (which has been cited as an example in the report) though, the costs are often borne by the individual under monitoring. These include \$100-\$200 in setup charges and daily charges of up to \$35, according to the nonprofit Electronic Frontier Foundation. The report also acknowledges the possibility of stigma associated with a visible monitoring device: "Some individuals may resist wearing [them] due to concerns about social stigma or a perception of invasive surveillance".

Question of privacy

On July 8, an SC Bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan struck down a bail condition imposed by the Delhi HC on two foreign nationals booked for offences under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985 — that they must "drop a PIN on the google map to ensure that their location is available to the Investigation Officer...". This, the top court held, would violate the fundamental right to privacy under Article 21. "The investigating agency cannot be permitted to continuously peep into the private life of the accused enlarged on bail," it said. The Standing Committee Report of 2023 had noted that such measures must only be taken with the consent of the individual. "It must be ensured that to avoid any kind of human rights violation this scheme or method should be used on voluntary basis after procuring the consent of inmates," the report said. Research by George Washington University on the impact of electronic monitoring on privacy in 44 US states reported that "people on court supervision (including those who are on monitors) are often subjected to invasions of their bodily autonomy through random drug testing, blood and DNA sampling, as well as invasions of their home through mandatory home visits...". The 268th Report of the Law Commission of India, published three months before the SC verdict recognising the fundamental right to privacy, argued for electronic monitoring, but acknowledged the possible "grave and significant impact on constitutional rights". "Such monitoring must be used only in grave and heinous crimes, where the accused person has a prior conviction in similar offences", the Report said.

EXPLAINED GLOBAL

President Biden pardons his son: What will it entail?



President Joe Biden embraces his son Hunter Biden after his speech in Chicago on August 19, 2024. THE NYT

THE US President Joe Biden on Sunday pardoned his son Hunter after repeatedly saying that he will not. Here are the circumstances in which the pardon came, and what all it entails.

What did the pardon cover?

Hunter Biden was pardoned for his conviction by a jury in Delaware and a guilty plea in California. Hunter was also pardoned for federal crimes "he committed or may have committed" between January 1, 2014 through the end of this year.

What crimes was Hunter convicted of?

A Delaware jury in June found the President's son guilty of lying about his addiction to illegal drugs on a disclosure form that is required to purchase a firearm. Hunter was scheduled to be sentenced on December 12.

He separately pleaded guilty to criminal charges of failing to pay \$1.4 million in taxes while spending lavishly on drugs, sex workers, and luxury items. He was scheduled to be sentenced on December 16.

What kind of sentence was Hunter looking at?

Hunter was potentially facing decades in prison, although sentencing guidelines suggested he was likely to receive a much less severe punishment.

For the gun charges, sentencing guide-

lines are 15 to 21 months, although legal experts said defendants in similar situations receive shorter sentences and are less likely to be incarcerated if they abide by the terms of their pretrial release.

Could Hunter still be implicated in other cases?

If the US House of Representatives or the Justice Department decides to probe the Biden family business dealings, as some Republicans have promised to do, Hunter could potentially be called to testify.

Before he was pardoned, he could have declined to do so, citing his Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination. The pardon could limit his ability to invoke that right, because he no longer faces criminal jeopardy for any federal crimes committed during the period covered. Presidential pardons do not protect people from prosecution for state crimes.

Are presidential pardons unusual?

No. Presidents beginning with George Washington, the first US president, have granted pardons. Gerald Ford pardoned his predecessor Richard Nixon, who had resigned in disgrace. Bill Clinton pardoned his brother-in-law, and Donald Trump pardoned Charles Kushner, a real estate developer and the father of Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner.

REUTERS

RAVI DUTTA MISHRA NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 2

DONALD TRUMP has threatened the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) countries with 100% import tariffs if they create their own currency or back an existing currency to replace the United States dollar as the world's reserve currency.

"We require a commitment from these countries that they will neither create a new BRICS currency nor back any other currency to replace the mighty US dollar, or they will face 100 per cent tariffs and should expect to say goodbye to selling into the wonderful US economy," the US President-elect posted on social media over the weekend.

Ever since the US threw Iran and Russia out of the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT), which is key to international financial transactions, countries around the world, including India, have looked to reduce dependence on the US dollar, as well as on the US-led global financial system.

At the BRICS summit in Kazan in October, Russian President Vladimir Putin said: "The dollar is being used as a weapon. We really see that this is so. I think that this is a big mistake by those who do this."

At the 2023 BRICS summit in Johannesburg, President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva of Brazil had said the "creation of a new [BRICS] currency...increases our payment options and reduces our vulnerabilities".

Internationalisation of rupee...

In an attempt to reduce reliance on the US dollar and to internationalise the Indian rupee, the Reserve Bank of India allowed invoicing and payments for international trade in Indian rupees in 2022, after sanctions were imposed on Russia amid the war in Ukraine. In his remarks at Kazan, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said India "welcomed [d] efforts to increase financial integration among BRICS countries", and "trade in local currencies and smooth cross-border payments will strengthen our economic cooperation".

Last month, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar told the India-Russia Intergovernmental Commission meeting in Mumbai that "mutual settlement of trade in national currencies is of great importance, especially in the current circumstances".

India's trade with Russia in domestic currency remains low due to Indian banks' fear of US sanctions, and an unbalanced trade relationship between the countries — India imports far outstrip its exports. Russia has,



Russia's President Vladimir Putin, seen at the Kazan BRICS summit in October with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and China's President Xi Jinping, has said the United States is using the dollar as a "weapon". REUTERS

therefore, not been able to use its huge pile of rupees reserves to settle bilateral trade dues, and has used it to invest in Indian stocks and bonds instead.

The more balanced Russia-China trade, by contrast, has helped transactions using the yuan and ruble. According to the Russian government, more than 90% of trade settlement between the two countries is now done in rubles.

...But not targeting US dollar

In October Jaishankar had clarified that while US policies often complicate trade with certain countries, and India sought "workarounds" in pursuit of its trade interests, it did not "target" the dollar or seek to move away from it.

"We have never actively targeted the dollar. That's not part of our economic, political, or strategic policy. Some others may have done so. What I will say is that we have a natural concern. We often have trade partners who lack dollars for transactions. So, we must decide whether to forgo dealings with them or find alternative settlements that work. There's no malicious intent towards the dollar," Jaishankar said in response to a question at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, an American think tank in Washington DC.

The Triennial Central Bank Survey 2022 of the Bank for International Settlements (BIS), an international financial institution owned

by member central banks, showed the US dollar accounted for 88% of the global forex turnover. The rupee ranked for 16th.

High tariff wall could hit US

While the dollar dominates global trade — accounting for more than 90% of transactions — it is not the only currency used internationally. Other convertible currencies like the Japanese yen, the euro, and the British pound are also integral to global commerce, and the US has not objected to their use. The proposed BRICS currency is simply another of these alternatives, aimed at facilitating trade among member countries and reducing over-reliance on a single currency, international trade experts said.

"It is the actions of the United States that have pushed many countries to seek alternatives to the US dollar. The US has a history of leveraging its influence over global financial systems, such as the SWIFT network, to impose unilateral sanctions. SWIFT is essential for secure and standardised international financial transactions. By blocking countries like Russia and Iran from accessing SWIFT, the US has effectively weaponised the global financial infrastructure, forcing other nations to find alternative payment mechanisms to continue legitimate trade," Ajay Srivastava, head of the think tank Global Trade Research Initiative, and a former Indian government trade official, said.

According to Srivastava, a 100% tariff on

BRICS countries would ultimately hurt the US. "Imports into the US would shift to third countries, potentially increasing costs for American consumers without bringing manufacturing jobs back home. The US has become less competitive in manufacturing labour-intensive goods due to higher production costs, and tariffs are unlikely to reverse this," he said.

Need for China caution

Ajay Sahai, Director General & CEO of the Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO), the country's top trade promotion organisation, said that while supporting local currency initiatives, India should ensure the framework does not disproportionately favour China, given the asymmetry in economic power among BRICS nations.

"China is very keen to assume a dominant role to use the bloc against the US, though India, Brazil, and South Africa are more keen to work with the US and settle the differences amicably through negotiations," Sahai said. India should engage diplomatically with the US to explain its position, emphasising that diversifying trade mechanisms is not anti-American but a move towards multipolarity and financial stability, he said.

India should accelerate its Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) initiative and push for internationalisation of financial platforms such as Unified Payments Interface (UPI), Sahai said. "Trump's threat is unlikely to deter BRICS nations from pursuing alternatives to the US dollar. For India, the best course is a balanced approach: supporting financial reforms within BRICS that align with its interests while maintaining strong ties with the US to safeguard its broader strategic and economic priorities," he said.

The Currency Composition of Official Foreign Exchange Reserves (COFER) of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) shows a gradual decline in the share of the dollar in central bank and government foreign reserves. However, the reduced role of the dollar over the past two decades has not been matched by corresponding increases in the shares of the euro, yen, and pound, according to the IMF. "Rather, this has been accompanied by a rise in the share of...non-traditional reserve currencies, including the Australian dollar, Canadian dollar, Chinese renminbi, South Korean won, Singaporean dollar, and the Nordic currencies," the IMF said in a blog published in July. The gains of the renminbi in particular, "match a quarter of the decline in the dollar's share", the blog said, confirming a trend it also had flagged in a paper in 2022.

