

The
Hindustan Times
 ESTABLISHED IN 1924

[OUR TAKE]

Must balance laws with rights

Professor's death months after his acquittal puts the spotlight on the need to ensure that constitutional safeguards are followed even in cases involving national security

Roughly seven months after he walked out of Nagpur jail after being acquitted of serious charges under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), former Delhi University professor GN Saibaba died on Saturday night. The 57-year-old paraplegic served as an English professor at Delhi University's Ram Lal Anand College, from where he was suspended in 2014 after being arrested for suspected Maoist links. Over the last decade, Saibaba's case had become a live wire example of a recurring concern — cases involving stringent statutes condemning the accused to long periods of incarceration without bail. His disability compounded the problem, often inviting allegations of prison callousness and underlining the lacunae in Indian jails in dealing with the issues of disabled inmates. Saibaba's health suffered gravely, his wife and friends often alleged, highlighting the lack of facilities and empathy inside prison.

At the same time, Saibaba's legal battle — in March, the Bombay high court (HC) reversed a conviction by a Gadchiroli local court, and the acquittal was later confirmed by the Supreme Court — raised questions about processes followed in anti-terror cases and the nature of police investigations behind levelling serious charges. The HC held that the prosecution failed to prove its case and that neither any seizure nor any other incriminating material could be linked to the accused. The prosecution's assertion that pamphlets connected to the Communist Party of India (Maoist) were found in Saibaba's home was junked by the high court, which said that mere possession of literature of a particular philosophy cannot be an offence. The court insisted that an active role in fomenting violence and terrorism was necessary under UAPA. These are important pointers that both prosecuting agencies and the lower judiciary must keep in mind to ensure that no one is incarcerated for long periods merely because they have been charged under a stringent law.

Terrorism is a scourge that must be wiped out. But laws meant to nab terrorists must be balanced with constitutional freedoms guarding individual liberty and must not make the process the punishment. Saibaba's years in jail and the denial of his bail, are a reminder that every stakeholder in the criminal justice system must ensure a tough but fair prosecution that adheres to constitutional safeguards.

Nobel reminder of the perils of nukes

The Nobel Peace Prize for Nihon Hidankyo puts the spotlight back on nuclear weapons and their devastating impact on generations of victims. This Japanese organisation, which represents the *hibakusha* — the victims of the US nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of World War II — has been leading the campaign for the abolition of nuclear weapons and is richly deserving of the Nobel.

The timing of the prize is significant. In the wake of the wars in Ukraine and West Asia, there is growing unease globally about nuclear adventurism by nations with access to nuclear weapons. The international architecture that governed the use and spread of nuclear weapons suddenly looks wobbly. The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), the 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and other international treaties lose their use threshold. President Vladimir Putin has said Russia would use nukes even if a non-nuclear state attacks Moscow with participation or support of a nuclear power. The collapse of the consensus on nuclear weapons and the failure of international bodies to regulate spread have revived the quest for nuclear weapons in many areas — Israel's actions may have defeated attempts to convince Iran to contain nuclear ambitions. The UN's ineffectiveness in arbitrating territorial disputes has also changed the narrative in favour of such weapons, which many countries now see as the only reliable deterrent against aggression by big and rogue powers.

With time, the tragedy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki has retreated into the recesses of history. All the talk about banning nuclear weapons was defeated by the big powers that sparked an arms race. The Nobel for Nihon Hidankyo will hopefully revive the conversation about an effective global regime against proliferation.

The need for nuance in India-Pak relationship

How to read India's decision to attend the upcoming SCO meet in Islamabad

India is a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). Since its member countries cover a large landmass and population of Eurasia, its deliberations are important for Delhi. Therefore, India's representation at its meetings should be a routine affair. But not when a meeting takes place in Pakistan, as is the case with the SCO Heads of Government meeting on October 15 and 16. After all, no senior Indian functionary has visited Pakistan since defence minister Rajnath Singh did in August 2016 to attend the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) home/interior ministers meeting. Saarc remains stalled since Delhi's decision in 2016 not to attend its summit scheduled to take place in Islamabad.

The suspense over India's participation at the SCO meet ended with the government's announcement that external affairs minister (EAM) S Jaishankar would attend the meeting. That triggered speculation if a bilateral engagement on its margins is on the cards. The research and analysis group clarified that he was not going to Islamabad to discuss bilateral relations, but to be a good member of SCO. Notwithstanding the remark, unstructured pull-aide interactions are not unknown in such situations.

But even if it takes place, the moot question is if it can make any difference to the bilateral relationship.

Pakistan remains fixated on India reversing its August 5, 2019 move (abrogation of Article 370) for any bilateral engagement. India will have to see whether restoration of statehood to Jammu & Kashmir, whenever our government deems it appropriate, amounts to a face-saver for Pakistan. Anti-India rhetoric by the army-led Pakistani establishment remains high. And, Prime Minister Shabbaz Sharif's aggressive anti-India stance in his recent United Nations (UN) General Assembly speech was anything but a signal for constructive engagement.

Islamabad's preoccupation with its internal problems also makes it difficult for a major foreign policy initiative. Teetering on the brink of a sovereign default, its economy has got a reprieve as a result of the recent International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout package of \$7 billion. Terror and violence remain real. Political polarisation is in vogue with the recent agitation by Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf paralysing Islamabad to the point of raising concerns about holding the SCO meeting in that city. On the Indian side, the political disarray in recent years and funding some of the justified public anger at Pakistan's conduct and shrunk the space for diplomacy.

In this backdrop, the chances of any positive development on the bilateral front during EAM Jaishankar's

visit remain slim. However, it is good that Delhi has eschewed a dogmatic approach by deciding to send the minister to the SCO meet. Besides being appropriate in the context of India's SCO membership, it may also offer an opportunity to gauge the intentions of the Pakistani establishment behind its jarring public rhetoric.

While speaking of the current impasse in the relationship, a few notes of caution may be in order. First, the relative calm on the western front, largely due to Pakistan's internal preoccupations, should not lull India into complacency. If, as is more likely, Pakistan recovers from its current crisis, India may again see heightened adventurism from across the border. If, on the other hand, as some predict and shortsightedly wish, crisis-ridden Pakistan State moves towards a collapse, it may result in an unbridled sea of turmoil and extremism at India's doorstep. Therefore, Pakistan remains a major challenge that needs to be dealt with by all the instrumentalities at Delhi's disposal, including diplomacy.

Second, India's focus on Pakistan as its primary threat over the years has now shifted to China. This makes a case for keeping the western frontier as calm as possible. This imperious need to keep Pakistan's desire to calm things down given its growing internal challenges led to the restoration of the LoC ceasefire in February 2021 following behind-the-scenes dialogues. It was an indicator, like simi-



Sharat Shabarwal



As India pursues a calibrated punitive approach, it must also look to enhance stability on the western frontier through bilateral diplomacy

lar steps in the past, that though the complete normalisation of the India-Pakistan relationship remains a long shot, bilateral engagement can reduce its volatility and help in its better management. This should not be lost sight of.

Third, after a long period of turmoil and the absence of elections to the state assembly since 2014, the people of Jammu & Kashmir have yet again given a thumping endorsement to the democratic process under the Indian Constitution through their participation in large numbers, both in the Lok Sabha and the recent assembly elections. Respect for their democratic choice and mature handling by all the Centre and the elected state leadership could pave the way for a new dawn in Jammu & Kashmir, though the process will face both internal and external challenges. Political parties in the region have been calling for dialogue with Pakistan to secure peace. Though Pakistan does not have a veto over India's constructive moves in Jammu & Kashmir, its disruptive actions, even if largely contained by the security forces, can cause problems as evidenced by the uptick in

Pakistan-sponsored terror in the Jammu region.

In the face of Pakistan's threatening posture, deterrence and a punitive approach have remained a part of India's repertoire to deal with it. Delhi has two broad options at this juncture. Not letting up pressure on Pakistan and exercising a punitive approach — overt and covert — sounds tempting. However, in this case, India should be prepared for greater turmoil on its western border as Pakistan would seek to build counter-pressure through terrorism. An alternative would be to continue exercising a calibrated punitive approach while keeping an eye out for opportunities to enhance stability on the western frontier through bilateral diplomacy.

In this context, it may be noted that Jaishankar hinted recently that India would not be unresponsive to any positive moves by Pakistan.

Sharat Shabarwal is a former high commissioner to Pakistan and author of *India's Pakistan Conundrum: Managing a Complex Relationship*. The views expressed are personal.

Civil society organisations can't escape accountability

In India, there are civil society organisations that continuously draw attention to the fact that the law is not applied equally to the rich and powerful, and yet when they are accused of violating the law, they call it unfair and allege intimidation by the State. Think tanks are important in shaping public policy and informing decision-makers through rigorous research and analysis. They serve as a bridge between academic knowledge and practical application and provide useful insights to help address complex social, economic, and political challenges. By engaging in policy advocacy and public discourse, think tanks influence the development of laws and regulations, often working closely with government agencies, non-profits, and the private sector.

But with this influence comes significant responsibility. Think tanks must ensure their research is grounded in evidence and free from biases, while maintaining transparency about their funding sources and potential conflicts of interest. Ultimately, the integrity and credibility of think tanks are essential, as they uphold the standards of public trust and accountability in the policymaking process, which is why there is a growing concern about a subset of them wanting to operate under a veil of exceptionalism, believing they are above the law. This issue has come to the forefront with several prominent think tanks receiving notices for alleged violations of the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA).

FCRA is designed to regulate the flow of foreign funds to NGOs and non-profit organisations, ensuring that these entities adhere to national interests and legal frameworks. When think tanks, which often operate as non-profits, receive foreign funding but fail to comply with FCRA regulations, it raises significant accountability questions. Reports indicate that certain think tanks attract ire for not appropriately reporting or using their foreign grants, leading to income tax scrutiny. This is not just about financial propriety; it also raises critical questions about the integrity of the research and policy advocacy pursued by these entities and whether they respect the democratic frameworks of the countries in which they operate. Let's not forget that governance hinges on accountability, particularly for entities that wield influence over public policy and opinion. When think tanks neglect legal obligations, it diminishes trust in their contributions and raises concerns over potential foreign influence on domestic politics.

Some debate around this issue seems to point to this as being very specific to India. This

is far from true. Several developed countries have also taken similar action against think tanks that have crossed legal lines. For instance, the legal landscape surrounding think tanks has become increasingly scrutinised in the United States, especially concerning their lobbying activities and funding sources. The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) has laws prohibiting tax-exempt organisations from engaging in lobbying efforts or political campaigning. In the past, the IRS has revoked the tax-exempt status of a think tank for significant violations of these lobbying rules, citing that the organisation engaged in political activities beyond permitted thresholds. This reinforces that adherence to the law is paramount for everyone, especially organisations that claim to be non-partisan.

Similarly, in the United Kingdom (UK), the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act, 2014 was adopted to curb undue influence from unaccounted sources. Under this law, think tanks and non-profit organisations engaging in political campaigning during elections are required to register and disclose their funding sources. Non-compliance can lead to significant penalties and restrictions. This framework serves as a reminder that all institutions, especially those registered as non-profit entities, must operate within the boundaries set by law and public expectation. Even in the European Union, calls are becoming increasingly strident for think tanks to disclose their funding sources and expenditures, highlighting the growing recognition that transparency is not merely a best practice but a necessity to maintain public trust.

The recurring theme across these geographical regions is the essential nature of accountability. Think tanks contribute to democracy by providing research and providing expertise. However, they must operate transparently and responsibly. No one can be above the law and be allowed to operate beyond the prescribed legal frameworks.

The recent steps taken to a few think tanks in India will undoubtedly lead to debates about the relationship between think tanks and the law; in fact, some of that debate has already started. A few voices will always call this an attack on freedom of speech and term it a disquieting overreach. But let them pause and reflect that countries demand accountability from all sectors, including intellectually-minded and civil society groups. These entities must adopt and enforce rigorous compliance protocols and adherence to all legal requirements. At the same time, States must implement laws in a way that reinforces democratic integrity.

Ultimately, the conversation about think tanks and legal adherence is not just about compliance with regulations — it's much more about the fundamental values upon which these think tanks stand. Think tanks must ensure their operations comply with the law and align with the ethical standards expected of entities that wield significant influence over the societies they aim to serve. The stakes are high, and so is the need for accountability.

Adhuri Subramanyam Raju is professor and head, Centre for South Asian Studies and UGC Centre for Maritime Studies, Pondicherry University. The views expressed are personal.