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How land degradation is threatening Earth's capacity to sustain humanity

ALIND CHAUHAN NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 2

LAND DEGRADATION is undermining Earth's capacity to sustain humanity, and failure to reverse it will pose challenges for generations to come, a new United Nations report found. A million sq km of land is getting degraded each year, with an estimated 15 million sq km already impacted — more than the entire continent of Antarctica — by land degradation, the report titled *Stepping back from the precipice: Transforming land management to stay within planetary boundaries* said.

The analysis has been carried out by the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) — a legally binding framework to address desertification and the effects of drought — in collaboration with Germany's Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research. It was published

on Monday, a day before the 16th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP16) of UNCCD began in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

What is land degradation? Why is it a matter of concern?

According to UNCCD, land degradation is "the reduction or loss of the biological or economic productivity and complexity of rainfed cropland, irrigated cropland, or range, pasture, forest and woodlands resulting from a combination of pressures, including land use and management practices". Land degradation adversely affects humans and ecosystems around the planet. For instance, it raises the risk of malnutrition by reducing the quality and quantity of food production, and contributes to the spread of water- and food-borne diseases that result from poor hygiene and scarcity of clean water. It can cause respiratory diseases due to soil erosion.

Marine and freshwater systems also suffer due to land degradation. For example,

LAND DEGRADATION IN NUMBERS			
60%: Remaining global forest cover — well below the safe boundary of 75%.	expansion and poorly planned afforestation.	since 2015 attributed to climate change	
15 MN SQ KM: Degraded land area, more than the size of Antarctica, expanding by 1 mn sq km annually.	46%: Global land area classified as drylands, home to a third of humanity	25%: Share of biodiversity found in soil	
20%: Earth's land surface covered by the savanna, now under threat from cropland	90%: Share of recent deforestation directly caused by agriculture.	50%+: World's major rivers disrupted by dam construction	
	20%: Decline in trees' and soil's CO2 absorption capacity	47%: Aquifers being depleted faster than they are replenished	
		Source: UNCCD report	

eroded soil carrying fertilisers and pesticides washes into water bodies, harming both the fauna living there and local communities which depend on them.

Land degradation contributes to climate change as well. The world's soil is the largest terrestrial carbon sink. When land is degraded, soil carbon can be released into the

atmosphere, along with nitrous oxide. This can further exacerbate global warming.

The new report said land degradation has reduced the capacity of land ecosystems such as trees and soil to absorb human-caused carbon dioxide by 20% in the last decade. Previously, these ecosystems could absorb nearly one-third of this kind of pollution.

What is causing land degradation?

Unsustainable agricultural practices such as the heavy use of chemical inputs, pesticides, and water diversion are the foremost drivers of land degradation, the report said. That is because such practices lead to deforestation, soil erosion, and pollution.

"Unsustainable irrigation practices deplete freshwater resources, while excessive use of nitrogen- and phosphorus-based fertilisers destabilise ecosystems," according to the report.

Another factor is climate change — land degradation not only contributes to climate change but is also spurred by it. A report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate

Change (IPCC), the UN body for assessing the science related to climate change, noted that global warming has worsened land degradation by increasing frequency, intensity and/or amount of heavy precipitation, and increased heat stress.

Then there is rapid urbanisation, which has intensified land degradation by contributing to habitat destruction, pollution, and biodiversity loss.

Which areas are the worst affected?

The report has identified several land degradation hotspots in dry regions such as South Asia, northern China, the High Plains and California in the United States, and the Mediterranean. A third of humanity now lives in drylands, which include three-quarters of Africa.

It also noted that land degradation hits low-income countries disproportionately. That is because its impacts are concentrated in tropical and arid regions, and poorer countries have lesser resilience to withstand land degradation and its fallout.

The
Hindustan Times
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

[OUR TAKE]

Dollar challenge
to Brics nations

Trump raises new bogey to boost optics about him as a protector of American interests

Donald Trump will only take over the White House in January next year. However, his policy pronouncements have already started. A lot of his disruption, for good or bad, will be aimed at domestic institutions in the United States (US). But his economic policies, thanks to the US being the dominant economic power in the world, have global bearings.

After his proclamations of imposing tariffs on countries such as Canada and Mexico on his first day in office, Trump has now warned Brics countries against attempts to float any other currency to challenge the dollar's hegemonic status. Trump might well be trying to make himself look good by raising a bogey. Talks of floating another currency to replace the dollar have gone on for too long without anything materialising. Brics countries today, especially China and India — the former is the world's second-largest economy, and the latter will become the third largest soon — have far too many strategic differences to trust each other enough to enter a currency union. The others are not exactly best friends and almost all of them except Russia have deep economic ties with the US. Such statements might be good to boost Trump's optics of a strong leader in the eyes of him and his supporters, but the markets know better.

Not all of Trump's economic designs, however, are empty rhetoric. At the heart of them is a belief that the US can continue to enjoy its position as the global capitalist leader without fulfilling the obligations that this role requires. And this is exactly where Trump and the US economy under him will face their biggest contradictions. To give an example, if the Trump administration were to continue its promised tax cuts and do little to control the fiscal deficit and, more importantly, national debt, there will come a threshold when financial markets will start raising their risk premium vis-à-vis their US investments. Add to it the already growing talk of a big bubble building up in high-tech stocks in the US, and things could get more complicated for the American financial markets and the dollar.

When seen in the backdrop of these real constraints, Trump's threats against (as of now) imaginary attempts to float another currency vis-à-vis the dollar seem like a strategy to convince outside governments and markets that America can have its cake and eat it too. This has not been attempted since the 1950s. We are in uncharted waters now.

The return of Maoist spectre in Telangana

The encounter on Sunday in Telangana's Mulugu district that resulted in the death of seven persons — all members of the outlawed CPI (Maoist), according to police — points to the continuing presence of Left-wing extremists in the state. This incident, coming in the wake of Maoists killing 21 tribal people on November 23, is only the second of its kind in the last 10 years. Telangana, once a hotbed of Maoists/Naxalites, nearly eliminated Left-wing extremism (LWE) using a judicious mix of police action and incentives such as an attractive surrender-rehabilitation policy for Maoist cadre and developmental initiatives in underdeveloped areas.

This success, however, is yet to be replicated in Chhattisgarh, which remains the last major bastion of Maoists. Ironically, the resurfacing of LWEs in Telangana could well be the result of security operations in Chhattisgarh: At least 207 LWE activists have been killed in Chhattisgarh in 2024, the highest since 2009, which may have forced Maoist cadre, already on the backfoot, to flee into Telangana. Mulugu district, a relatively less populated and forested region in the state, borders Chhattisgarh.

Since former prime minister Manmohan Singh termed Naxalism as India's greatest internal security threat in 2009, there has been a strong push, involving central forces and specially trained state police, to eliminate LWE. This involved both interstate security action as well as smart policy interventions to address social and economic issues that the Maoists have exploited to spread their ideology. Home minister Amit Shah said in October that the last battle against Maoists has begun and that the LWE problem will be tackled by 2026. The government needs to go about this task without compromising on human rights so that extremists cannot exploit the situation in the ostensible endgame. To ensure this, the government must not veer from its larger goal of extending public goods and services to the people living in embattled regions.

Multiple crisis vectors
destabilising Pakistan

The glue of self-interest binds the government and the military firmly together and as long as that alliance is firm, it can assure Pakistan of the minimum stability it needs to stagger on

Two distinct vectors have intersected in Pakistan this past week. The first was a high-intensity political clash as the jailed Imran Khan's wife led large numbers of his supporters into the heart of Islamabad in defiance of the government, vowing to remain till their leader was released. If the intention was to create a high-pressure situation to change the status quo, clearly the effort did not work. The protest was dispersed with some force but without the major casualty figures that would have significantly discredited the government. It leaves Imran Khan in much the same position as he was earlier — very popular, but in jail along with other major figures of his party.

The second vector was major armed clashes, part-sectarian, part-tribal, in the Kurram district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This Shia-Sunni confrontation was the cause of over 100 casualties over a four- to five-day period before an uneasy truce was

somehow stitched up. Violence levels have since reduced but not slightly, and clashes and gun battles continue.

Nether situation is new. Mobilising large armies of supporters in the tens of thousands is a favoured technique of Imran Khan. It enables him to put pressure on his opponents and the expectation is that under pressure, mistakes will be made. In 2014, he led his supporters into Islamabad and refused to leave the city centre, bringing life in the capital to a near halt. So disruptive was the process that a scheduled visit by the President of China had to be put off. Such protests can get out of hand too. Last year, on May 9, following Imran Khan's arrest, his protesters targeted prominent military installations, further cementing the divide between the army command and the former Prime Minister (PM). Unsurprisingly, last week's protest was somewhat of an anticlimax: PM Shahbaz Sharif is presently assured of the military's support, so Imran Khan's attempts to rock the boat can be countered. Equally clear is that this setback does not appear to have dented the jailed leader's popularity.

The Kurram clashes are also part of a long pattern of Shia-Sunni clashes overlaid by tribal differences — in this erstwhile tribal area. Kurram is incidentally the only Shia-majority district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. As elsewhere in Pakistan, the events of 1979 — with the Shia Revolution in Iran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan — transformed what were relatively minor local issues and conflicts into geopolitical fault lines. The recent clashes in Kurram stand out for their intensity and cannot be dissociated from the ferment in the Af-Pak border region after the consolidation of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the new public divide between Pakistan and the Taliban in Kabul.

The high drama in Islamabad and the bloodletting in Kurram come also in the wake of other political and security stresses. Violence and terrorist attacks in Baluchistan as well as in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have seen a marked spike over most of November and, in fact, over the course of 2024 as a whole. Major terrorist attacks, targeting both relatively soft civilian targets as well as security personnel, have been regular features during the past few weeks.