SEYED ABBAS ARAGHCHI | FOREIGN MINISTER, IRAN

While we have made tremendous efforts in recent days to contain an all-out war in our region, we have no red lines in defending our people and interests



[STRAIGHTFORWARD]
 Shashi Shekhar



Grassroots politics helped the BJP win in Haryana

Early evening on October 8, 2024, results for elections to the assemblies of Haryana and the Union Territory (UT) of Jammu & Kashmir were clear. TV debates were intense, but one expert's comment stood out for its sheer wisdom. "We can learn from Congress how to throw away a sure-shot win, and from BJP how to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat," he said.

A conversation I had with a senior Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader a day before the elections in Haryana, this leader asked me what my opinion was about Haryana. I countered that he would be in a better position to say as he had spent a long time in that state. He told me the mood in Haryana had shifted perceptibly over the days ahead of the elections and insisted that the BJP was sure to form the government there again. I thought he was imposing his party's views on me.

The next day, when counting was about to begin, he called me again and I asked him what had made him so confident of a BJP victory the previous day. His reply was startling.

He said despite his seniority, he was asked to visit panchayats instead of organising large gatherings. Panchayats are the smallest units mostly belonged to his community. He said he may have touched the feet of close to 5,000 elders. They not only blessed him but also helped during the polls. He said many leaders like him had been roped in for the same exercise. Even senior leaders like Dharmendra Pradhan insisted on public relations and meetings with workers instead of large public gatherings.

The BJP also went all out to woo non-Jat voters. The Congress was heavily banking on Bhupinder Hooda and son, while the BJP consolidated its position by constantly reminding every voter how Prime Minister Narendra Modi was personally looking after their well-being. Data about welfare schemes of the government, how much money had been spent on each, and who the beneficiaries were of each scheme were at every worker's fingertips.

The gap between social reality and data was negligible, and the BJP was able to march into the corridors of power in Haryana for a record third time.

Just before the general elections in 2024, BJP had replaced Manohar Lal Khattar with Nayab Singh Saini, a leader from an extremely backward caste, as Haryana's chief

minister. It needs nerves of steel to pull off such a political gambit. The Congress, by contrast, couldn't resist the temptation of projecting the ageing Bhupinder Hooda as the spearhead of their Haryana campaign. They had made the same mistake of surrounding the satraps in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Rajasthan and lost elections.

Like every other state, internal differences were out in the open. Sideline Kumar Selja's group during ticket distribution and non-appearance in public gatherings were the wrong signals. Apathy towards the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and emerging Dalit leader Chandrasekhar Azad proved costly. It should be noted that the AAP secured 17.9% of the votes while the Congress got 30.09%. If both had joined hands their combined strength would have been 48.07% ahead of the BJP's 39.94%.

Haryana may not have given the AAP any reason to cheer, but Jammu & Kashmir has. Violence-hit Doda district elected AAP candidate Mehr aj Malik.

Now that the Maharashtra and Jharkhand elections are on the horizon, the Congress will be subjected to ruthless bargaining from its alliance partners. Shiv Sena (Uddhav) and the AAP have offered a glimpse of the coming cold and hard negotiations. The Samajwadi Party has already announced seven out of 10 candidates for Uttar Pradesh by-elections. Though Akhilesh Yadav said his party would fight the elections along with the Congress, the latter is in no position to bargain. Similarly, the AAP has announced that it will go it alone in the Delhi assembly elections early next year. The Congress will find the going tough in keeping the INDIA flag together at the state level.

Let's talk about Jammu & Kashmir. Here the National Conference and the Congress coalition looks stable, but the Congress is at the mercy of the Abdullahs. The BJP, on the other hand, has never been a force to reckon with in the Valley. However, this time it has extended its influence in the region. In one constituency, the party lost by just 1,000 votes. Its vote percentage has risen to 25.64% at the state level.

Finally, let's address the age-old question: When will the Congress learn from its mistakes? Look at the past 10 elections, you'll get your answer.

Shashi Shekhar is editor-in-chief, *Hindustan Times*. The views expressed are personal.

SCIENCE

Why precision medicine in India can't advance without biobank laws

A biobank is a repository of biological samples alongside their genetic data. These samples are collected from consenting individuals for use in research. For precision medicine to succeed, biobanks need to be large and diverse or only a small section of society will benefit from the findings of research

Manjeera Gowravaram

Precision medicine is bringing in a new era of personalised healthcare. The field began to take concrete shape when scientists were wrapping up the Human Genome Project. Since then, genomics has played a major role in the diagnosis and treatment of various cancers, chronic diseases, and immunological, cardiovascular, and liver diseases.

Other emerging technologies, such as gene editing and mRNA therapeutics, also contribute to precision medicine. In a recent success story, researchers were able to restore vision in people who had lost it due to a genetic mutation using gene therapy. In a more recent and more notable example, researchers in the U.K. reversed an individual's diabetes by transplanting reengineered stem cells. During the COVID-19 pandemic, researchers were able to use the mRNA platform to develop new vaccines in record time, winning the technology a Nobel Prize last year.

Organ-on-chips is another area that promises precision medical solutions. These small microfluidic devices containing human cells can replicate the microenvironment of a tumour or an organ in a laboratory setting. They are expected to allow researchers to test drugs in settings more similar to the drugs' eventual users.

Precision medicine in India

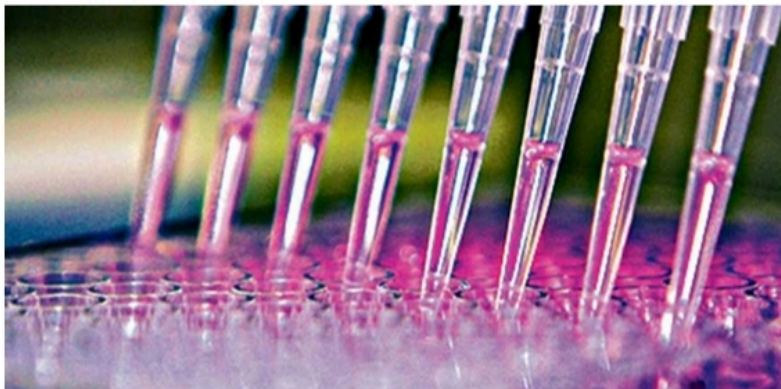
The Indian precision medicine market is estimated to be growing at a CAGR of 16% and is expected to be worth more than \$5 billion by 2030, according to industry estimates.

Currently, it contributes 36% of the national bioeconomy, alongside cancer immunotherapy, gene editing, biologics, etc. The development of precision therapeutics is also part of the new 'BioE3' policy.

In October 2023, the Central Drugs Standard Control Organization approved NexCAR19, India's domestically developed CART cell therapy, and earlier this year the government opened a dedicated centre for it. Recently, the Apollo Cancer Centre and a collaboration between Siemens Healthineers and the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru, opened new facilities to deploy artificial intelligence for precision medicine.

Biobanks in precision medicine

A biobank is a repository of biological samples, such as blood, DNA, cells, tissues, and/or organs, alongside their genetic data. These samples are collected from consenting individuals and intended for use in research. For precision



A biobank is a repository of biological samples, such as blood, DNA, cells, tissues, and organs, alongside their genetic data. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

medicine to succeed, biobanks need to be large and diverse. Otherwise, only a small section of society will benefit from the findings of precision medicine.

Recently, researchers identified people with an undiagnosed rare genetic disorder using data from a biobank and comparing it to people who were already diagnosed with it. Their findings were published in *Nature Communications* on August 29.

In another study published in *Cell* on October 3, health researchers created the largest biobank of sarcoma patient-derived organoids to date. Organoids are miniaturised, synthetic versions of organs that can replicate tumours; the researchers used it to understand the sarcoma and identify potential therapies using high-throughput drug screening.

Biobanks in India

There are 19 registered biobanks in India that host many biological specimens, including cancer cell lines and tissues. Earlier this year, the 'Genome India' programme finished sequencing 10,000 genomes from 99 ethnic groups to identify treatments for rare genetic diseases, among others.

The pan-India 'Phenome India' project has collected 10,000 samples to create better prediction models for cardio-metabolic diseases. The Paediatric Rare Genetic Disorders (PReGeD) mission could help identify new genes or variants to develop targeted therapies for genetic diseases that affect children.

However, biobank regulations in India are a significant hurdle to realising the full

The Indian precision medicine market is estimated to be growing at a CAGR of 16% and is expected to be worth more than \$5 billion by 2030, according to industry estimates

potential of precision medicine.

India's biobanking regulations

The U.K., the U.S., Japan, China, and many European countries have laws or comprehensive regulations that address several biobanking issues, including informed consent, withdrawal rights, privacy, and data protection. At present, India's regulation of biobanks is inconsistent, with gaps that could undermine public trust and limit the potential of precision medicine. In particular, there is no law to protect the rights of individuals.

The Indian Council for Medical Research handbook on 'National Ethical Guidelines For Biomedical And Health Research Involving Human Participants' and the Department of Biotechnology's (DBT) practices for data storage and analysis have many gaps. For instance, participants are expected to consent to providing samples without knowing how their data will be used, who will have access to it, for how long they will be stored, and when they will be used. Genetic information can provide details about a person, including their family, that also could result in discrimination.

Next, in the absence of a single authority to regulate biobanks and no

penalty for misconduct, the risk of inconsistencies arising from sample mishandling and ethical violations like data or sample sharing for non-consenting purposes is nontrivial.

Without proper regulations, many pharmaceutical companies, including those abroad, will have access to samples from India. Research projects often require researchers and pharmaceutical companies to collaborate with biobanks during drug discovery and development.

In the absence of an overarching law, Indians could be deprived of the ownership of biological samples and/or the data thereof and the profits from the resulting research findings.

A leadership opportunity

Taken together, strong data and privacy protections and regulatory oversight by an expert committee will encourage more people to share samples and participate without worry. It will also allow research to happen on the right foundations instead of the findings becoming the fruits of a poisoned tree.

India is a part of international groups like the Quad and BRICS, and an important plank of its soft diplomatic efforts has been pharmaceuticals. It is a major supplier of generic drugs and is a hub of vaccine manufacturing, and it has plans to expand leadership to include next-generation therapeutics. To do this, it will have to align its biobanking laws with global standards to encourage public participation and trust.

(Manjeera Gowravaram has a PhD in RNA biochemistry and is a freelance science writer. gmanjeera@gmail.com)

THE GIST

Gene editing and mRNA also contribute to precision medicine. Researchers were able to restore vision using gene therapy. In the U.K., an individual's diabetes was reversed by transplanting reengineered stem cells

India's rulebook has many gaps. Participants do not know how data will be used, who will have access, for how long they will be stored, and when they will be used. Pharmaceutical companies, including those abroad, will have access to samples from India

Strong data and privacy protections will encourage more people to share samples and participate without worry. It will also allow research to happen on the right foundations instead of the findings becoming the fruits of a poisoned tree

JOBIN FROD: https://twitter.com/jobin_frod; <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/Health/Prevention/article-1234567890.html>

BIG SHOT



An artisanal miner searches for gold using a metal detector at an illegal mining site in the Prestea-Huni Valley Municipal District, Western Region, Ghana, in August this year.

WHAT IS IT?

Monte Carlo method: random to real

Vasudevan Mukunth

The Monte Carlo method is a type of algorithm that reveals a distribution by randomly sampling its elements again and again. For example, say there are 40 red marbles, 20 green marbles, 25 orange marbles, and 15 blue marbles in a bag. The bag is opaque and has a narrow opening; you dip your hand inside and pick up five marbles at random, note down their colours, and put them back. The Monte Carlo method is based on the idea that by repeating this process over and over again, you will develop a better idea of the marbles' colour distribution. The more times you randomly sample the marbles, the better your estimate.

Monte Carlo methods are frequently used to estimate the odds of an event occurring when doing so by other means is too difficult. If a sample is very complicated — e.g. the billions of particles produced during an experiment at the Large Hadron Collider — a Monte Carlo algorithm itself will require a lot of computing power. But its great advantage is that computers can sample and record multiple samples in parallel, keeping the power demand lower than other



The method is named for a casino in Monaco, where Polish physicist Stanislaw Ulam was inspired by the way his uncle gambled to come up with the idea. JONATHAN PETERSON/UNSPASH

Such algorithms have applications in aerodynamics, power plant design, quantum mechanics, several areas of engineering, computer graphics, artificial intelligence models, and risk-estimating in finance. The method is named for a casino in Monaco, where Polish physicist Stanislaw Ulam was inspired by the way his uncle gambled to come up with the idea.