What has attracted the most attention is the safety of Chinese personnel in Pakistan. In the first week of October, at least two Chinese nationals were killed in an apparently targeted terrorist attack in Karachi. Baluch insurgent groups are believed to have been responsible. The question of security for their project workers has led to a very unusual public airing of concerns by Chinese officials about the security situation in Pakistan.

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REUTERS

Amidst this distinct uptick in terrorist attacks and related violence, political manoeuvring, and tactical positioning alongside major constitutional engineering also continue, almost as if on an autonomous track. In late October, the National Assembly and Senate passed the 26th Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan. The most substantive of the changes it has made is in the relative power positions of the judiciary vis-à-vis the legislature, which is now tilted pretty decisively in favour of the latter.

For instance, the commission which oversees all superior judiciary appointments has been reconstituted so that the judicial members in it are in a minority. The Chief Justice of Pakistan will henceforth not be appointed on the basis of seniority but by selection from a panel of three senior-most judges by a parliamentary committee. There are other changes with the same thrust: The empowerment of the judiciary, which had been a striking feature of the process that saw the end of the Musharraf military dictatorship, is basically being reversed. The reason is also clear.

Neither the government led by the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) and supported by the Pakistan People's Party, nor the army wants to take the chance of a pro-Imran judge or Chief Justice acting in a way that could upset their calculations.

Where does all this leave Pakistan? It is tempting to see all this as the further unravelling of Pakistan's long "poly-crisis" — a structural malaise encompassing economic, internal and external security-related, geopolitical and numerous internal dysfunction factors. But, equally, it is essential, especially for us in India, not to make the mistake of seeing this as a kind of tipping or even implosion point for Pakistan. It most certainly is not. The glue of self-interest binds the government and the military firmly together and as long as that alliance is firm, it can assure Pakistan of the minimum stability it needs to stagger on — much as it has always done in the past.

TCA Raghavan is a former high commissioner to Pakistan. The views expressed are personal

[SIMPLY ECONOMICS]

Pranith Bhattacharya

The great Indian debate
on national champions

In the spring of 2014, the American pharma giant Pfizer offered to take over the British pharma company AstraZeneca, partly to take advantage of lower taxes in the United Kingdom (UK). The offer sent shock waves across the British establishment, which viewed AstraZeneca as an important scientific asset. The most vocal champions of globalisation discovered the virtues of protectionism at that time.

The "cost-crunching emperor" would imperil the UK's scientific base, the *Financial Times* warned in an editorial. "Britain is uncomfortable with the idea of national champions and state interventions," the editorial said. "But as it considers the deal, AstraZeneca's board must lift its eyes from tax returns and consider the long-term interests of the company and the industry of which it forms a part."

Eventually, AstraZeneca's board decided to reject Pfizer's offer, and the firm went on to play a stellar role in coming up with an effective vaccine against Covid-19. Easy access to the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine (sold under the brand names Covishield and Vaxzevria) allowed the UK to vaccinate its citizens ahead of most parts of Europe. The national champion paid its debt to the nation.

The AstraZeneca example suggests that even in highly globalised economies, the economic policy establishment may treat some companies as national assets and be fiercely protective of their implicit nationality. But whether national champions should receive State subsidies, and under what terms and conditions, remain contentious issues.

The recent actions against the Adani Group by officials in countries as diverse as the United States (US), Bangladesh, and Kenya have ignited a fresh debate on the role of national champions in India's growth story. Unlike AstraZeneca, the Adani Group is not known for world-beating innovation. But it has an impressive track record in running ports. The breathtaking pace at which it has acquired infrastructure assets in different parts of the world has led to an impression that it enjoys the implicit support of the Indian State. The fact that a State-owned insurer is among the handful of institutional investors in the group has only strengthened that impression.

On one side of the debate are those who

worry that the concentration of economic power in the hands of a few State-backed industrialists would give them an unfair edge over their rivals. As their competitors wither away, the oligarchs would gain extraordinary pricing power, raising prices and hurting consumers over the long run. Their wealth would help them manage the political process and prevent any backlash against their growing powers. They would find enough "influencers" cutting across political lines to justify their acts of omissions and commissions under the guise of "national interest," the argument goes.

On the other side of the debate are those who find nothing wrong if Indian officials promote Adani's case, at home and abroad. They view Adani as India's answer to China's Belt and Road Initiative. Adani and other large conglomerates (such as Reliance and the Tata Group) can help India realise its geostrategic ambitions faster. So, they deserve special treatment, the argument goes. They point to the example of South Korea, where the State helped them manage the political process and prevent any backlash against their growing powers. They would find enough "influencers" cutting across political lines to justify their acts of omissions and commissions under the guise of "national interest," the argument goes.

One must remember, however, that Korea's conglomerate-led growth strategy was crafted by the example of South Korea, where the State helped them manage the political process and prevent any backlash against their growing powers. They would find enough "influencers" cutting across political lines to justify their acts of omissions and commissions under the guise of "national interest," the argument goes.

No democratically elected leader — however popular — can afford to cede the right to industrialists in the same manner. Hence the Chunghee model won't work in India, and if the Indian State must use industrial conglomerates to secure its long-term strategic goals, then these conglomerates must be subject to rules and oversight mechanisms that other quasi-State entities face, including not just regulatory but also parliamentary scrutiny.

India's founding fathers worried that political equality in the country was accompanied by stark economic and social inequalities. Unless socioeconomic inequalities were reduced, political equality would be under constant threat, the economist-turned-lawyer BR Ambedkar warned in his final speech at the Constituent Assembly. Any policy initiative that increases the concentration of economic power and moves the country away from the ideals of our founding fathers must be viewed with caution. A growth path that is overly dependent on a few oligarchs may not answer the needs of a large and complex democracy. Unless all citizens and all businesses consider themselves equal stakeholders in the growth process, it may not be possible to sustain growth for very long.

Pranith Bhattacharya is a Chennai-based journalist. The views expressed are personal

[OLAF SCHOLTZ | GERMAN CHANCELLOR]

Germany will remain Ukraine's strongest supporter in Europe. Ukraine can rely on us. We say what we do. And we do what we say

How MVA lost the plot in the
Maharashtra assembly polls

Though the Maharashtra elections were widely expected to be closely contested, they turned out to be far from that. The reasons behind the thumping victory of the Mahayuti — the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Shiv Sena and the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) alliance — have been widely discussed. But we also need to examine the possible reasons for the failure of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) that comprised the Congress, the NCP (Shriyachandra Pawar), and Shiv Sena (Uttam Bhalchandra Pawar). The MVA's failure in Maharashtra was not just a setback for the alliance but also a blow to the Hindutva narrative being pushed by the BJP and Shiv Sena. The MVA's loss in the assembly polls was a result of several factors, including the BJP's strong campaign, the NCP's internal divisions, and the Shiv Sena's lack of a clear strategy.

Traditionally, Maharashtra has been seen as a progressive, assimilative state, with Hindutva politics having limited appeal. However, in the run-up to the assembly polls, the BJP and the Shiv Sena-led Shiv Sena strategically appealed to Hindutva to unite, to defeat caste and class-based attempts at social engineering that are usual in state polls. The Rashtriya Swamivasek Sangh (RSS) ran an aggressive campaign online and offline to unify Hindus in favour of the Mahayuti.

The Shiv Sena-led Shiv Sena vernacularised the Hindutva narrative by invoking Marathi ruler Shivaji and the legacy of Balasaheb Thackeray (the "Hindu shiradi samrat"), alleging that the Shiv Sena (Uttam Bhalchandra Pawar) had forgotten its Hindutva roots. Among the MVA allies, the Congress and the NCP (Shriyachandra Pawar) found it difficult to resist this narrative due to their ideological complicity. Similarly, Shiv Sena (Uttam Bhalchandra Pawar) could not successfully differentiate its Hindutva from that of the RSS/BJP. Political workers on the ground said that the MVA grossly underestimated the rising space and appeal for Hindutva, especially among young voters hooked to the narrative through social media. There were also conscious attempts to rope in temple trusts and religious bodies in the Mahayuti's campaign, something that was well beyond the MVA's control.

A significant blow to the MVA has been its diminished grip on Maharashtra's political economy over the last five years, mainly caused by the defection of Shiv Sena and Ajit Pawar, who were instrumental in managing extensive patronage networks, and resource allocation within their parent parties. As deputy chief minister (CM) and finance minister, Ajit Pawar wielded significant influence over the state's financial and cooperative sectors, including the powerful sugar lobby. Meanwhile, Shiv Sena, as the CM and deputy chief minister, controlled vital brokerage networks across major cities. Their entry into the BJP-led Mahayuti not only strengthened the alliance's administrative and electoral machinery but also facilitated a strategic transfer of crucial networks — including businesses, cooperatives, and grassroots organisations — into the BJP's fold. Ajit Pawar reportedly aligned with the sugar lobby with the BJP, ensuring political support and financial stability, while Shiv Sena's grassroots appeal and organisational acumen consolidated support across constituencies.

The Congress, despite its status as a national party with a pan-Maharashtra presence, failed to emerge as its organisation or take on a leadership role within the MVA. Similarly, the limitations of the Shiv Sena (Uttam Bhalchandra Pawar) and Sharad Pawar's faction, which traditionally relied on strong grassroots cadres but struggled to rebuild their organisational networks after internal splits, were underlined again. Shiv Sena and Ajit Pawar breaking away not only cost their parent outfits influential leaders but also siphoned off significant portions of their bottom-turn leadership.

While Uddhav Thackeray and Sharad Pawar relied heavily on their personal appeal, there was little effort to systematically cultivate second- and third-rung leadership and also siphoned off significant portions of their bottom-turn leadership.

The MVA's lack of internal cohesion was reflected in its failure to announce its chief ministerial face, even as the Shiv Sena (Uttam Bhalchandra Pawar) hoped that Uddhav Thackeray as the potential CM would help the alliance immensely. Similarly, many leaders of the MVA supported independent candidates contesting against official MVA candidates. While the Mahayuti, too, had several internal disagreements and skirmishes, these were effectively nipped. The MVA had a tough contest with the incumbent coalition, which had significant political and economic clout and resources. But, for the three parties in the MVA, the elections were as much about their relevance in state politics as they were about a moral and political victory — something they seem to have missed.

Sanjay Patil is a Mumbai-based researcher working on Maharashtra's political and urban informatics. The views expressed are personal

Opinion

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2024

Trump's bluster

The US president-elect's latest threat may remain on paper but India must navigate carefully

ANY SENSE THAT India was perhaps spared when US President-elect Donald Trump threatened a 25% tariff on Canada, Mexico, and China on day one of his presidency has been dispelled by his latest bluster of a 100% tariff on the Brazil, Russia, India, and South Africa (BRICS) grouping. This is the first time he has indicated any adverse tariff against New Delhi on the grounds that BRICS are planning to create a currency rivaling the almighty US dollar. Trump's concerns in this regard are more than to protect American jobs — to ensure the continued dominance of the greenback even when the US's global influence is in relative decline. India's policy establishment for the record allays any adverse implications of Trump's America First tariff policies but is taking these threats seriously and working on various strategies to cope with the potential challenges that higher duties could pose to the economy. On de-dollarisation, external affairs minister S Jaishankar, while recently addressing the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, has clarified that India has no "malicious intent vis-à-vis the dollar" and does not target it through economic or strategic policies.

More than the targeted countries or groupings, Trump's tariff bluster adversely impacts the American consumer through much higher prices as also its leading companies. The threat of a 25% tariff on Mexico and Canada, for instance, affects auto giants like General Motors, Ford, and Chrysler-owned Stellantis who extensively use these countries as manufacturing hubs to sell vehicles in the US. The trade against BRICS is more directed against Russia and China for seeking to undermine US-led western influence and replace the US dollar. America's policies, especially the growing ambit of financial sanctions against Moscow for its war in Ukraine, have contributed in great measure to this state of affairs, as has been underscored by Jaishankar. Due to sanctions-related complications in dollar-based trade, this has necessitated "workarounds" to settle trade payments. Instead of supporting moves to head towards a yuan-anchored BRICS currency to challenge the US dollar, India as a founding member of the grouping instead favours trade in local currencies and cross-border payment systems like its Unified Payments Interface.

BRICS nations are therefore far from unified on evolving a currency to challenge the dollar. Contrary to Trump's concerns, the dollar is also in no danger of losing its global hegemony. The greenback accounts for 90% of global trade transactions and 58% of official foreign exchange reserves across the world. The threat of the yuan emerging as a rival to the dollar is a distant prospect even though China is rapidly rising as an economic power to rival the US's global economic influence. The last time the world experienced a change in reserve currency from the British pound to the dollar was almost 80 years ago. But what can make matters worse is if Trump's bluster translates into policy. This will most certainly invite retaliation by US's trading partners, triggering trade wars that can diminish the dollar's influence. As has been pointed out by Michael Pettis, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, "The US cannot both reduce its trade deficit and increase the global dominance of the US dollar because these impose diametrically opposed conditions." The threat of Trump's tariffs is unlikely to deter India from pursuing policies to promote the internationalisation of the rupee and settle trade in local currencies.

Wrong oil price is really a problem for OPEC+

THE BEST SCANDALS are those that start when someone, somewhere, decides to say something utterly shocking: the truth! A senior official of the OPEC+ oil cartel has said publicly what many thought privately — the group has been keeping oil prices too high, effectively subsidising its rivals. The result? It cannot increase production and instead relies on ever-increasing output cuts.

Afshin Javan, the No. 2 official in the Iranian delegation to OPEC+, published a commentary on his country's state-run news agency Shana on November 26. The group, he argued, faced a "supply glut" largely of its own making following several years of production cuts. "This strategy in support of prices has effectively encouraged higher supply outside the group, particularly on the part of the US," he said. "That would leave a limited room for manoeuvring by OPEC+ to ease its restrictions."

Within hours, the op-ed was deleted without explanation. But the damage, in the run-up to the cartel's next meeting, was done. The commentary echoes the child in Hans Christian Andersen's fable *The Emperor's New Clothes*, who proclaims "but he hasn't got anything on!" Yup; the king is in the altogether.

OPEC+ has now delayed a gathering scheduled for December 1 until December 5, as Saudi Arabia tries to concoct a plan to keep oil prices higher. Back in June, the group announced a deal to increase production from September 2024 and throughout 2025 in monthly instalments. But weak oil prices had forced OPEC+ to delay the increases already twice, first from September to October, and then from October to January.

The postponement allows the group extra time to decide what comes next. At a minimum, Saudi Arabia is pushing to delay the output increases a third time, by somewhere between three and six months, delegates tell me. The kingdom has also discussed the possibility of extra output cuts, but has so far found zero appetite among the members for that proposal.

In the meantime, Riyadh is trying to arm-twist Iraq and Kazakhstan into respecting their OPEC+ production limits. Both nations have regularly pumped above their quotas, along with Russia and the United Arab Emirates. Kazakhstan, which has spent billions expanding its largest oilfield, is protesting so that the group recognises its right to produce more oil next year. That battle has the potential to derail any deal on December 5, delegates tell me.

Ultimately, however, the Iranians are right: OPEC+ is subsidising the growth of its rivals, and the longer it persists the more difficult it will be to find an exit strategy. Sure, President-elect Donald Trump may create an off-ramp for the Saudis if he's able to curb Iranian and Venezuelan oil exports. But that's hardly a sign of policy success for OPEC+; on the contrary, it would show that the cartel is at the mercy of the White House.

Year-to-date, Brent crude has averaged about \$80.5 a barrel. Prices have only been low enough since September to inflict some pain on US producers. Still, oil prices of \$70 to \$75 a barrel aren't enough to stop the American shale industry. One key reason is efficiency: another is that \$70 a barrel is quite good from an historical point of view. It's worth remembering that Brent averaged \$63 a barrel in the 2017-2019 period, when US producers added roughly six million barrels a day in extra crude and other liquids output.

The International Energy Agency estimates the US shale industry is so good at drilling, and does it so cheaply, that today just 300 rigs do the job that took 500 rigs five years ago. Travis D Stice, the chief executive officer of top shale producer Diamondback Energy, recently told investors that he initially planned to use 22 to 24 rigs next year, but thought he could do the job now with just 18 rigs.

Geology will eventually halt the US shale industry even if oil prices stay high. But that day hasn't arrived yet. The longer OPEC+ pushes for too high prices, the deeper the hole it digs for itself, unless it can increase production. OPEC+ officials know it, but few dare to speak up. They need to do so — or they'll regret it in the future.



JAVIER BLAS
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GDP shock not a trigger

A POSSIBLE START TO RBI'S RATE-CUTTING CYCLE COULD BE SEEN IN FEBRUARY

THE SWEET-SPOT story for India may be ending as the recently announced GDP data shows that all might not be well for the Indian economy, both from the demand side as also from the supply side. Especially as the GDP growth has now entered a sub-6% zone, unanticipated by many, including the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). As recently as the October policy, the RBI had indicated its confidence on the growth momentum as it moved the monetary policy stance to "neutral". At the October Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meeting, the RBI continued to risk a forecast of 7.2% for the full-year FY25, even as it saw the Q1 numbers missing its own estimates of 7.1% and registering an actual output of 6.7%. For the Q2FY25, the RBI estimated a growth of 7% but this has once again been missed significantly with the actual output of 5.4%.

To achieve the RBI's estimated 7.2% GDP growth for FY25, the H1FY25 growth should be at 8.4% and this seems to be an unlikely task after H1FY25 growth of 6.1%. Surely the RBI would have to accept the slip in its own estimates and bring down the growth target for the year — possibly to around 6.5%. Having accepted that growth is slowing, the question that needs an answer is, will the RBI be reactive enough to immediately launch itself into a rate cut?

First, we think that the sharp slowdown in the manufacturing sector (on the production side) and the slowdown in personal consumption (expenditure side) is due to the aggravated rainfall in certain parts of the country. Importantly, the slowing trend is also due to the slow pace of government expenditures, especially on the capital side. Remember, capital expenditures of the government were the key for the sharp turnaround in economic activity post-

Covid. Gross fixed capital formation (GFCF) was down 3.2% quarter-on-quarter (q-o-q) in Q1FY25, mostly due to elections. It was expected that government spending would pick up post-elections, but even for Q2FY25, GFCF is down by 0.5% on a q-o-q basis. The finance ministry is reported to be pushing various other ministries to speed up spending and thus, one can hope for a more stable growth trend in the remaining part of the fiscal.

The economics team at YES Bank is not calling for a rate reduction at the December meeting. Apart from growth, which is no doubt important for policy-makers, the mandate for the RBI is inflation and there is some discomfort over there. Between the October and the December meetings, the MPC has seen two inflation readings — the first for September at 5.5% and the next for October at 6.2%. The trajectory has been on the higher side and the upper end of the targeting band has been breached. True, the major component responsible for this breach is vegetable prices, which have come down in November by around 10%. This implies that the November reading will be lower than that of October,

but the monetary authority will probably have to wait a bit longer for confirmation on the inflation prices trending durably to 4%. According to our current model estimates, the average headline consumer price index (CPI) inflation should be around 5.3%, another miss from the RBI's own estimates of 4.8%. For FY26, we expect headline CPI inflation at 3.9-4%, sans any ugly swing in vegetable prices.