For feedback and suggestions for 'Science', please write to science@thehindu.co.in

CACHE



Looming danger: BYD electric cars waiting to be loaded on a ship stacked at the international container terminal of Taicang Port at Suzhou Port, in China's eastern Jiangsu Province in 2023. AFP

Are the U.S.'s cybersecurity concerns over Chinese electric vehicles justified?

The Biden administration has raised concerns that Chinese electric vehicles (EVs) could pose national security risks due to the potential misuse of the software these vehicles rely on. EVs rely on connected technologies to enable features such as autopilot, auto-park etc.

Nabeel Ahmed

Modern electric vehicles (EVs) are technological marvels, combining innovation and convenience. Connected tech allows drivers to personalise their driving experience while ensuring better security through advanced algorithms. But as with all technology, the potential for misuse brings about serious concerns.

EVs increasingly rely on connected technologies to enable features such as Advanced Driver Assistance Systems (ADAS), autopilot, auto-park, geo-fencing (a virtual perimeter around a real-world location), and even charging. However, this heavy reliance on software and its vulnerabilities has drawn attention from U.S. officials, particularly concerning Chinese vehicle imports.

In February 2024, the Biden administration launched an investigation into Chinese connected vehicles, many of which rely on these technologies, warning that they could pose national security risks. These vehicles, the administration pointed out, "collect large amounts of sensitive data on their drivers and passengers and regularly use their cameras and sensors to record detailed information on U.S. infrastructure."

How strong is the global presence of Chinese EVs?
To understand why the U.S. is considering a potential ban on Chinese connected car technology, consider the current global

EV market dynamics. Compared to American brands like Tesla and Rivian, Chinese EV makers have a lead in global sales. Chinese EV manufacturers are expected to generate a collective revenue of \$376.4 billion in 2024, while the global market is projected to reach \$786.2 billion, according to Statista.

Chinese EVs account for around 60% of global EV sales, according to the International Energy Agency. Major players in the Chinese EV market include names such as BYD (Build Your Dreams), Geely, Xiaomi, NIO, Li Auto, and SAIC Motor. These companies owe much of their success to substantial government support, including tax breaks and subsidies – particularly in the case of BYD.

Is Chinese connected car technology a cause for concern?
One major concern is the lack of robust cybersecurity in EV software, which poses significant risks. EVs rely on software to manage virtually every aspect of their functioning – from car performance and locking/unlocking systems to collision prevention. While these features enhance driver safety, they also present serious risks if compromised. Hackers could exploit software vulnerabilities to gain control of vehicle systems, potentially causing collisions or immobilising entire fleets.

There is also a dearth of robust legislation around the collection, storage,

transmission, and use of data by automakers.

Is there a threat to user safety?
Poor cybersecurity in EVs makes them easy targets for hackers. Beyond controlling the vehicle, hackers could access sensitive information, including financial data stored on the vehicle's onboard computer. Furthermore, EVs are often integrated with other smart devices – like smartphones and home systems – through IoT platforms. A breach in one system could lead to a broader compromise, granting hackers access to users' personal data, home security systems, or even real-time location. An attack on an EV's software could allow hackers to move laterally through connected systems. For instance, breaching an EV could potentially expose a user's local Wi-Fi network or smart home system, creating a ripple effect of security vulnerabilities.

Is there a threat to critical infrastructure?
EVs are also unique in their connection to power grids for charging, which presents another significant vulnerability. Power grids operate on a delicate balance of energy distribution, and a coordinated cyberattack on EV charging stations could destabilise entire grids. This could cripple energy supplies to major urban centres. Such attacks are not hypothetical. In 2022, hackers disabled EV charging stations outside Moscow, displaying

pro-Ukraine messages in a politically motivated cyberattack. This incident highlighted the potential for nation-state threat actors to target infrastructure by manipulating connected vehicles.

What about attacks by nation states?
Some nation states further exacerbate the problem. Countries like Russia and China are known for their advanced cyber capabilities and motivations. In the case of EVs, nation state actors could exploit software vulnerabilities to infiltrate broader networks, target fleets of vehicles, or compromise critical infrastructure.

A notorious example of nation state cyber activity is the NOBELIUM group, a Russia-linked hacking collective, which executed a supply chain attack by exploiting software vulnerabilities. This attack demonstrated how sophisticated actors could infiltrate tech systems, granting them access to sensitive information by targeting high-profile individuals and companies.

The combination of cybersecurity weaknesses in EVs, coupled with the capabilities of nation-state actors, underscores the significant risks involved in allowing foreign-built connected car technology to operate in critical markets like the U.S.

The concerns raised by the Biden administration are far from unfounded – EV software security is a critical issue that requires urgent attention on a global scale.

THE DAILY QUIZ

Following England's Harry Brook's 317 recently, a quiz on cricketers who have notched up 300 runs or more in a Test innings

V.V. Ramanan

QUESTION 1
Of the 28 players who have scored triple centuries, only four have achieved the feat twice. Who are the other two apart from Don Bradman and Brian Lara?

QUESTION 2
Brian Lara broke Sir Gary Sobers score of 365 not out to hit 375 but the former's score was overhauled by an Australian (380) before Lara took it back with a 400. Name the Australian.

QUESTION 3
Brook's 322-ball effort was the second-fastest in terms of

balls taken to reach the mark. Who holds the record for the fastest triple hundred, scoring it just off 278 balls?

QUESTION 4
Which is the only instance in Tests of a batter scoring 300 runs in a day and against whom?

QUESTION 5
Which famous venue in India has seen two triple Test hundreds being scored?

QUESTION 6
What specifically connects triple-century makers Bobby Simpson, Graham Gooch, Mark Taylor, Brian Lara, Mahela Jayawardene, Yousuf Khan, Michael Clarke and Brendon McCullum?



Visual question: Name the batter whose only Test ton is a triple century. FILE PHOTO

Questions and Answers to the October 11 edition of the daily quiz: 1. The first woman head writer for SNL. **Ans: Tina Fey**
2. The initial name of Saturday Night Live. **Ans: NBC's Saturday Night**
3. The only woman in SNL history to have won Emmy awards for Outstanding Supporting Actress in a Comedy Series twice in a row. **Ans: Kate McKinnon**
4. Seth Meyers, Billy Crystal, Julia Louis-Dreyfus, Robert Downey Jr. and Steve Carell. Name the person who was not a member on SNL. **Ans: Steve Carell**
5. This goofy character created by John Mulaney and Bill Hader went on to become one of the most iconic and funny SNL characters. **Ans: Stefan**
Visual: Identify this iconic cast member. **Ans: Chevy Chase**
Early Birds: Tito Shladitoyl Tamal Biswas| Piyali Tulji Sonali Das| Bharath Viswanathan

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



KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

She is always playing the devil's advocate

He did not get the promotion he wanted and has started doing some career cushioning

S. Upendran

What is the meaning and origin of the expression 'play devil's advocate'? We have all argued with our friends and family members about many things – cricket, politics, movies, etc. For example, your friend may argue that Sachin Tendulkar is the greatest batsman that India has produced. You too may believe that Sachin is the best, but to make things interesting, you might say, "I think Laxman is better. He won more games for India than Sachin did." You deliberately choose to contradict your friend because you wish to make the discussion interesting. By providing a counterargument, you are provoking your friend into analysing the problem in depth. You are forcing him to make a case as to why Tendulkar is the best batsman ever. When you play devil's advocate, what you are doing is putting forward an argument that people may not support.

Usha's father used to drive her crazy by playing devil's advocate. This term 'devil's advocate' has been in existence for several centuries. It is a translation of the Latin 'Advocatus Diaboli' meaning 'one who advocates the contrary side'. The expression was first used by the Roman Catholic Church. Whenever an individual performed miracles, people felt that there was something divine about the person; very often, the public demanded that the person be elevated to the status of a Saint. Whenever this happened, the Church appointed a devil's advocate. This individual was usually a priest, and it was his job to argue why the performer of miracles should not be made a saint. He was to provide the counterargument.

What is the meaning of 'career cushioning'? (K. Sharada, Vellore)
This is a term that has been frequently used by native speakers of English; especially by those who work in the private sector. In the past, it was common for people to work for the same company all their life. Youngsters nowadays, do not wish to work for the same company for more than a year or two; they want to keep moving from one organisation to another. I guess we can attribute much of this to job insecurity. It is common today, for a company, to lay off people. Given the uncertainty that employees have, many of them have a backup plan in case they are fired – some keep a careful eye on the job market, and apply for positions in other companies while some start their own business. This is to ensure that they are not caught off guard and have something soft to land on when they get the boot.

Our company didn't do well. Some of the senior people have started doing some career cushioning.
upendrankye@gmail.com

Word of the day

Extortionate:
greatly exceeding bounds of reason or moderation

Synonyms: steep, outrageous, unconscionable, exorbitant

Usage: The shop's clothes have extortionate prices.

Pronunciation: newsth/ive/ extortiontepro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /ekstɔːʃənət/

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

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Countries which have criticised Israel attacks on UN peacekeepers

34 The joint statement came after at least five United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) peacekeepers were wounded in recent days as Israeli troops launched attacks in southern Lebanon.

Number of caste-related complaints received by the NCSC

47,000 The complaints the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) received included atrocities against Dalits and disputes related to land.

The number of people detained along with Sonam Wangchuk

20 Climate activist Sonam Wangchuk and other protesters were detained for protesting outside the Ladakh Bhawan. Mr. Wangchuk demands Ladakh's inclusion in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.

Number of people killed due to sectarian violence in Pakistan

16 Sunni and Shiite Muslim tribes have been engaged in intermittent fighting for several months in Pakistan's Kurram district, which has a history of such sectarian confrontations.

The number of drones Russia launched at Ukraine overnight

68 Ukraine's air defence units destroyed 31 of the drones, while 36 were unaccounted for, most likely intercepted by Ukraine's electronic warfare, the air force said.

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

Follow us [facebook.com/thehindu](#) [twitter.com/the_hindu](#) [instagram.com/the_hindu](#)

What is Wayanad's new X-band radar?

What is a Doppler radar and how does it work? Why does Wayanad need an X-band radar? Where and when was the first indigenously designed and manufactured X-band installed? Is India increasing the procurement and instalment of radars?

EXPLAINER

Privali Prakash

The story so far:

After devastating floods and landslides killed more than 200 people in Kerala's Wayanad district in July 2024, the Union Ministry of Earth Sciences approved an X-band radar to be installed in the district. A torrential downpour triggered the landslide in the valley above Panchirattom, near the Mundakkai region; its effects were compounded by a massive debris flow triggered by the rains.

How do radars work?

Radar is short for 'radio detection and ranging'. The device uses radio waves to determine the distance, velocity, and physical characteristics of objects around the device. A transmitter emits a signal aimed at an object whose characteristics are to be ascertained (in meteorology, this could be a cloud). A part of the emitted signal is echoed by the object back to the device, where a receiver tracks and analyses it.

Weather radar, also known as a Doppler radar, is a common application of this device. The Doppler effect is the change in frequency of sound waves as their source moves towards and away from a listener. In meteorology, Doppler radars can reveal how fast a cloud is moving and in which direction based on how the cloud's relative motion changes the frequency of the radiation striking it.

A pulse-Doppler radar can measure the intensity of, say, rainfall by emitting radiation in pulses and tracking how often they're reflected to the receiver.

This way, modern Doppler radars can monitor weather conditions and anticipate new wind patterns, the formation of storms, etc.

What is an X-band radar?

Doppler radar relies on Rayleigh scattering, when the scatterer is much



Weather blues: The complex housing an S-band Doppler Weather Radar at the Meteorological Centre in Begumpet, Hyderabad. FILE PHOTO

smaller than the wavelength of the radiation. A radar trying to 'see' smaller particles like rain droplets or fog will need to use radiation of lower wavelengths, like in the X-band. An X-band radar is radar that emits radiation in the X-band of the electromagnetic spectrum: 8-12 GHz, corresponding to wavelengths of around 2-4 cm (this is in the microwave part of the spectrum.)

The smaller wavelengths allow the radar to produce images of higher resolution. However, the greater the frequency of some radiation, the faster it will be attenuated. So X-band radars have a relatively shorter range.

In Wayanad, the new radar is expected to be able to monitor the movements of particles, such as soil, to inform landslide warnings. The device will also perform high temporal sampling, that is, rapidly sample its environs, allowing it to spot particle movements happening in shorter spans of time.

How many radars does India have?

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) started using radar for weather applications in the early 1950s. The first indigenously designed and manufactured X-band storm detection radar was installed in 1970 in New Delhi. In 1996,

IMD replaced 10 outdated X-band radars with digital X-band radars.