With this type of inflation projection one year ahead, there is no doubt a monetary easing is in the offing. But the timing is important as the RBI is currently pushed into making a very delicate choice. From the monetary policy angle and with the consideration of financial stability, restrictive monetary policy measures along with other macro-prudential measures have led to the credit deposit ratio of the banking sector correcting lower, while the froth in the unsecured loan has been reduced.

The RBI has probably now largely achieved its objective of derisking the financial sector; and with the banking sector slowing its loan growth, there was no doubt that a slower growth was in the offing. The

UNBALANCED SCALES

Union commerce & industry minister Piyush Goyal

Nations of the Global South have historically borne the brunt of environmental challenges without reaping the benefits of low-cost energy, unlike developed nations



INDRANIL PAN
Chief economist, YES Bank

What the RBI would not have a handle on immediately is the extent to which it would have to erode its forex reserves to stop a currency depreciation and having a negative impact on domestic rupee liquidity

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RBI will also have to keep an eye on the INR depreciation trends. Trump's policies on higher tariffs and a US fiscal push are likely to be inflationary for the rest of the world. Policy authorities in India would have to take cognisance of this. The final word on when the policy repo rate might be moved lower may not be in December, but there is now a fair chance for this to happen in February after an understanding of Trump's policies and their impact on global supply chains is taken into consideration.

More than a policy rate cut in December, the markets have become vocal for a cash reserve ratio (CRR) cut. The argument is that the government surplus has vanished, and systemic liquidity deficit is looming large. To my mind, it is too early to argue for a CRR cut as we expect the government to speed up spending to an extent. The seasonal tightness in liquidity could anyway be due as we head into the year-end in March, but that should sort itself out as we enter the new financial year.

What we and the RBI would not have a handle on immediately is the extent to which the latter would have to erode its forex reserves to stop a currency depreciation and having a negative impact on domestic rupee liquidity. Thus, the RBI will have to cross the bridge when it comes to it. As we write, for November 29, the RBI had absorbed ₹500 billion through its liquidity operations.

Finally, no rate cut is expected in December, and a possible start to the rate-cutting cycle could be seen in February. The RBI may not sound too worried about the rupee's liquidity position and may convey its willingness to act as the situation evolves.

Views are personal

MAGA pressure on the rupee



JAMAL MECKLAI
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effect is the weakening of the currencies of Trump's targets — the euro has fallen by 1.5% since his election, as has the Chinese yuan. With China clearly the major MAGA target, global banks are expecting further sharp falls in the yuan over the next few months. While this may provide some comfort to manufacturers in these countries, there is a limit on how low they can go, particularly since currency weakness would certainly reignite — and, in some cases, sustain — inflation.

However, the biggest issue with Trump's approach is that it will do precious little to bring support to the forgotten Americans, who I believe he genuinely wants to help as an essential part of his MAGA push.

Let us say that as a result of the tariffs on automobile imports from Mexico, Ford (for instance) decides to close down a plant (or plants) there and open them back in the US, paying the higher US wages. Let us also say that these higher costs could be absorbed if the domestic prices rose to at least the tar-

China, recognising that its huge trade surplus with the US is like a red rag to the MAGA bull, has responded by reducing the VAT rebate it was providing to exporters on aluminium and copper products

iff-adjusted level. This would generate jobs, to be sure — a key priority — but also create more than a whiff of inflation. That is unless Trump is willing — and able — to put pressure on the companies to squeeze their margins to square the circle.

Lower margins could tank the stock market, which is certainly flying on a lot of gas, unless, of course, he also cuts corporate taxes, as he plans to. But this would continue to widen the deficit, again pushing up inflation.

It looks like whichever way you turn, inflation is going up in the US, and the Fed will probably have to step dead in its tracks in its monetary easing and may well have to raise rates sometime in 2025. Boom, boom, splat! to the stock market and uppity, up, up to the dollar.

The market will get you every time, even if you are Donald Trump. The impact of all this on India is that it is exposing the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) flawed approach to managing the rupee. Growth is sharply

With the rupee falling less than other currencies and more Chinese dumping likely, Indian business may face domestic sales dip and less competitive exports

down — 5.4% in Q3 as compared to 6.7% in Q2, well below the expectations of 6.5% and the lowest in seven quarters; inflation, at 6.21% in October, is the highest in a year, up from 5.49% the previous month, and well above forecasts of 5.81%; and, most relevant in this context, the foreign currency reserves are collapsing.

The US foreign currency assets (FCA) were reported at \$567 billion as of November 22; if you add the \$70 billion the RBI is short in the forward and non-deliverable forward markets, the FCA are lower than \$500 billion. The last time they were this low was two years ago (November 2022), when the FCA were \$487 billion and forward holdings were a long \$8 billion. (Note these numbers are for foreign currency assets, not total reserves which include gold and special drawing rights.)

Again, with the rupee falling less than other currencies, particularly the yuan, and the likelihood that Chinese dumping is bound to accelerate as China struggles to find buyers with the US getting progressively more closed to it, Indian business could suffer a double whammy — reduced domestic sales and less competitive exports.

It's more than time that the RBI gives up on its incomprehensible and dangerous balancing act and gives the rupee some more room to float.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

India's growth dip

The recent deceleration of India's economic growth to 5.4% in the second half of FY25, the lowest in seven quarters, is a matter of serious concern. This slowdown, amidst a global environment of volatility, necessitates a closer examination of domestic and external factors contributing to this downturn. Weak private consumption, coupled with subdued industrial output and rural distress, has hindered growth. High inflation has eroded purchasing

power, while erratic monsoons have affected agricultural productivity, further straining rural demand. Additionally, India's over-reliance on services and insufficient focus on manufacturing has limited the economy's resilience. Structural issues continue to hinder sustainable growth. A combination of monetary policy adjustments to stabilise inflation and targeted fiscal measures to stimulate demand is imperative. Expediting infrastructure projects, enhancing ease of doing business, and incentivising investments in high-

growth sectors like renewable energy can pave the way for recovery too.

—Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

Reducing dollar dependency

The threat by President-elect Donald Trump to impose 100% tariff on Brazil, Russia, India, and South Africa (BRICS) nations adopting an alternative to the US dollar presents a challenge to global trade and diplomacy. This not only violates the principles of a multipolar world order but also risks

creating instability in markets. India, a key BRICS member and a significant partner of the US market, faces the tough challenge of maintaining balance in this situation. Strengthening its economic autonomy while reducing reliance on the dollar requires India to develop local currency trade systems and transparent financial frameworks. India must demonstrate vigilance, foresight, and diplomatic resilience.

—RK Jain 'Arijet', Barwani

Write to us at letters@expressindia.com

Reversing family planning

A three-child norm is regressive

India can take pride in the fact that the country has achieved a drop in the total fertility rate (TFR) from a high over five births per woman in 1965 to 2.01 in 2022 without the draconian civil-rights abuses (bar the 21 months of the Emergency) that were imposed on China for 36 years with its one-child policy. A falling TFR is not, of course, unalloyed good news for the world's most populous country since it implies that India's TFR is below the replacement rate of 2.1. By 2050, if a study by *Lancet* is to be believed, the country's TFR is dipping irreversibly to 1.29, suggesting that India may grow old before it grows rich. There are many approaches to coping with this demographic future, including bolstering health care, training the workforce appropriately, and tweaking insurance products, as western economies have done. Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh Sansangchak Mohan Bhagwat's solution of a three-child norm, recently spelt out, should not figure among the demographic coping mechanisms.

Significantly, Mr Bhagwat's assertion, made at an assembly in Nagpur, are a reversal of his emphatic calls for population control just two years ago, his exhortation then being an elliptical reference to disparities in the TFR between Hindus and Muslims. Now, with the growth rate of the population falling and India facing the prospect of demographic stagnation, he sees an encompassing societal danger to the nation. Encouraging a population expansion may appear to be an easy solution to accelerate growth. Certain Scandinavian nations and other European countries, which have been suffering falling population growth for decades, offer child care incentives to families. But these countries have reached a degree of socio-economic progress and administrative efficiency that enable such policies to achieve demographic aims without being socially regressive (equal paternity leave being one example). In a country as unequal as India, where welfare delivery is uneven and inefficient, a three-child norm would be fraught with pitfalls.

Unchecked population growth will undo the societal gains India has made since independence. For one, such a policy militates against women's rights, since the burden of having children and looking after them will fall disproportionately, as it does even today, on women. It will erase at one stroke all the fragile gains women have made in entering the cohorts of higher education, offices, and shop-floors. Women from poorer, more conservative families are likely to bear the brunt of such a norm. India's low female-labour participation rate at 37 per cent has long been cause for concern; burdening women, who have been at the forefront of the move towards smaller families, is unlikely to improve this critical dynamic. In Andhra Pradesh, Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu scrapped the two-child restriction on those contesting local-body elections and is considering incentivising larger families. Telangana is likely to emulate its eastern neighbour.

The southern states (Tamil Nadu and Kerala included) may have legitimate concerns that their progressive moves towards population control will militate against them when it comes to Finance-Commission awards and in diminishing representation in Parliament following a delimitation exercise. These apprehensions may not be entirely misplaced, and urgently demand addressing at policy level so that the demographic windfall in these states becomes a role model for the poorer, more populated states in the Hindi heartland. Encouraging larger families would amount to a giant step back. Instead, states paying more attention to strengthening education and health care across the country should be the preferred path.