In its X-band radar network, India has both wind-finding and storm-detecting radars, and some with dual capabilities. The country also uses S-band radars (2-4 GHz) for long-range detection. The first S-band cyclone detection radar was installed in Visakhapatnam in 1970 and the first locally made variant was commissioned in Mumbai in 1980.

In September 2024, the Ministry of Earth Sciences said India is set to have 56 additional Doppler radars in a few years. On September 11, the Union Cabinet cleared the ₹2,000-crore 'Mission Mausam' to upgrade meteorological infrastructure in the country. This includes installing up to 60 meteorological radars until 2026 under the Mission's first phase.

Minister of State for Earth Sciences Jitendra Pradhan said in August in Parliament that the government has started the process to procure and install 10 X-band Doppler radars to improve weather forecasting in the northeast States and in Himachal Pradesh's Lahaul and Spiti district.

The initiative to install an X-band radar in Wayanad included installing a C-band radar (4-8 GHz) with an observational range of 250 km in Mangaluru.

What is NISAR?

NASA and the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) are currently developing a satellite called NISAR, short for 'NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar'. It will use radar imaging to produce a high-resolution map of the earth's landscapes.

Its payload consists of an L-band radar (1.25 GHz, 24 cm) built by NASA and an S-band radar (3.2 GHz, 9.3 cm) built by ISRO. Together they will track and record changes in the earth's various natural processes.

It is currently expected to be launched onboard an ISRO GSLV Mk II rocket in 2025, at a total cost of \$1.5 billion, the bulk of it borne by NASA.

THE GIST

Radar is short for 'radio detection and ranging'. The device uses radio waves to determine the distance, velocity, and physical characteristics of objects around the device.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) started using radar for weather applications in the early 1950s. The first indigenously designed and manufactured X-band storm detection radar was installed in 1970 in New Delhi.

FOR MORE: <https://www.instagram.com/DailyPressNotes>

The initiative to install an X-band radar in Wayanad included installing a C-band radar (4-8 GHz) with an observational range of 250 km in Mangaluru.

Who gets the preferred symbol when there are two factions?

Why has the Nationalist Congress Party (SP) filed a plea to restrain the use of the 'clock' symbol?

Rangarajan R

The story so far:

Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) founder Sharad Pawar has filed a plea in the Supreme Court, seeking a direction to restrain the Ait Pawar faction from using the 'clock' symbol in the upcoming assembly polls in Maharashtra.

How are symbols allotted?

Symbols are allotted to political parties as per the provisions of the Symbols Order by the Election Commission of India (ECI). In the largest democracy where a sizeable population is still illiterate, symbols play a crucial role in canvassing and voting process. A national or State recognised political party has a reserved symbol that is not allotted to any other candidate in any constituency.

What is the present issue?

The NCP at present is a State recognised party in Maharashtra and Nagaland. In

July 2023, there was a split in the NCP with the Ait Pawar faction claiming the support of 41 MLAs out of 53 in the Maharashtra assembly. The ECI in February 2024 recognised Ait Pawar faction as the real NCP and allotted to it the 'clock' symbol reserved for NCP during the Lok Sabha elections in April-May 2024. The NCP (Sharadchandra Pawar) [NCP(SP)] was allotted a common symbol of 'man blowing turia'. The present plea claims that during the Lok Sabha election, voters were confused as to which faction represented the real NCP. The NCP (SP) therefore has sought a direction to freeze the 'clock' symbol and allot a new symbol to Ait Pawar faction.

What are past instances?

As per the Symbols Order, in case of split in a recognised political party, the ECI decides as to which faction or group is the recognised political party. It allots the reserved symbol to such faction. However, the ECI has also frozen symbols in the past before determining the

dispute. The 'two leaves' symbol of the AIADMK party in Tamil Nadu was frozen in January 1989 and April 2017 due to competing claims. The 'bow and arrow' symbol of Shiv Sena was also frozen before a bye-election in October 2022.

What can be the way forward?

The Supreme Court in *Sadiq Ali versus the ECI* (1971), laid down the 3-test formula for determining which faction is to be recognised as the original political party. These are the aims and objectives of the party; its affairs as per the party's constitution that reflect inner party democracy; and majority in the legislative and organisation wings.

The ECI in its order in February 2024 held that there was no dispute between the two factions on the first test and that neither of the factions followed the party's constitution rendering the second test redundant. Since the organisational election of NCP in the year 2022 was shrouded with doubt, it went on to decide the issue solely based on majority in the

legislature as a majority of legislators supported the Ait Pawar faction.

However, in the Maharashtra Lok Sabha elections, the NCP (SP) faction despite fighting with its new symbol won eight seats as against just one seat won by the NCP led by Ait Pawar that fought on its traditional 'clock' symbol. The Supreme Court generally does not interfere in the poll process as it is the domain of the ECI. Nevertheless, in exceptional circumstances, it has given directions to the ECI for ensuring a fair election process. In the instant case, because of the performance of the NCP (SP) in the recent Lok Sabha election, the third test of legislative majority can again be disputed. The decision of the ECI to recognise the Ait Pawar faction as the real NCP has also been challenged in the SC by NCP(SP). Considering these factors, the court may direct the ECI to freeze the 'clock' symbol for the assembly elections to be held in November 2024. The real reform required is institutionalising internal democracy through regular inner-party elections in our political parties. Various experts are of the view that the ECI should not be involved in monitoring these elections as it will drag a constitutional authority into the middle of party politics. It is the members of various political parties as responsible citizenry who need to demand and operationalise such internal democracy.

Rangarajan R is a former IAS officer and author of 'Polity Simplified'. Views expressed are personal.

THE GIST

Symbols are allotted to political parties as per the provisions of the Symbols Order by the Election Commission of India (ECI).

In July 2023, there was a split in the NCP with the Ait Pawar faction claiming the support of 41 MLAs out of 53 in the Maharashtra assembly. The ECI in February 2024 recognised the Ait Pawar faction as the real NCP.

The Supreme Court in *Sadiq Ali versus the Election Commission of India* (1971), laid down the 3-test formula for determining which faction is to be recognised as the original political party.

Scuttling people's right to information

The Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005, has been one of the most empowering laws for Indians. From exposing corruption in the delivery of basic rights to bringing to light the truth behind the opaque electoral bonds scheme, the law has been used by citizens to hold power to account. Therefore, it is no surprise that there is a severe backlash against both the legislation, which has just entered its 20th year, and those who use it.



Anjali Bhardwaj
Transparency activist associated with the Satark Nagrik Sangathan and the National Campaign for the Peoples' Right to Information

Vacant posts

Governments are scuttling the RTI Act by not appointing information commissioners and allowing the commissions to crumble under the weight of mounting backlogs. A 2023-24 report of the Satark Nagrik Sangathan, a citizens group that campaigns for transparency in government functioning, shows that seven out of 29 information commissions were defunct for varying periods of time last year. The commission of Jharkhand has not been functional for over four years, while those of Tripura and Telangana have been defunct for three years and one and a half years, respectively.

Many information commissions were found to be functioning without an adequate number of commissioners, despite large backlogs. The information commission of Maharashtra, with a backlog more than 1 lakh appeals and complaints, is headless. Six out of 11 posts of commissioners are lying vacant. Since May 2015, not a single information commissioner has been appointed to the Central Information Commission by the Central government without citizens having to approach courts. Despite repeated directions by the Supreme Court, eight out of 11 posts are vacant in the Central Information Commission.

Under the RTI Act, information commissions are the final appellate authority and are mandated to safeguard and facilitate people's right to



Anurita Johri
Transparency activist associated with the Satark Nagrik Sangathan and the National Campaign for the Peoples' Right to Information

There is a severe backlash against the RTI Act, which has just entered its 20th year, and those who use it

information. They have wide-ranging powers, including the power of direct disclosure of information which the government finds inconvenient. It is because adequate information commissioners have not been appointed that more than 4 lakh appeals and complaints are pending in information commissions across India. The report shows that it would take more than a year for an appeal or complaint to be disposed in 14 commissions. A fresh appeal filed in Chhattisgarh or Bihar would be disposed only in 2029. While hearing a petition regarding vacancies in information commissions across India, in 2023, the Supreme Court noted that the failure to fill vacancies is leading to a situation where "the right to information which is recognised under an Act of Parliament becomes a dead letter."

Even when appointments are made, a majority of the appointees are either retired government officials or people who enjoy political patronage. They are often reluctant to act against violations of the transparency law. The report shows that commissions did not impose penalties in 95% of the cases where penalties could be imposed. This failure sends a signal that violating the law will not invite serious consequences. This destroys the basic framework of incentives and disincentives built into the RTI Act, promotes a culture of impunity, and exasperates applicants who seek information at a high cost and often against great odds. The laxity in enforcing accountability allows information officers to take liberties with the RTI Act, leading to many unanswered applications and an equal number of delayed or illegitimately refused ones.

Regressive amendments

In the last five years, there have also been regressive amendments to the RTI Act. In 2019, despite strong objections from civil society and Opposition parties,

the government brought amendments which dealt a blow to the autonomy of information commissions by empowering the Central government to determine the tenure, salaries, pensions and post-retirement entitlements of all information commissioners.

The Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023, included an explicit provision to amend the RTI law to exempt all personal information from disclosure. The RTI Act of 2005 provided for protection of the privacy of individuals through section 80(K). In order to invoke this section to deny personal information, at least one of the following grounds had to be proven: information sought had no relationship to any public activity or public interest; or information sought was such that it would cause unwarranted invasion of privacy, and the information officer was satisfied that there is no larger public interest that justified disclosure. The DPDP Act amended section 80(D) to expand its purview and exempt all personal information from the ambit of the RTI Act. It also deleted a key provision in the law, which gave citizens a right to information at par with Members of Parliament and Members of Legislative Assemblies.

According to Transparency International India data, nearly 100 people have been killed for using the RTI Act, and thousands have been assaulted, threatened, and slapped with false cases. Though the Whistleblowers Protection Act was passed in 2014, it remains confined to the statute books as the Central government has failed to formulate rules to operationalise it. Every year, some 6 million information applications are filed in India. Evidence shows that the RTI law has initiated the vital task of redistributing power in a democratic framework and transforming the relationship between the government and citizens. An erosion of this fundamental right is an erosion of democracy.

Revanth Reddy's lost opportunity

Telangana does not need yet another committee to study SC sub-categorisation

STATE OF PLAY

Serish Naniseti
serish.n@thehindu.co.in



In October 11, the Telangana government appointed the Justice Shameem Akhter Commission to study the details of sub-classification of Scheduled Castes (SCs) in Telangana and make recommendations to it. Earlier, in August this year, the Supreme Court had said that States could take a call on sub-categorisation, which involves classifying marginalised communities within SCs for more equitable distribution of benefits, addressing graded inequalities, and ensuring comprehensive representation.

Apart from having merely 60 days to complete its task, the one-man Commission faces a big challenge in the absence of Census data and data on castes. This was the same handicap that the B.N. Lokur Committee had also faced in 1965. As a result, it stopped short of recommending sub-categorisation. The committee concluded that the de-scheduling of advanced communities, such as the Malas, needed urgent consideration.

The Telangana government's decision could not have come at a worse time for the disadvantaged communities among the SCs as it is currently on a hiring spree for government posts. The Madiga Reservation Porata Samithi (MRPS), which initiated the demand for sub-categorisation, has urged the government to appoint 11,000-odd teachers in the State only after sub-categorisation of SCs. A planned protest march in Hyderabad by MRPS leader Manda Krishna Madiga, demanding immediate implementation of sub-categorisation, was scut-

tered by the police. Mr. Madiga has spent four decades championing the cause by using Gandhian tactics such as fasts, silent protests, and marches.

It is a fact that discrimination against some of the communities classified as SCs continues to this day. In September, for instance, the Telangana High Court had to order police protection for a Madiga family in Madak district, about 40 kilometres from Hyderabad. The entire family had been ostracised by the Gram Sabha as two brothers who are a part of it did not want to be drum-beaters – the traditional occupation of the community – at a funeral in the village of Govthojiguda in Madak. They are post-graduates and work in Hyderabad. The seriousness and persistence of discrimination can be seen from the frequent reports on the lack of access of certain communities to temples in Telangana.

Efforts to sub-classify SCs have been made in the past in the region. In erstwhile united Andhra Pradesh, the government led by Chandrababu Naidu had issued an ordinance in 1999 for SC sub-classification. In 2000, the Andhra Pradesh legislature passed the Andhra Pradesh Scheduled Castes (Rationalisation of Reservations) Act. It was implemented from 2000 to 2004. The SCs were divided into A (Reli), B (Madiga), C (Mala) and D (Others).