Age restrictions

Australia's social-media law will be a case study

Last week, Australia approved the Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Bill, 2024, to prevent children under 16 from using social media such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat. Australian lawmakers were triggered into passing this measure by the recent suicides of two 12-year-olds who had been bullied online. This is the first such legislation in a liberal democracy, though many platforms voluntarily prevent children under 13 from accessing their platforms and ask for parental permission before signing up underage users. The Bill imposes fines of \$32 million if a platform fails to prevent access by under-16 users and it gives the platforms a year to set up age-verification measures. This is tricky, and may turn out to be a Catch-22 since age-verification involves the use of the sensitive personal data of minors, which may in itself result in a breach of existing privacy laws.

The new law is also contentious for other reasons. For one, while bullying and anxiety caused by social-media harassment are well-documented issues (affecting not only underage users), there are conflicting opinions about the holistic effects of social-media usage. Some developmental psychologists claim in data-driven, peer-reviewed studies that social media can have positive impacts. For children in isolated places, or with unusual interests, it can be a window to a larger world, and can create a sense of belonging to a community. There are instances of youngsters with abusive families reaching out and finding support on social media, to offset the many instances of online harassment.

There is also the practical issue that banning an all-pervasive medium doesn't make it go away. Close to a third of global internet users are underage; all use some form of social media. Crucially, most use social media as a critical adjunct of school work and conduct educational research on it. YouTube and other platforms with educational content have not been banned. Messaging apps (such as WhatsApp) and online gaming platforms are also exempted. But, for example, TikTok, which has been banned, hosts the world's most influential book clubs, and Instagram, which too is banned, is the world's go-to medium for showcasing architecture and art. Some Australian youngsters have argued that they will, one way or another, continue to use social media, in defiance of the law.

The platforms are upset. The ban impacts a large chunk of their user base, and young people are among the most engaged users. As mentioned above, there will be serious practical problems in implementing the ban. In practice, a ban may be unenforceable. It is easy for a teenager to impersonate an adult, or use a virtual private network to set up accounts outside the geographical reach of Australian law, or simply set up a fake account in the name of an adult. There are clearly two sides to this debate. Social-media platforms have, according to whistleblowers, developed addictive algorithms to increase engagement and have tended to ignore or suppress evidence that they can have harmful impacts. On the other hand, social media can, according to academics, also have significant positive impacts. A blanket ban, particularly one that is very likely unenforceable, may not be the best way to mitigate possible harm. Once the Australian law is implemented, the outcomes will be worth watching for India, which has a large and young user base of social media.



Time to adapt

India's efforts to address climate change are misaligned with what is required to protect its people and farms from extreme heat

The COP29 meetings have quite unambiguously revealed that the developed world will not pay for its sins. Consequently, developing countries in general—and India more so—will neither receive aid nor subsidised credit on the scales required. For this commentator, what has happened would not have been politically feasible anywhere in the developed world today. At best, they could have promised substantial credit facilities, which would have meant the Global South being straddled with inordinately high levels of debt. Anyway, the transition-related debt problem will now not be faced. Instead, we now need to focus on the basic problem, namely, how to survive and prosper in an era where climate changes far more rapidly than we had hoped.

The challenge is not small. Evidence suggests that both the extent of change and the associated income losses are likely to be higher than expected. Climate models indicate that South Asia will be among the most highly impacted regions. It is now obvious that while average temperature increases will far exceed the 1.5 degrees Celsius target, temperatures in specific locations on certain days will be much higher than we are used to. Therefore, the recent experience of 50 degrees Celsius-plus in North India was just a glimpse of what could happen much more widely and frequently.

Moreover, recent research reveals that the income impacts of climate change are extremely high, much more than previously envisaged. Studies on agriculture have already found a strong causality between high temperature anomalies and reduced food production across a wide range of products. Informal sector incomes are also now being found to be highly affected because of the health and effort impacts of high temperatures. Broadly summarising some of

these studies, there are large negative productivity and income impacts of high temperatures, percentage falls can be in high single or double digits for each degree of temperature increase.

The UN system has been trying to catalyse action on climate change for some time now, supporting many different initiatives including the creation of National Adaptation Plans in many countries. India, too, put together the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC). However, the NAPCC does not focus on adaptation in the sense of protecting people from income losses, enhancing resilience, or enabling them to adjust to a hotter world with more volatile weather patterns.

The NAPCC has eight components or missions, which include greater solar power, improved energy efficiency, energy efficient urban planning, water use efficiency, Himalayan ecosystem improvement, forest cover increase, and enhanced knowledge capacity on climate change. There is nothing wrong with any of these missions, though some of these did not deliver. The more important issue, however, is that we need to protect incomes, enhance resilience and help change occupational and lifestyle practices. Though well-meaning, the NAPCC will not solve the emerging problem. Most Indian states have also adopted Heat Action Plans (HAPs), but these are guided by the National Disaster Management Authority, whose natural focus is on creating event-based mechanisms. In other words, the HAPs are more focused on addressing the problem of extreme heat episodes, much like the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) is for pollution. And just as GRAP is unable to address the more systemic pollution issues, HAPs fail in addressing the adaptation challenge. India's key instruments to address climate change are misaligned with what is required for protecting itself.

To understand the challenge better, consider the



LAVEESH BHANDARI

Global warming and AI: A dangerous synergy

Global warming and artificial intelligence (AI) are two of the hottest discussion topics among scientists, technologists, economists, and policymakers today. They are also discussed animatedly in the corner offices of big corporations and the drawing rooms of the cognoscenti.

Except for die-hard climate change deniers, almost everyone agrees that global warming is a serious threat—to life and the economy, globally and locally. Global warming and climate change also offer many business opportunities—as all disasters inevitably do. But most people agree that the business opportunities of climate change are nothing compared to the threat it poses to humanity.

Meanwhile, recent developments in AI evoke mixed emotions—in the potential of it revolutionising industries and supercharging the economies for those who can use it properly it is tantalising. The dangers too are apparent—from the job losses that it will inevitably cause to the deepfakes that are destroying lives, influencing elections and generally causing havoc.

Global warming and artificial intelligence are rarely discussed together or even considered connected themes. But this is a mistake because they are linked closely. The history of global warming shows that while carbon emissions started when humans discovered how to make fire, it was really the technology revolutions that truly brought us to our current predicament. Each technology revolution—from the steam engine to thermal electricity to the hydrocarbon revolution and the rise of information technology—increased the quantum of emissions exponentially.

The balance between natural carbon sinks and carbon emitters started changing. As forests were cleared and water bodies exploited, the capacity of

natural carbon sinks diminished. And as we generated more electricity by burning coal and hydrocarbons and developed an insatiable appetite for petrol and diesel in personal transport as well as industries, the global warming clock started ticking faster. The inevitable side effect of development and better living standards and incomes has been more emissions.

But all these—hydrocarbons, coal, the internal combustion engine, cement and steel plants, and giant cargo ships consuming tonnes of fuel powered by dirty energy sources—are well-recognised villains. Less discussed and vilified is the role of digital technologies and the information technology revolution—the ubiquity of personal computing and mobile computing devices, the rise of the internet, the cloud revolution, the surge in the popularity of cryptocurrencies, and now, the generative AI revolution.

The data centres that make our lives easier at home and in the office are huge consumers of electricity and water. They contribute significantly to global warming and emissions. They heat up the environment directly, despite air conditioners used to keep them cool. It is the nature of the computing process that generates heat. Giant data centres emit immense heat, and Big Tech has often looked for solutions such as creating data centres underwater or setting them up in extremely cold geographies. While these methods may keep the servers cool, they ultimately add to global warming.

The problem has escalated with the popularity of Generative AI and Large Language Models (LLMs). The energy consumption of the latest tech centres is gargantuan. A recent study estimates that the daily electricity usage of ChatGPT is equivalent to the daily consumption of 180,000 US households. And that's just ChatGPT. Its competitors—from Google Gemini to Anthropic's Claude, Meta's Llama, X's Grok,

France's Mistral AI and others—are likely consuming similar amounts of energy. Then, there are the GenAI companies in China that are trying to outpace the Western world's GenAI champions.

Optimists argue that AI itself will help solve the global warming crisis. Many policymakers also advocate for using renewable energy sources like solar power to run AI cloud centres. But the energy usage of AI is outrunning any renewable energy capacity addition. In desperation, a large number of Big Tech companies—from Microsoft to Amazon and OpenAI—are now turning to nuclear power. From reopening the shuttered Long Island nuclear facility to investing in modular nuclear fission projects, and betting on nuclear fusion startups, the Silicon Valley AI tycoons are exploring all nuclear options.

Will these help? It remains to be seen whether nuclear will be a boon or bane. The reason the world fell out of love with nuclear was its dangers—and it is little to suggest that those dangers have vanished.

Can we turn the clock back and put a halt to AI developments until a solution to global warming is found? That is silly, as humankind cannot go back in development.

While there are no immediate solutions in sight currently beyond what is being tried out, policymakers and technologists need to start a discussion on the AI revolution and accelerated global warming as being interlinked, and mandate that AI companies first figure out how to not add to carbon emissions, even before they propose new solutions for other industries. Without that, it is unclear whether AI will destroy mankind directly by taking over all of society, as some science fiction writers have predicted, or whether it will lead to the extinction of most life on Earth through its contribution to rapid global warming. Neither option is comforting.

The author is former editor Business Today and BusinessWorld and founder of Prosaic View, an editorial consultancy

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Crossing the trans bar



BOOK REVIEW

SAURABH SHARMA

Even that there are few literary works by trans people, especially in South Asia, Düsseldorf-based dental hygienist Thanuja Singam's autobiographical work *Thanuja: A Memoir of Migration and Transition* is a welcome addition to the canon of LGBTQIA+ literature. It has been translated from Tamil by the assistant professor of English at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Guwahati, Kiran Keshavamurthy. In the afterword to the book, Mr Keshavamurthy notes that he was introduced to Ms Singam's memoir while

working on an essay on queer literature in Tamil. And like him, those who've read *Revathi's The Truth about Me: A Hijra Life Story* (Penguin, 2010), will find "negotiations with gendered and sexual norms that are spatially organised and reinforced: toilets, homes, trains, hijra households and neighbourhoods." However, there are several departures in Ms Singam's book from Ms Revathi's story, making *Thanuja* a unique attempt at narrativising the personal. Divided into two parts with 68 short chapters, the distinctive achievement of this memoir is not only its accessible language—much to the credit of the translator—but also its style. Each chapter is episodic and reads like a long-drawn social media post. Born in 1991 when the "brutal conflict known as the 'Second Eezham War' had begun", Ms Singam's story is as much a story about the afterlife of the Tamil diasporic population affected by the Sri Lankan Civil War as it's about a trans

person's journey to find a home—in a land and a body that she can call her own. Ms Singam begins this book by sharing how her family had to "escape to India as refugees when the war intensified in December 1991". However, they experienced discrimination as refugees in India. With the Indian government failing to cater to the needs of the refugees it had welcomed, Ms Singam's father moved to Germany to find work and to apply for asylum there. She ends the first chapter with a chilling submission: "When refugees escape a war-torn country, they don't just traverse land and water, they also traverse death." In subsequent chapters, she writes about her growing-up years. Influenced by "Tamil actresses and video jockeys like Meena and Pepsi Uma", she'd apply makeup and be her own person, which, initially, was dismissed as a "kid's just having fun". However, soon she attracted a label of a "troublesome child". Treating a path outside the gender binary in a heteropatriarchal world invites severe criticism and Ms Singam experienced her share of ostracism. For example, some Tamil

men who would drink with her father would say that she was "a hybrid fetus born to my mother because of the sins she had committed". Her family would both physically and mentally torture her. Educational institutes—whether in India or Germany—were no good either. While the Tamil diaspora would call her "troublesome", in Germany, the "white students at my school ridiculed those who were dark-skinned by calling them 'forest dwellers' and 'black monkeys'". Sadly, the author tended to unconditionally accept her trust in men who would place her femininity only to satisfy their sexual hunger. This naive judgement would cost her enormously. Often, she helped several men with money. And when she'd withdraw this support, she was abused. Multiple

times, she even decided to kill herself. Ms Singam notes several incidents in this memoir that inform readers how the internet opened up a world of new possibilities for a trans person to make connections. Because Ms Singam desired to be a woman who would be as independent as a man, several relationships didn't workout. Some of these men lied about their marital status. Others forged romantic relationships only to take advantage of her. Often these men's families would not accept a transwoman as a daughter-in-law. There are incidents of casteism in Germany that Ms Singam doesn't fail to document. Finding herself fighting these battles alone, she did make some "imaginary friends" too and, thanks to the internet, was able to find a network of supportive transwomen.

Sometimes, Ms Singam tends to generalise. For example, she thinks "Most Indian trans women think about wanting to become women when they are in their teens, but in Europe it happens when they are much older." At other times, she's spot on. For example, about the trafficking of transwomen—a form of modern-day slavery—Ms Singam writes, "There are many trans women who are trapped in this system like bonded labourers." For the issues it raises and documents candidly, but most importantly the courage Ms Singam shows, *Thanuja* is an inspiring read. Her book reinforces the belief in what the great James Baldwin had once noted: "You think your pain and your heartbreak are unprecedented in the history of the world, but then you read." The world needs more such narratives. And on the Transgender Day of Remembrance on November 20, it's fitting to celebrate *Thanuja's* resilience.

The reviewer is a Delhi-based freelance journalist. On Instagram: @iwritelyrife



THANUJA: A Memoir of Migration and Transition
Author: Thanuja Singam (translated by Kiran Keshavamurthy)
Publisher: Bloomsbury
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THE ASIAN AGE

3 DECEMBER 2024

Indians don't need larger families, only a better life

It may suit the political viewpoint of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Samaj, ideological parent of the ruling BJP, to keep igniting the debate over population in India, as its chief Mohan Bhagwat did in saying most recently that a society would perish if its population growth rate fell below 2.1 and that the total fertility rate (TFR) needs to be at least three, towards which he recommends parents to have at least three children.

What the RSS chief did not bring up, wisely enough, this time is the comparative growth rate of communities as designated by religion because that could only add an incendiary element at a time when the debate is already loaded with differing views on India's population growth and desired controls over population that have yielded positive results over the last few decades.

As the world's most populous country, India, with a population now exceeding 144 crore, is already weighed down with numbers that defeat the demographic dividend often spoken of when referring to the young average age of the country's people. Even at the current growth rate, India is projected to have a population of 150 crore by 2030 and 166 crore by 2050.

To put a dividend from greater human capital to good use, there would have to be opportunities for productive employment, which can come only with higher education standards, skilling and training, of course, provided that economic growth can be sustained to provide for a population growing even at the lower TFR.

The focus should not so much be on population control, which is not a problem now, as about raising the standard of living and quality of life of a country with so many people. Only a far higher economic growth than the projected 7 per cent can even attempt to provide improved standards of living for all. The challenge of providing for people in sheer terms of total number in one country can easily be guessed at when we see the figures in perspective.

It is not only the RSS that is viewing the TFR of 2.1 in a different light as the chief ministers of southern states of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu have also been advocating larger families as they feel the south, having followed the family planning concepts better for decades, will suffer when and if the parliamentary seats for each state are recast proportionate to their population in this decade.

How wrong all of them can be is best reflected when considering how difficult it is already for governments to provide basic education to children, job opportunities for the working age population and healthcare for all, most of all for the ageing population. Very soon India will have the largest working population in the world, and it will continue to be a problem that only about a quarter of the women are employed.

The task is about improving the lives of those living now and those who are to be expected to join them soon at the existing rate of TFR. How to achieve that for all Indians when educational attainments are not up to the mark and the workforce lacks basic skills and the country's employment rates are still one of the lowest.

While arguing about TFR and the perceived political need for larger families, still should not be lost of the fact that 81.35 crore people are being given free foodgrains in 2024 and India ranks 103 out of 116 nations on the Global Hunger Index despite a vast PDS system. Politicians must think before speaking to people on the need for larger families. They may believe it is good politics, but it is very poor economics when it comes to providing for the country's people.

Trump's Brics threat is premature

US President-elect Donald Trump's threat to levy 100 per cent duty on imports from Brics+ nations, if they chose to float an alternative global reserve currency to the US dollar, is premature and does not take into account ground realities.

The dollar is still the most widely used currency in the world. Eighty eight per cent of foreign exchange transactions take place in the dollar, 50 per cent of foreign currency reserves are held in the dollar and 54 per cent of exports are paid in dollars. The Brics+ group's share of global merchandise exports stood at 23.3 per cent in 2023, which is still less than the G7's share of 28.9 per cent. Nearly 65 per cent of global corporate funding happens in the dollar.

Though the attempt of Brics+ to launch a reserve currency as an alternative to the dollar is seen as the most serious threat to dollar hegemony after the launch of the Eurozone's single currency in 1999, the dollar is unlikely to be dislodged from its prime position any time soon.

The internal disagreements in Brics+ bloc are also likely to pose a serious challenge to the de-dollarisation of the world, would like to subscribe to a China-led finance order, would like to subscribe to a China-led finance order, would like to subscribe to a China-led finance order.

Even if Brics+ does launch its common reserve currency, Mr Trump cannot impose 100 per cent duty because Brics holds 37 per cent of global GDP. If Mr Trump makes good on his threat, it will upend the American economy by shooting up its prices of most of the products that US citizens use. A higher inflation as a consequence would lead to a fall in the US dollar value, hastening the de-dollarisation of the world.

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Aakar Patel

As China & US in race for the top; Indians busy with battles over past

The stunning victory of Donald Trump has sharpened focus on America's relationship with its only peer competitor, China. Eight years ago, Mr Trump had identified China as America's primary threat and had acted to curb its economic rise. He did this by attempting to deny China market access to the United States through tariffs. This was to some extent successful and the tariffs were continued by Mr Trump's successor Joe Biden.

Mexico became America's largest trading partner this year, eclipsing China, which had held the position for a decade. Of course, much of Mexico's exports to the US were initially from China so it is unclear what the actual damage to China has been. Biden also took the next step towards trying to handicap China's growth by denying it access to the most advanced microchips and the machinery used to design them. This was explained as a move to counter China's military capability but the real reason is economic. China responded by starting its own development of these goods and experts claim it is only a few years behind and will at some point catch up.

China is by far the global leader in electric vehicles and clean energy, including solar panels. Meaning its products are priced competitively and often better in quality than what is made in Europe and the US. Tesla owner Elon

Musk says that the cars produced by his Chinese plant are the best the company makes. Given Chinese-designed cars by local brands in China are thought to have caught up with the best the world has to offer and at a cheaper price.