Subsequently the Supreme Court struck this Act down, citing overreach by the State government.

The Andhra Pradesh Scheduled Castes (Rationalisation of Reservations) Act was clear about its goals: "The State shall endeavour to eliminate inequalities in status, facilities, and opportunities, not only amongst the individuals but also amongst groups of people residing in different areas or engaged in different vocations as enjoined under Article 38 (2) of Part IV Directive Principle of State Policy of the Constitution of India." This law had provided 7% reservation for the group of castes that included the Madigas, who constitute 59.52% of the SCs in Telangana (Census 2011). It provided 6% reservation to the other SC communities, including the Malas (28.1% of the SC population).

The same measure of segmentation used in the 2000 Act could have been used for implementing reservations after the SC verdict, in Telangana. After all, the Census has not been conducted yet. Also, the Congress, which has been championing social justice, could have been seen to be walking the talk. Instead, it has chosen to constitute a one-man committee, which looks like a delaying tactic for sub-categorisation. Past committees, such as the B.N. Lokur Committee, the Justice Ramachandra Raju Commission, and the Justice Usha Mehra Commission, made recommendations which were implemented in a half-hearted manner. The Revanth Reddy government has failed to seize the opportunity presented by the Court's verdict. The Justice Shameem Akhter Commission appears to be just another hurdle for the marginalised communities among the SCs.

A spatial look at the Haryana Assembly poll results

Congress lagged behind the BJP in urban seats. But even in rural seats, the race was competitive except for those with a large minority component

DATA POINT

Srinivasa Ramanaj
Vignesh Radhakrishnan

The Haryana Assembly election results were among the closest in recent history in terms of vote share. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) secured 39.4% of the vote share and won 48 seats in the 90-member Assembly. The Congress was just marginally behind in vote share (39.09%), but won only 37 seats. While the BJP outperformed the Congress in terms of vote share in urban and semi-urban areas, the Congress outshone the BJP in the State's semi-rural and rural areas (Table 1).

The BJP translated its superior vote share compared to the Congress in urban areas (48.8% versus 27.7%) and semi-urban areas (46% versus 33.6%) into a substantial lead in seats (48 versus 5 overall).

However, the Congress was unable to translate the vote share differences in rural areas (40.4% for Congress versus 36.4% for the BJP) and semi-rural areas (46.3% for Congress versus 37.8% for the BJP) into victories (only 32 versus 30 seats overall). Since Haryana is predominantly rural or semi-rural (65 out of the 90 seats amount to 72% of the vote share), a higher vote share for the Congress in these areas should have helped it win many more seats and the election itself. But this was not to be.

We plot the BJP and Congress' vote shares in four scatter plots – Chart 2 (urban), Chart 3 (semi-urban), Chart 4 (rural), and Chart 5 (semi-rural). In urban seats (Chart 2), the BJP won five seats with nearly 50% or more votes and the Congress just won one (Rohtak). Even in seats where the BJP won a lower vote share (Ambala Cantt: 44.9% and Ballabgarh: 42.2%), the Congress' performance was dismal (10.9% and 5.9% of the votes, respectively).

A similar story played out in se-

mi-urban seats as well (Chart 3).

In Charts 4 and 5 (semi-rural and rural seats), the Congress secured a high vote share in a number of seats and won. However, the BJP gave it good competition in a substantial number of seats as well. So, why did the Congress' overall higher vote share in semi-rural and rural seats not translate into a higher number of seats?

The answer lies in Chart 6. This chart shows the BJP and Congress' vote shares across all seats – the rural and semi-rural ones shown in circles, with the darker circles corresponding to rural seats; and the urban and semi-urban ones shown in crosses, with the darker crosses corresponding to urban seats. We add another dimension to this chart. The size of the circles/crosses corresponds to the percentage of religious minority voters in that seat.

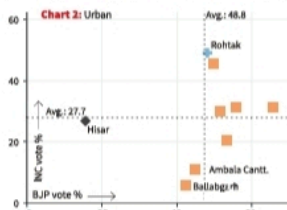
The proportion of minority voters is among the highest in semi-rural seats such as Ferozepur Jhirka (70.4%), Nuh (63.9%), and Punahana (73.4%). Owing to the BJP's image as a party that endorses Hindutva, the minority voters in these seats strongly preferred the Congress. This earned the party substantial vote shares (72%, 59.3%, and 70.1%, respectively) and increased its overall vote share in semi-rural areas. However, the BJP's competitive performance in other rural/semi-rural areas – thanks largely due to its emphasis on targeting the non-Jat Other Backward Classes voters; and the split in the Dalit votes – helped it win substantially and dented the Congress' margin.

Clearly, the Congress, which seemed confident of returning to power in Haryana, has its task cut out in tweaking its message to reach out, first, to urban voters, who seem to decisively favour the BJP, especially in the Hindi heartland. But the grand old party should also be concerned about the lack of translation of its message of social justice into greater margins of support in rural areas.

Rural-urban patterns

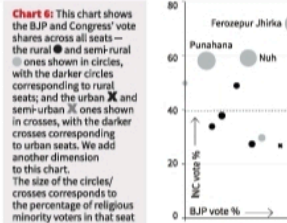
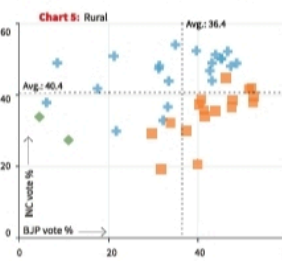
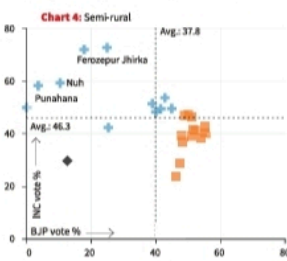
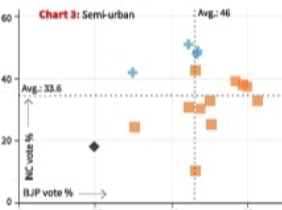
The minority population was obtained from Raphael Susewind's "Data on religion and politics in India" that estimates the figures based on correlations of electors' names in the electoral rolls (2014) of Haryana

In charts 2, 3, 4 and 5: shows BJP's wins, shows Congress' wins and shows others wins



BJP, INC vote share (%) and seats secured (S) across areas

	BJP v%	BJP S	INC v%	INC S	Oth. v%	Oth. S
Urban	48.8%	7	27.7%	1	23.5%	1
Semi-urban	46%	11	33.6%	4	20.4%	1
Semi-rural	37.8%	13	33.3%	11	15.9%	1
Rural	36.4%	17	40.4%	23	23.2%	2



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO OCTOBER 14, 1974

Anti-smuggling drive has uneven impact on prices

New Delhi, Oct. 13: Prices of several commodities have registered a sharp fall ranging from 15 to 40 per cent in many parts of the country, following the massive crackdown on smugglers and black money operators, according to a UNI survey.

However the survey revealed that the impact is uneven. While prices were showing a downward trend in important centres like Bombay, Ahmedabad and Calcutta, they continued to gallop in many other places including Madras, Hyderabad and Gauhati.

Official circles in Delhi, while expressing cautious optimism over the trend, thought it was premature to rush to any conclusions. They preferred to watch the trend for a few more weeks.

In Delhi commodity prices have declined considerably following the multi-pronged drive launched by the Government.

Mr. P.S. Gill, Assistant General Manager of the Superbazar, said the price of groundnut oil had declined by Re. 1 per kg and sugar from Rs. 6.30 to Rs. 5.35 a kg.

The prices of various varieties of wheat had also come down from Rs. 250-300 to Rs. 5.35 a kg.

The prices of certain pulses registered a marginal decline while cereal prices were unchanged.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO OCTOBER 14, 1924

Infant mortality in Bombay

Associated Press of India
Bombay, Oct. 14: The Bombay Corporation after consideration of the report of the Medical Relief Committee on the high rate of infant mortality in the city have resolved to represent to the Government the necessity of amending the Factory Law on lines approved by the Washington Convention of 1919 with regard to women labour, establishment of more maternity homes by the Municipality, free supply of milk, bread and clothes to women during confinement, greener facilities for the treatment of venereal diseases, legislation on the lines of the English Midwives' Act and the abolition of unqualified mid-wives in seven years' time.



Take the gauntlet

'Kavach' implementation is a priority but will not be a silver bullet

In October 11, a passenger train collided with a stationary goods train fast enough for 13 bogies to overturn and one to catch fire, in Kavaraipettai near Chennai. No casualties were reported although several people were injured. No deaths and swift post-event action would have rendered this incident less significant if not for the recent spate of railway accidents across zones, spotlighting the off-precarious conditions of trains, the infrastructure they need to operate, and the people and goods they transport. In the Kavaraipettai incident, officials said the passenger train received a green signal to enter the main line but it passed into the loop line, rear-ending the goods train. 'Kavach', the Indian Railways' train protection system of choice, is designed to avoid such incidents, and the government can install it across its entire network in a decade with as little as 2% of its annual capex. Of course the effects of its implementation will become clear in a similar span of time, not in a few months as some in the political class are demanding. This said, if the seemingly straightforward causes – due to which a naive decision to reroute a train can turn into the reason for a major accident – are a sign of the precarity of the railway infrastructure, 'Kavach' coverage plus overhauling existing signalling systems should be a national priority but cannot be considered a silver bullet.

The long-standing delay in improving safety could be symptomatic of shortfalls in multiple areas. For example, the staff of the Railways matter for safety, too. Recent media reports have revealed deplorable working conditions for East Coast, Western, and Central Railways locomotive pilots, including 12-hour shifts, unhygienic resting facilities, and absence of toilets on engines. Even with 'Kavach', rail safety will require constant vigilance yet vigil is threatened by access to basic amenities competing for pilots' attention. Overall, the Railways' revenue growth has slowed while its dependence on budgetary allocation for capex has increased; its freight basket is dominated by coal (and thus vulnerable to the pressure on multiple sectors to decarbonise); both high-density routes and high-utilisation routes often report more than 100% network utilisation; and there are signs it has still to recover market share it lost during the COVID-19 pandemic to other passenger services. The Railways cannot improve safety in a vacuum but must address all these stressors in consonance. Finally, the government's response to recent accidents has included counter-terrorism investigators as well. While this is due diligence, their presence and involvement should neither distract India from the Railways' needs nor allow the government to hide behind a veil of secrecy.

Biology transformed

Nobel for determining protein structure recognises a big advance

The Nobel Prize in chemistry has been awarded to David Baker for succeeding in the seemingly impossible feat of building new proteins and to Demis Hassabis and John M. Jumper for solving the half-a-century old problem of predicting proteins' complex structures using an artificial intelligence (AI) model called AlphaFold that they developed. It used to take years of painstaking experiments to determine the 3D structure of a protein, which in many cases have only been partially determined. Determining structure is the first and most important step in determining protein function. Proteins are long ribbons in which the 20 different amino acid building blocks can be sequentially arranged to form innumerable combinations. Even if researchers know the sequence of amino acids in a ribbon, the ribbon can twist and fold in an astronomical number of possible shapes for each sequence, thereby making protein structure determination extremely challenging. For instance, if a protein consists of only 100 amino acids, the protein can assume at least 1,047 different 3D structures. Till a few years ago, of the 20,000-odd proteins found in humans, the structure of only a third was partially determined even experimentally. Hassabis and Jumper made protein structure prediction child's play. AlphaFold has now predicted the structure of almost all 200 million proteins from nearly a million species. Baker developed computerised methods to create proteins that did not previously exist and which, "in many cases, have entirely new functions".

In 2018, Hassabis and Jumper achieved an accuracy of 60% in predicting protein structure. In 2020, the AI model's performance was comparable with X-ray crystallography. Though still not perfect, the AI model estimates how correct the structure that has been produced is, allowing researchers to know the reliability of the prediction. The code for the AlphaFold model has been publicly available since 2021, and the AI tool has been used by more than two million people from 190 countries. Baker used his computer software Rosetta to generate new proteins that never existed naturally. Instead of predicting the protein structure based on amino acid sequences, he created new protein structures and used Rosetta to determine the amino acid sequence by searching a database of all known protein structures and looking for short fragments of proteins that had similarities with the desired structure. Rosetta then optimised these fragments and proposed an amino acid sequence. Like Hassabis and Jumper, Baker too made the code for Rosetta freely available so that researchers can develop the software and find new areas of application.

In September this year, the Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the United States to attend yet another meeting of the Quad nations (Australia, India, Japan and the U.S.). This turned out to be possibly the most significant meeting of the Quad to date, during which the quartet seemed to firm up what may be viewed as a security alliance.

The 'Wilmington Declaration' did not mention any country, least of all China by name, but left nothing to the imagination that it was aimed at the containment of China across the entire Indo-Pacific. Despite the absence of any reference to a formal mutual defence declaration, it was obvious that the "four maritime democracies" had a single objective, viz., to checkmate China.

The state of India-China ties

The message from the Wilmington Declaration has certain overriding implications for India and India's security. India-China relations today are not merely stalemated but are also steadily deteriorating. In the northern border regions, the stalemate in the Galwan region continues despite some soothing statements by India's military and civilian leaders. Recently, India announced that it will maintain, if not increase, its vigilance in the border areas by inducing more forces despite the onset of winter. In the Depsang Plains and Demchok, there has been no breakthrough in negotiations regarding disengagement. In Ladakh alone, the number of 'friction points' has increased, with Indian forces unable to access several 'patrolling points' that they were previously accustomed to.

The military is currently in the process of further augmenting its fighting capabilities across the entire length of the China-India border. It is inducting new long-range firearms and heavy artillery, and has begun to deploy howitzers, missiles, rocket systems and 'loitering munitions'. While the Indian Army Chief has characterised the current situation along the Line of Actual Control as 'stable and sensitive', he has also stated that the Indian armed forces "are operational and fully prepared to deal with any contingency". While strengthening its border capabilities, China appears unfazed by India's moves, confident that given its defence budget (which dwarfs that of India), it can thwart any new Indian initiative.

China's arrogance, misplaced or otherwise, is legendary. It is again true that China greatly depends on the element of surprise to achieve the best results for itself. Hence, while it may look unfazed at this time by talk by India acquiring 'new alliance partners' from the West, China is unlikely to take such a situation lightly. Dealing with China is never a 'zero sum game', and India's leaders need to be wary and watchful of



M.K. Narayanan

a former Director, Intelligence Bureau, a former National Security Adviser, and a former Governor of West Bengal

how China reacts to the developing situation. What is again worrying is that China under Xi Jinping seems increasingly willing in most situations to test the waters vis-à-vis its neighbours, including India.

An aggressive nationalism

It may, thus, be prudent for India to proceed with care in its dealings with China on the one hand, and with its Quad partners on the other. In the short term, it may be expedient not to be seen to align with countries that have openly declared their hostility to China, for Xi Jinping's China is almost certain to treat this as a provocation, compelling it to 'walk the talk'. In this context, it is worth recalling that as far back as 2017, Mr. Xi had ominously declared that 'China under Xi was different from China under Deng'. In 2021, the centenary year of the Chinese Communist Party (CPC), Mr. Xi had again made a series of pronouncements which included a stern warning to all external forces "seeking to bully, oppress or subjugate China". In 2022, in the course of the 20th National Congress of the CPC, statements made by China's leaders appeared to reveal an increasingly aggressive brand of Chinese nationalism. Rationality is not something to be expected of China in any situation. India must not overlook this aspect, and should 'read the tea leaves' correctly in its dealings with China.

Over the years, India's strategic experts had sought to differentiate between what in the Chinese mind constitutes a 'real' threat as distinct from peripheral dangers that haunt the Chinese psyche. From China's postures it can be inferred that the border issue with India in the Himalayas does not represent a real threat to China's sovereignty and to its future. This is notwithstanding that from the early 1950s, China has made territorial claims on several thousand square kilometres of Indian territory, in Ladakh and in Arunachal Pradesh. China is well aware that its claims here were based on maps that were at best 'non-official', created during predecessors' regimes. China itself tends to doubt their sanctity though it is not willing to give up its claims.

The situation existing as far as China's eastern seaboard is concerned, as also its claims in the Pacific to its east, fall into an entirely different category. Here, any attempt to tamper with what China believes is its territory, constitutes in its mind a real threat to China's very existence. Understanding the difference is important as far as the Chinese psyche is concerned.

India's strategic community has understood this for a long time and has dealt with China's quirky behaviour in a nuanced manner over the years. Lately, however, India does seem to have shifted its stance to an extent and it is possible

that the Chinese read this as an outcome of India's growing alignment with the West, specifically with the U.S. Recent overtures by China, including statements of the Chinese Defence Ministry that China and India have been able to 'reduce differences and build some consensus' on disengaging troops from friction points to end the stand-off in eastern Ladakh, and have also agreed to a dialogue to reach a resolution acceptable to both sides, could well signal a shift in China's approach, but India does not seem to take this seriously.

Beijing's view

All this serves as a backdrop to China's increasing concerns over India's association with the Quad – seen by it as a U.S.-sponsored 'coalition of the willing'. Rumbblings from China have grown stronger of late. To the fevered Chinese mind of today, India's membership of the Quad represents a far more serious threat to it than the occasional skirmishes on the Himalayan heights. The Wilmington Declaration, having given up any pretence that the Quad is not a defence alliance, could well be seen by China as an indication of a grand design by the U.S. and its enemies to encircle and contain China. With this, China's understanding of the threat posed by India will increase significantly.

India must take due care not to send out any wrong signals, as the consequences of this could be serious. As well as to confrontational politics, in substance and as well as in style, can have adverse repercussions in the India-China context. History may not repeat itself, but as Mark Twain is reported to have said, "it rhymes" enough to make one uneasy. India must not, and need not, subscribe to Mr. Xi's notion of a 'community of shared future of mankind' (first mentioned almost a decade ago), but India must not also be seen to subscribe to the West's entrenched belief that China's rise is inimical to the future of mankind, and that nations across the globe should join together to post a challenge to it.

In the context of China, it would, hence, be prudent for India not to be seen to be increasing its security congruence with the U.S. and the West. Clearly, India has no intention of being part of any pincer movement directed at China and its future ambitions, but it is equally important that China understands this – and the world recognises this as well – and has no reason to doubt where India stands in terms of Asian and world security. Any impression that India has become part of the U.S. bandwagon, engaged in checkmating China's ambitions is best avoided. India's future is hardly dependent on checkmating China's ambitions or in aiding any U.S. attempts to prevent this from becoming a reality.

It would be prudent for India to proceed with care in its dealings with China on the one hand and with its Quad partners on the other

A critical message for the urban elite

In India, this year's summer shattered records, with red alerts issued nationwide. Over 200 lives were lost to heatwaves (official), but countless more went unrecorded. Delhi experienced an unprecedented 50°C. With the progress of the monsoon and the memory of the extreme heat far behind us, we risk ignoring a critical warning.

In the last decade, urban areas in India have faced increasingly severe and frequent heatwaves, largely due to the urban heat island (UHI) effect. This phenomenon, where cities are significantly warmer than their rural counterparts, is driven by carbon-emitting human activities. Urban design exacerbates this effect, with concrete, asphalt, and glass structures retaining heat. In corporate hubs such as Gurugram, sleek glass buildings, while modern and attractive, trap heat and increase energy consumption. The reflections from these buildings and the lack of green cover further worsen conditions for those outside.

The marginalised bear the brunt

The severity of these issues demands immediate attention, as poor urban planning disproportionately affects marginalised communities. Delivery boys, who navigate city streets to meet the demand for online orders, face relentless heat with little relief. Auto drivers are directly exposed to the scorching heat of the day as they strive to earn a living. So do construction workers who are forced to work long hours outdoors, enduring the hot sun without adequate shade or hydration. Women domestic workers frequently travel by foot, and street vendors constantly battle the whims of the weather, with their earnings declining as foot traffic reduces due to the heat. These individuals face the harshest consequences of poor urban planning. They are on the front lines, experiencing the direct impact of rising



Rohit Kumar

Co-founder of Young Leaders for Active Citizenship (YLAC)



Akshat Sogani

former Associate at Young Leaders for Active Citizenship (YLAC)

Our technology-enabled ecosystem could be making our cities unlivable

temperatures, poor air quality, and the scarcity of green spaces.

Poor urban planning remains unchecked in part because the privileged, who have more influence, are less affected. And technology is enabling this by lulling us into inaction. In air-conditioned environments, the comforts provided by technology further insulate the privileged from the harsh realities of urban life, diminishing their incentive to push for change. Grocery delivery apps reduce the need to step outside for basic needs. For even minor repairs, we turn to apps for doorstep services, and ride-hailing apps encourage us to take cabs for short distances.

This unintended consequence of our thriving app ecosystem, built on a labour surplus economy, has not been widely discussed in public discourse and warrants a deeper examination for its societal implications.

Our tech-enabled ecosystem has redefined the concept of 'luxury', creating a comfort trap that reduces our motivation to engage with the outside world. It has led to greater human domestication and a detachment from the environment around us. Tech coupled with privilege has also invisibilised labour, which is making us lose our empathy. In service complexes, guards receive deliveries at building gates, reducing our interaction with the people who serve us. In all these instances, a common theme is that the urban elite are willing to pay a premium to trade discomfort for convenience. Unfortunately, the insulation of the upper classes from the external environment has profound implications for urban governance and the local economy.

When the privileged encounter issues such as poor public services or inadequate infrastructure, these problems often gain media attention, prompting governmental action. For instance, the flash storm in Delhi some months ago that led

to the flooding of basements in posh areas and even the houses of Members of Parliament in Lutyens' Delhi. This led to swift action by the authorities.

Similarly, public schools often lack resources because the affluent prefer private institutions. And public transportation receives less focus and funding as the elite avoid using it.

Even more worrisome is the fact that we are entering a vicious cycle. While heatwaves force people indoors, technology enables this behaviour, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy: worsening urban conditions make outdoor engagement unbearable which further increases reliance on technology. As a result, the wealthy demand fewer public service improvements, making cities less livable for everyone.

The broader societal implications of this change are alarming. As technology is integrating further into our lives, it is reshaping our expectations of urban living. But this integration is not improving the quality of life for the general populace. Instead, it is aggravating existing inequalities and creating new ones.

The need to reconnect

The real challenge lies in breaking free from this comfort trap. Reconnecting with our cities and each other is not just a noble goal; it is essential for our collective survival. We have to snap out of our false sense of comfort and recognise that our world is changing in fundamental ways. We are losing our public spaces and our ability to enjoy outdoor activities due to increasingly frequent extreme weather events. The urban elite must, therefore, leverage their privilege to actively engage with governments and help improve living conditions in our cities. Only by confronting the true state of our urban areas can we hope to rebuild them as equitable, livable spaces for all.

Let us not let convenience become the architect of the demise of our cities.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Frequent train accidents

The country is witnessing frequent railway accidents, many being attributed to 'signal failures' and 'technical defects'. After every incident, there is advice to install the 'Kavach' system. The greatest blunder that has been committed by the government of the day is in doing away with a separate Budget for the Indian Railways. Train journeys, considered one of the safest

in the past, evoke fear and anxiety now. The focus on 'Vande Bharat' trains is disproportionate as these trains cater only to the rich and the affluent. It is time the government thought about the safety of the common man. One also wonders whether the Indian Railways is on top of an agenda for privatisation. **Tharicus S. Fernando,** Chennai

The political comparison of

train safety in previous regimes is childish. The government of the day is in its third term and there ought to have been improvements by now. The safety of all trains must be given preference over the introduction of 'Vande Bharat' trains which seems to be an obsession. **M.C. Vijay Shankar,** Chennai

All is not well with the railway administration. It

seems that the government is not serious about improving safety despite repeated derailments and collisions. A government which takes pride in development should not leave the nation's biggest public transport system to fend for itself. **J. Anantha Padmanabhan,** Tiruchi

India and letter of support
The decision by India to abstain from signing a letter

condemning Israel for banning UN Secretary-General António Guterres is perplexing. As a prominent member of the Global South, India's move raises questions about its stance on multilateralism and the UN's role in conflict mediation. India's silence may be viewed as a shift in foreign policy or even as growing reluctance to criticise Israel openly. **Korada Sai Ikshitha,** Visakhapatnam

Change at Wimbledon
The announcement that Wimbledon is scrapping its iconic line judges in favour of electronic line calling from 2025 comes with a tinge of sadness ('Sport' page, October 10). It would mean fewer part-time opportunities for trained officials and also affect aspiring chair umpires. Many chair umpires started off as line officials. **R. Sivakumar,** Chennai

Search for oil

Global majors will be interested only if the balance of risk/reward is tempting in the new law

DUE TO RISING geopolitical tensions in West Asia, oil prices are expected to remain elevated and volatile. With a high import dependence of 88%, India must make determined efforts to boost domestic oil production that has been steadily declining since FY12. In the current fiscal up to August, production was almost similar to the corresponding period last fiscal. This has been falling for various reasons including declining output from old and marginal fields. India lacks the technological capability for deepwater exploration. There have also been no major hydrocarbon discoveries of late either. The government is seized of the imperative of stepping up oil production by incentivising domestic producers and global giants for exploration and production (E&P) and plans to introduce a new law replacing the existing Oilfields (Regulation and Development) Act of 1948 in the next session of Parliament. There is also a sense of urgency to extract more oil before the world switches to other forms of energy to hit net zero climate targets.