America is stuck with what they call gas cars and trucks, which are powered by petrol and are a sunset industry. The only way for American giants like Ford and General Motors to not only compete today but to survive is by blocking Chinese cars through tariffs and other barriers. This likely will not go on for much longer, for two reasons. The first is consumer interest and denying people cheaper alternatives for strategic reasons is not going to be popular. And the other, of course, is the fact that electric vehicles are the future, and even if they are not mandated will replace those running on petrol.

China is now two-thirds the size of the US economy (\$18 trillion to \$26 trillion) and the same size as the economy of the entire European Union. In the next 10 years, China will come close to equalling the US. No other nation has done that or come close to doing it. Before it collapsed, the Soviet Union was a fourth the size of the US economy. But that was a very different time and the Russians never had the dominance of China in key sectors. China is the world's largest manufacturer and makes one-third of all

goods worldwide.

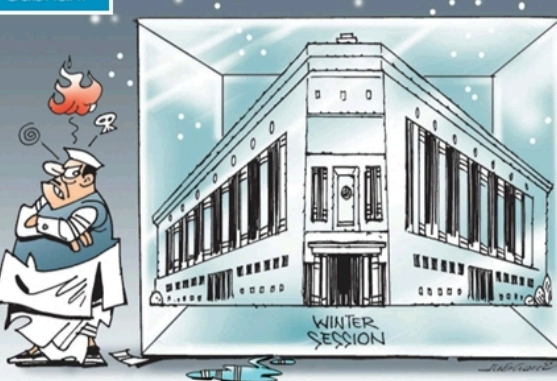
This has happened though China wages have grown multiple times in the last decade and a half. For several years now, it has not been cheap labour that has powered Chinese exports. China's growth has slowed since the Covid-19 pandemic, but a slow China is still formidable. It is growing at twice the rate of the United States and, based on the latest numbers out on November 29, at the same rate as India though it has an economy which is five times larger.

China's cars through tariffs and other barriers. This likely will not go on for much longer, for two reasons. The first is consumer interest and denying people cheaper alternatives for strategic reasons is not going to be popular. And the other, of course, is the fact that electric vehicles are the future, and even if they are not mandated will replace those running on petrol.

China is now two-thirds the size of the US economy (\$18 trillion to \$26 trillion) and the same size as the economy of the entire European Union. In the next 10 years, China will come close to equalling the US. No other nation has done that or come close to doing it. Before it collapsed, the Soviet Union was a fourth the size of the US economy. But that was a very different time and the Russians never had the dominance of China in key sectors. China is the world's largest manufacturer and makes one-third of all

goods worldwide. This has happened though China wages have grown multiple times in the last decade and a half. For several years now, it has not been cheap labour that has powered Chinese exports. China's growth has slowed since the Covid-19 pandemic, but a slow China is still formidable. It is growing at twice the rate of the United States and, based on the latest numbers out on November 29, at the same rate as India though it has an economy which is five times larger.

Subhani



FROZEN...



Digs and gigs: Ajmer Sharif & archaeology of Hindutva



Shikha Mukerjee

It is a snowball gathering speed. Or maybe it's a mudslide gaining momentum. Or maybe it's a virus, something that flourished for millennia needs revival is a mystery, because it never faded, verged on extinction, though it was in danger of being eclipsed by Buddhism around and after Emperor Ashoka's times. But in twenty-first century India, some people believe it needs kindling to keep it burning. Reviving temples suspected or believed to have been destroyed is the new and supplementary agenda of Hindutva.

A new archaeology has been established in service of Hindutva. Thanks to the former Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud, the starter or spark or kindling was his 2022 decision to overturn the 1991 law which sought to "prohibit conversion of any place of worship and to provide for the maintenance of the religious character of any place of worship as it existed on the 15th day of August 1947", otherwise known as the Places of Worship Act. While the law was meant to be a temper proof, the former Chief Justice, who seemed to fuse his piety with his professional responsibilities, decided that digging into the foundations of Varanasi's Gyanvapi Masjid to uncover a "Shiva linga" was perfectly in order.

The outcome of the reversal and its consequences are four dead and several injured in UP's Sambhal over a dispute on what lies below the Shahi Jama Masjid. The claim by a mahant of the mosque by a lawyer, who is involved in other places of worship disputes, starting with the Gyanvapi Mathura's Shahi Idgah Mosque and the Sambhal dispute. Having retired and thus free to presume, he pursues his pieties in

Legalising the demolition of Muslim places of worship on the pretext of unverified claims to temples buried under them is a political problem; it is not a problem that the judiciary can solve.

private, instead of in front of a camera that turned his devotions into a public spectacle, the retired Chief Justice can now watch from the sidelines the consequences of his decision.

The Hindu Right in pursuit of Hindu revival, aided and abetted by a judiciary that brandishes God to support its decisions that are fundamentally flawed, as in the Ayodhya land dispute, is now part of the archaeology of Hindutva. To legitimise the digs and gigs, advocates and various litigants have a judiciary that is willing to overturn the law to enable what the law said could not be done. So, claims can be confidently made that legal proceedings will progress faster than a "bullet train" and that justice, as defined by them, will be done.

Hindutva archaeology is essential to the project of "de-Islamisation" as Mubjib Rahman calls it in his recent book, *Shikwa-e-Hind*. Digs and gigs are the window dressing required to legitimise the supplementary project to avoid committing what the former Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi described as a "heinous crime", of "disrespecting the sentiments of the community". The law and the taxpayer are vulnerable to being used as a tool of cynical exploitation of sentiment since the Hindu revivalists are essentially a bunch of free riders. The law and the taxpayer are vulnerable to being used as a tool of cynical exploitation of sentiment since the Hindu revivalists are essentially a bunch of free riders. The law and the taxpayer are vulnerable to being used as a tool of cynical exploitation of sentiment since the Hindu revivalists are essentially a bunch of free riders.

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and other disputes relating to Waqf-administered properties.

The choice for the Narendra Modi government is simple: it can support the supplementary project of mosque demolition-temple rebuilding and do so by abandoning the Constitution and its basic structure of which secularism is a part. Or, he can rein in the Hindu Right and demolish the supplementary project. He can follow the route he has adopted on the Waqf issue or buried under them is a political problem; it is not a problem that the judiciary can solve. The choice and decision that the Modi government has to make is simple. It can either amend the 1991 Places of Worship Act and open the floodgates to the new archaeology that Hindutva is trying to establish, or, it can, in Parliament, in the Winter Session, unequivocally declare its commitment to upholding the 1991 law.

Any waffling on this part of government is unacceptable. Flawed and weak as the attempt may have been, from within the ranks of the BJP there was a move to throw out the words "secularism" and "socialism" added through the 42nd Amendment in 1976. The Supreme Court, currently headed by Chief Justice Sanjay Khanna, has thrown out the petition. It does not mean that another petition will not be filed at a different time to which the apex court's response could be different. The Places of Worship Act reversal is a case in point; mischief can be made whenever there is a convergence of ideas, ideologies, politics and petitioners.

Shikha Mukerjee is a senior journalist based in Kolkata

LETTERS

SHAME ON DOCTORS

Dhaka is continuing with actions against Hindus in Bangladesh ignoring all protests by the Government of India as well as many other organisations. This kind of vindictive attitude will only make the nation another Pakistan with such treatment of the minorities. Still, the refusal by some hospitals in West Bengal and Tripura to admit patients from Bangladesh is a contravention of the Hippocratic Oath. No doctor can choose their patients, least of all on the basis of nationality and religion. A patient is a patient who deserves the best possible treatment even if a hardened criminal. It is sad to see so much support for such a move, when it must be wholly condemned.

Anthony Henriques
Mumbai

TOO MUCH INTERNET

AUSTRALIA'S DECISION to ban social media for children under 16 is a step in the right direction. This aims to protect children from the probable ill-effects of social media, including mental health issues, bullying and exposure to inappropriate content. Fines of up to \$33 million for social media platforms have also been ordered if they fail to prevent children under 16 from creating accounts within one year. While some argue the ban may isolate children and deprive them of the benefits of social media, others feel it's a necessary measure to protect vulnerable youth. I think it could not have come sooner!

Bhatinda, Punjab

PINK BALL CRICKET

TEST CRICKET is all about tradition, from wearing white flannels to the customary lunch and tea breaks. But over the years the game's longest format has evolved in many ways, and the introduction of the pink ball is one such thing. Day-night Test matches are now a regular part of the game, and this has led to a central role. With India and Australia clashing at Adelaide with the pink ball in play for the second time, the debate revolves around whether India can take its revenge on Australia for its ignominious loss four years ago at the same venue. Thanks to the ICC, its innovation in Test cricket have started bearing fruit in reviving the popularity of the best format of his beautiful game.

R. Sivakumar
Chennai

For us Indians, unfortunately, though we are the world's largest nation, our role here is limited. We are onlookers as we have not managed to do what China has. In 1980, India and China were together with economies the same size in per capita GDP (World Bank data in fact says that India was marginally ahead). Three and a half decades of "liberalisation" and one decade under the genius of Narendra Modi has not produced any shift. China's per capita GDP was \$7,600 in 2014, ours was \$1,559. A decade later they are at \$12,614 and we at \$2,400.

In any case, we no longer have the ambition to rival China save through wars. Across the landscape of geopolitics, there is as much reference to India as there might be to, say, Britain or France. Both spent powers and neither especially relevant in the meaningless sense. India is a shame for a nation war so much potential and for which there had been so much hope only a few years ago.

On the other hand, of course, we are happy to be fighting ourselves and digging disputes from centuries ago as a substitute for real development. The present and the future can wait while we will fix the past.

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