While oil minister Hardeep Singh Puri is optimistic about the interest of global oil majors like ExxonMobil and Chevron, little is known about their commitments. The government believes that E&P offers investment opportunities of \$100 billion, but the fact is that the interest of global oil majors in exploring for oil has so far been constrained by the challenging investment environment including concerns regarding arbitration and compensation in case of expropriation. Foreign direct investment inflows into petroleum and natural gas amounted to only \$8.2 billion from April 2000 to June 2024. ExxonMobil and Chevron earlier signed MoUs with the state-owned giant, ONGC, for joint and individual technical studies to enable E&P in the waters off the east and west coasts. Whether these two oil majors are investors or just providers of technological services is far from clear. "I said you come, join Oil India prospecting off the Andamans waters. Don't make any investment, just come in. We will incentivise them. And if you strike oil and you are a partner, you will have first right of refusal," Puri told the Financial Times Energy Transition Summit.

The new legislation, which seeks to broaden the definition of mineral oils that previously included only petroleum and natural gas, is intended to facilitate E&P in major offshore oil deposits located in previously prohibited or no-go zones. The policy regime seeks to double the current net area being explored for oil and gas to 500,000 sq km by 2025 by reducing the no-go areas in India's exclusive economic zones by 99% and incentivising the discovery of potential basins like in the Andamans, Kutch-Saurashtra, and Mahanadi at the government's cost.

India has around 26 sedimentary basins covering an area of 3.3 million sq km, of which only seven category 1 basins have established commercial production of oil. Only 10% of the sedimentary basin currently is under exploration with expectations that it will rise to 15% very shortly and go on to 30%. In the ninth round of the Open Acreage Licensing Policy, which was open from January to September, 38% of the bids were for exploration in the erstwhile no-go zones. Clearly, this is the frontier that must be tapped if the imperative of stepping up domestic output is to bear fruit. A more sobering reality, however, is that the global oil majors will be interested only if the balance of risk/reward is sufficiently tempting in the new law.

Milton's blow to Disney proves ESG isn't 'woke capitalism'

THE WEATHER has long been a favourite scapegoat of executives trying to explain disappointing earnings. Customers shying away from buying new clothes? It's the hot, hot summer. People drinking less beer than expected? Blame it on rain during the Euro Cup. Consumers not booking vacations? The heatwave is keeping would-be travellers at home.

But as weather has turned more extreme, it's no longer just a convenient scapegoat — it really is the problem. Look no further than the destruction wreaked by Hurricane Milton, which forced Walt Disney Co. to close its theme parks in Florida this week. It's reportedly only the 10th time in a half century a hurricane has shut down Disney World.

The monetary impact for Disney will be real and considerable. Bloomberg Intelligence's Geetha Ranganathan estimates the park closures could mean a hit of up to \$200 million in revenue and \$125 million in operating income for Disney during its current fiscal quarter. And the effects will linger long beyond the immediate aftermath of the storm; Milton could lower US attendance at Disney's parks during the period that closes at the end of the year by an estimated 4 percentage points, according to Goldman Sachs.

The historical data that analysts can point to for context are starting to pile up. In 2017, Hurricane Irma cost the company \$100 million in operating income when it closed the parks for two days, cutting into US attendance in the quarter by about 3 percentage points, according to Goldman Sachs. Hurricane Ian led to another two-day closure in 2022 and a \$65 million drag. (This time the closure lasted a day and a half; Disney reopened most of its park operations Friday.)

But as theme parks have become an increasingly important part of Disney's business, the stakes have gotten higher. The experiences division, which includes Disney World and the other parks, generates about a third of the company's revenue but two-thirds of its profit. Last year, Disney said it would nearly double its spending on the business, which has been fighting softening consumer demand due to inflation, to about \$60 billion over the next decade.

This is playing out in Florida, where Governor Ron DeSantis has made Disney the poster child of his crusade against "woke capitalism." He's turned the state into the hub of the anti-ESG movement, decrying companies' environmental, social, and governance initiatives as merely a way for them to impose their left-leaning agendas on the rest of society. "We want them to act as fiduciaries. We do not want them engaged on these ideological jousts," DeSantis said last year when he signed an anti-ESG bill that went farther than any other state's.

Disney's punching bag status for Republicans on an anti-ESG crusade has spread beyond the state. When Disney acknowledged in its 10-K filing last year that one of the risks to its brand was consumers' perceptions of its position on the environment and social issues, Oklahoma Treasurer Todd Russ pounced on it as evidence to support Oklahoma's own anti-ESG law. "Disney is a great example of how putting ESG policies over investor earnings is bad for business and doesn't belong in this arena," Russ said.

But as Hurricane Milton shows yet again, climate change is bad for business — and companies do have a fiduciary responsibility to combat it. Disney is taking steps in that direction with efforts like pledging to reduce absolute emissions from its direct operations by nearly 50% and to purchase or produce only zero-carbon electricity by 2030.

This is ESG's true purpose — not a PR move to paint a brand as a corporate do-gooder, nor an attempt to impose some kind of social agenda. It's a strategic decision and business imperative to protect a company's assets and its future.



BETH KOWITT
Bloomberg



OCTOBER 16 IS celebrated as World Food Day every year by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations. It is a reminder of the commitment made at the highest level to ensure food and nutritional security of the people living on this planet. The world has made tremendous progress in producing more food through large-scale adoption of better seeds, more irrigation, higher doses of fertilisers, pesticides, farm machinery, etc. This could not have been done without increasing incentives for farmers either through input subsidies or higher prices for their produce, or a mix of some such measures. On this day, many people who are committed to the cause of food and nutritional security, such as scientists, technologists, economists, and agri-business people, renew their vows to eliminate hunger and malnutrition from this planet. According to the FAO's State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI report), roughly 2.33 billion people on still face moderate to severe food insecurity. This is a challenge for those who are committed to providing food and nutrition security to all.

The theme of World Food Day this year is "Right to Foods for a Better Life and a Better Future". The "Right to Food" approach of FAO encouraged the government of India (the United Progressive Alliance government led by Manmohan Singh) to pass the National Food Security Act (NFSA) in 2013. It was to cover roughly two-thirds of Indian population in providing rice, wheat, or coarse grains (5 kg/person/month) at ₹3/kg, ₹2/kg, and ₹1/kg respectively. These prices could be revised upwards after three years, keeping in view the ballooning magnitude of food subsidy on account of this Act, and the overall finances of the



ASHOK GULATI

Distinguished professor, ICRIER

government. At that time, the erstwhile Planning Commission had estimated that the headcount poverty ratio was about 21%, which was constrained by some non-governmental organisations, and later this figure was revised upwards to about 29% by the Rangarajan Committee. Even at this higher estimate of poverty, questions were raised by many economists, including me, when I was a part of that government, that why such a highly subsidised food be available to two-thirds of the population.

The Vajpayee government (1998-2004) had reformed the food subsidy regime and made it targeted public distribution system. Under that scheme, the antyodaya (most vulnerable) people get free food, while those above that must pay at least half the minimum support price (MSP) being paid to the farmer, and those above the poverty line pay 90% of the MSP. I still feel that was the most rational policy decision. The "Right to Food" does not mean that everyone, or two-thirds of the population, will get free food. The government's job is to make sure that food is easily available and accessible. But distributing free food to more than 800 million people today is economically irrational, to say the least.

The present government of the National Democratic Alliance, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has used a different definition of measuring poverty. The Niti Aayog's multi-dimensional poverty index says that the poverty ratio declined from 29.13% in 2013-14 to 11.28% in 2022-23. If this is truly the case, and the government does not stop bragging about this achievement, why are we still distributing free food to 813 million people?

Remember, even a little ant to have to work a lot for ensuring its food security, and you can see them even storing food, working in a long chain with cooperation. Why can't humans work and earn and have their basic food? As a policy analyst, I have no problem if the government wants to give free food to even say 15% of the population. But above that, everyone must pay for food. Free food beyond this 15% is nothing else but a pure political bait for votes. And this must be resisted by taxpayers. Why I am saying so is because this is the largest subsidy in the Union Budget, and this, along with fertiliser subsidy, cuts down much more rational and productive investments in the agri-food space, such as in agri-R&D, precision agriculture, micro-nutrients, women's education, sanitation, etc. These investments

are almost 10 times more effective in ensuring food and nutritional security of our people than free food and highly subsidised fertilisers and power. Subsidies, when they are abundant and almost open-ended, become a den of corruption. ICRIER research shows that a substantial part (25-30%) of these two subsidies, food, and fertilisers never reaches the intended beneficiaries. And if one looks at the inefficiency in the use of these two subsidies, and adds that to the leakages, the overall loss easily goes to 40-50% of the total amount of resources being spent on them. This defeats the very purpose of "Right to Food".

Can this regime of highly ineffective food and fertiliser subsidies be reformed? The short answer is yes, provided the government has the courage to bite the bullet and have enough lead time to prepare for its proper implementation. The lead time is not many years, but just six-12 months, and a group of dedicated people who are committed to this cause of rationalisation. Digitalisation of the agri-food system can come in very handy in chalking out a more rational and robust system that can help achieve the zero-hunger target of the sustainable development goals by 2030. In this process, beware of engaging roadside consulting companies, who open their shops to make quick money, and get contracts from the government even by greasing palms through their bureaucratic friends — and they are multiplying in India. If the Modi government can take up this challenge, it can make Indian agriculture more vibrant, climate-resilient, and nutritious, helping to overcome the curse of malnutrition. Else, drum-beating slogans will go on without much change in the agri-food space.

Views are personal

Commodity derivative market needs a fillip



RAJOSIK BANERJEE
PUNIT AJANI

Respectively head of financial risk management (FRM) and deputy head of risk advisory, & associate partner (FRM), KPMG in India

COMMODITY DERIVATIVE TRADING volumes are rising in India and globally. However, trading activity is concentrated in a few commodities and exchanges often struggle to create liquidity in new contracts.

Globally, most of the commodity benchmarks continue to trade on the exchanges they were first launched on. For example, the Chicago Board of Trade soybean contract was first launched in 1936 and it is still used as a global benchmark for price reference. Trading on the London Metal Exchange (LME) can be traced back to as early as 1877, and LME-traded industrial metals are still considered by global companies to set their product prices. These contracts were first launched due to a requirement to manage a new or increased price risk and succeeded due to the active participation of physical market players. But despite historical success, global commodity exchanges have seen mixed success in launching and sustaining new contracts.

There is no one-size-fits-all strategy when it comes to developing and sustaining the commodity derivatives market. Commodity trading is unique as both buyers and sellers are to be incentivised to come and trade on the derivative platform. The key reason for consumers and producers to trade is to manage their price risk and get better visibility about future prices. Physical market players may trade huge quan-

tity; however, they may not trade regularly and may have limited risk appetite for higher price volatility. Hence, we need participation by financial market players to become counterparties to the consumers and producers. They provide the much-needed liquidity in the market and can help with easy entry and exit for physical market players, thereby reducing the impact cost.

Individually, if we talk about the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, the exchange has seen immense success due to its century-old presence, large product portfolio, open market access, and extensive incentive programmes. The Intercontinental Exchange is a recent entrant in commodity trading but has benefited from the acquisition of key trading platforms. LME is another century-old exchange which has managed to maintain its lead in industrial metal trading due to a large base of physical market players and the extensive use of LME prices as a benchmark in the global market. China has seen a sharp burst in trading activity recently and has benefited from the launch of products across the value chain and opening of some key commodities such as crude oil and iron ore to foreign participation.

A fresh impetus could help the Indian market enter the growth trajectory, with joint efforts of exchanges, market participants, and the regulator

India is a relatively new entrant in the global commodity derivative market and trade volumes have picked up significantly with the introduction new instruments such as options and index futures. However, the Indian commodity derivative market remains constricted by the concentration of volume in a few products, higher cost of trading, and limited market awareness.

India is a major player in the commodity market and a well-developed derivative market is the need of the hour for efficient risk management. Commodity derivative trading in India is still at a nascent stage, and there is a need to take targeted action to boost participation. Based on the learnings from international markets, Indian exchanges can focus on developing derivatives in commodities in which the country plays a major role of a price maker. India plays a major role in determining prices of commodities like pulses, sugar, spices, etc., and the focus can be on developing derivative contracts on these commodities.

Also, similar to global exchanges, the Indian ones need to design a robust incentive scheme to attract participation in new and existing contracts. These schemes should be largely

focused on new contracts and should continue until there is stable growth in trade volumes.

Given the early stage of Indian commodity markets, the cost of trading should be kept at a minimum. An important factor is widening the participation base, including with foreign and financial market players. Another important factor is regulation. Given the sensitive nature of commodity markets, regulatory oversight is a must. However, the focus should be only on controlling manipulation. Volatility in commodity prices cannot be controlled, given their dynamic nature and sensitivity to multiple factors. But constant intervention can dissuade new and existing market participants and arbitrary discontinuation of contracts can adversely impact the overall objective of commodity derivatives, which is price risk management.

The importance of the Indian commodity derivative market is evident, but it needs fresh impetus to enter the growth trajectory seen by some major global exchanges. Such an impetus may come from the combined efforts of the exchanges, market participants, as well as the regulator.

This article is part of an independent research study conducted by KPMG Assurance and Consulting LLP, as part of an educational initiative of MCK-IPF

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

War and peace

There could not have been a wistrier and more deserving recipient of the Nobel Prize for Peace than the Japanese anti-nuclear organisation Nihon Hidankyo. The organisation contributed significantly to what is known as "nuclear taboo", widely viewed as "a precondition of a peaceful future for humanity". The destructive power of nuclear weapons, demonstrated by the US in

Hiroshima and Nagasaki, needs to be narrated till they are completely eliminated. The human race has enough weapons to annihilate itself. The emergence of automated weapon systems and artificial intelligence-driven warfare could heighten the unthinkable if humans don't show enough sagacity to prefer peace over war and self-destruction. Nuclear disarmament is the only way forward if we are to survive. Nihon Hidankyo's cry that the present

situation in Gaza and Lebanon is like Japan 80 years ago resonates with us. It is the moral obligation of the international community to rise as one and bring the wars to an end. —G David Milton, Maruthanode

Double whammy

The index of industrial production (IIP) numbers have fallen for the first time in 22 months and should worry the government. Most agencies are predicting around 7% GDP growth for

the year. Unless the fall in IIP is reversed, it would be difficult to achieve growth as predicted. In a double whammy, the rupee has breached the \$84 mark against the dollar. Export numbers are not up to the mark and the government must plug the loopholes that prevent us from increasing our exports and making them competitive. —Anthony Henriques, Maharashtra

Write to us at letters@expressindia.com

Congress on the path of self-destruction

THE defeat which the Congress party suffered in Haryana seems to have made the party lose its direction. Instead of introspection, it has started hitting self goals. In a surprising move Karnataka Congress government had withdrawn the Old Hubballi Police Station. This case against the AIMM leaders including, Mohammed Arif. These leaders were accused of leading a mob that attacked the police, threatened to storm the police station that took place on April 16, 2022.

The big question is why did Congress whitewash Hubballi riot cases? Why did the 'Mohabbat Ki Dukan' of Congress decide to stand by rioters rather than the police officers? The Chief Minister of Karnataka says the

Government has the right to withdraw cases. It has the right but there is a rider. The police department or the home department and the public prosecutor has also to agree to it. In this case the police department sent a written recommendation saying the cases should not be withdrawn. But the government accepted the recommendation of Dy CM Shivakumar and withdrew the cases. In politics 2 plus 2 is 22. If we piece together the developments it is clear that the Congress has lost its credibility and other parties of bloc India have come to the conclusion that Congress on its own can do nothing to defeat the BJP. The AIMM has two MLAs one in Malegaon and others in Dhuriah and has some corporators in Aurangabad and

Nanded corporators. Hence Muslim votes matter most.

The AIMM sent feelers saying they were ready to support bloc INDIA if Congress withdraws Hubballi riot cases in which some AIMM leaders were involved. AIMM chief Assaduddin Owais had publicly stated that Congress should stop being a pseudo secular party since on its own cannot defeat BJP led by Modi. He said if the Congress and bloc INDIA do not want Phadnis government again, all should join hands. The Congress said 'Kaboolha' as Poonam Shehzada of BJP remarked. Well one thing that has come out from the opposition is that the Congress alone is no longer competent to defeat BJP. This is an important

development. The bloc India parties have also come to the conclusion that the Congress had proved that it cannot win any election on its own after the devastating results it got in Haryana and J&K which were held immediately after the Lok Sabha elections where BJP got tamed. Another mistake Congress committed was saying that it does not accept people's verdict in Haryana polls. Who the hell are they to insult the voters and the mandate they gave? What should one call this? Madness or immaturity of Congress party which has grey-haired leaders in their seventies and eighties? Or is it arrogance?

The Congress leaders tried to defend the undefendable saying that BJP government in Karnataka withdrew

385 cases during their tenure between 2019-2023. Agreed the BJP committed a blunder but why follow bad examples. What is more shocking is that while the police were opposed to withdrawal of cases, Congress leaders say the rioters were innocent. Who are they to certify? It is a matter the court should decide not political parties. Let's briefly recall the case. A Muslim mob had gathered outside the Old Hubballi Police Station on the night of April 16, 2022 to protest against a derogatory social media post and later went on a rampage damaging police vehicles and public property. Four policemen were injured in the stone pelting and rioting that took place. The police had to resort to lathi charge. If it is not a policy of appeasement what else is it? Nowonder, the BJP has been lashing at the Congress saying they are urban Naxalites and new Muslim league party.



LETTERS

Congress refuses to learn lessons

SUB: Bold Talk by V Ramu Sarma: Humility is key to success - Congress shall mend its ways (October 12, 2024). The Haryana poll outcome gave a tremendous boost to BJP to fearlessly plan and unleash a no holds barred election campaign in Maharashtra and other states where elections are due shortly. The exit poll predictions and psephologists were proved wrong. Congress vainly tried to project farmers' agitation at Singur border as farmers' disenchantment with the Centre, and attempted to play an exclusive Jat card, barring non-Jat OBC and SC/ST communities that miserably backfired. The overconfidence reality must serve as a good lesson for all - BJP including.

S Lakshmi, Hyderabad

IN the recent months, the Congress had won only Telangana and Karnataka elections. It could not make a dent in the north. While the BJP had won 8 state assembly elections in the last one year. In the recently held Haryana and J&K elections, the Congress was overconfident based on the results of the exit polls. Jat, farmers and Sikhs votes were more relied upon. But its performance was far below satisfactory. Less said about its performance in J&K the better. The BJP had increased its vote share there. Furthermore, Rahul Gandhi's speech in US, denigrating India, painted him badly. Seniors in party are sidelined. It has become a dynastic party.

Sravana Ramachandran, Chennai.

Historic education initiative in TG

THE Telangana government has created history in education by bringing out Young India Integrated Residential Schools all over the state, one in each legislative constituency, for quality education for poor among all castes and religions (THS 12/10). It's the most progressive idea to bring all students from class fourth to tenth of all castes, communities and religion under a single roof unlike in present setup with separate hostels to different castes and religions, which creates gap among students of different castes and religion. Revanth Reddy and his cabinet colleagues deserve compliments for their reforms in education.

Jayaprakash Reddy, Nalgonda

Brilliant cricket from England team

THE duo Root and Brook have anchored their phenomenally successful batting skills that paved for England's massive first innings lead that proved insurmountable for Pakistan, ultimately deciding the outcome of the match. Pakistan's inability to take 20 wickets and their second-innings batting collapse were cited as key factors in their loss. The root of the victory is Root's patience shown and his runs scored which doubled Pak's problems. The cricket world credits England bowlers for their brilliant efforts and the record-breaking partnership between Joe Root and Harry Brook for its stunning victory. The English bowlers on the other hand restricted Pakistan to 220 runs with their impressive bowling display and bowling performances including debutant Carse and Leach are notable.

Raju Kolluru, Kakinda.

Scrapping old vehicles a good policy

THE Telangana government has announced a commendable Voluntary Vehicle Fleet Modernisation Policy (VVMF). This policy aims to phase out 'end-of-life vehicles', and under the programme, owners who scrap cars older than 15 years will receive a tax break when purchasing a new vehicle in the same category. The initiative has also garnered support from major automobile companies reflecting a collaborative effort to improve both the environment and public welfare. Scrapping old vehicles, which are significant contributors to dust particles and hazardous pollutants, will greatly reduce air pollution, promote cleaner air, lower carbon emissions, and enhance road safety.

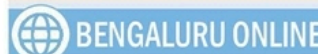
Snikitha Nadupalli, Hyderabad

Voters' verdict in Haryana is perplexing

HARYANA, the farmer's agitation for the repeal of the three contentious farm laws and legal safeguards for Minimum Support Price, the protest of female wrestlers in Delhi demanding the arrest of a BJP MP accused of molestation, and the perceived flaws in the Agniveer scheme, combined with strong anti-incumbency, a dire unemployment situation and the soaring prices of essential commodities seemed to jeopardise the ruling party's electoral prospect. Despite the challenges, the BJP won, notching up even more seats. Perhaps, elements such as caste, class, Khaps, virulent Hindutva and anti-Muslim rhetoric eclipsed other considerations.

Haridasan Rajan, Kozhikode

thehansreader@gmail.com



Two accused released on bail given warm reception

VIJAYAPURA: Pro Hindu organisations extended warm welcome to accused in murder of noted Kannada writer Gauri Lankesh on Saturday on their arrival to native village. The Bangalore Sessions Court has granted conditional bail to two accused in the high-profile 2017 murder case of journalist and activist Gauri Lankesh. The case, which has been ongoing for over six years, saw a total of 25 arrests, including Parasuram Waghmore and Manohar Yadav from Vijayapura. Both men, who were part of the group accused of being involved in the murder, have now returned home after their release on bail, sparking a controversial reception by local pro-Hindu organisations. The murder of Gauri Lankesh on September 5, 2017, sent shockwaves across the nation. Lankesh was a vocal critic of right-wing extremism and her assassination drew widespread condemnation. The murder took place in Bengaluru during the tenure of the Congress government led by then Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, who ordered the formation of a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to investigate the case.

Read more at <https://epaper.thehansindia.com>

REJUVENATING AGROFORESTRY

NEED OF HOUR: RIGHT INTERVENTIONS

P MALLIKHARJUNA RAO

Agroforestry comes to the forefront of discussions with the release of a working paper titled 'Agroforestry: Missing Trees for the Forest' released by the Economic Advisory Council to the PM in the last week of September. Agroforestry is the practice of intentionally combining trees and shrubs with agriculture and animal farming to create environmental, economic, and social benefits. It has been practiced for centuries in the United States and around the world. At present, agroforestry covers around 8.65% of India's geographical area, spread over about 28.4 million ha, while 16.96% of the area is still categorised as wasteland.

Some valuable recommendations in the paper such as the concept of tree ownership in place of land ownership, use of modern technologies and single window clearance are certain to create positive impact on the agroforestry sector. However, the conservation-oriented forestry and regulatory regime as squarely responsible for limiting agro forestry growth and keeping country import-dependent is not backed by relevant facts and proper evidence. As the recommendations made in this regard do not capture the concerns of various stakeholders other than requirements of the industries, it becomes necessary for wider consultations before they take a shape of an approved policy of the government.

Misconceptions about conservation first approach: The document is premised on a basic tenet that there is tremendous potential for agroforestry growth and the same could not be realised due to stringent regulations

and conservation-led forestry. The coverage of about 28 million hectares of tree crops, which is 17% of the global average as against the cropped area of 43% forms the basis for showing under-utilization of potential. The convenient example masks a stunning fact that the per capita agricultural land in our country is far less, that is one-fourth of the global average, thus allowing no digression from placing food production as the top-most priority and providing no room for expansion of agroforestry beyond certain limit. It is a misleading, if someone states that National Forest Policy (NFP), 1988 is aimed at increase of forest and tree cover and restricting to felling of trees outside the forests without the forest department approval. There is not any mention about such legal restrictions in the policy document and they were in existence much earlier to it.

The primary focus of the 1988 policy was to relinquish pro-industry approach and commercial orientation to give way to conservation first approach and sustainable forest management method aiming at environmental stability, ecological security and fulfilment of basic needs of local communities. The policy prescribes discontinuation of forest raw material supplies to industries at concessional rates and compels the industries to meet raw material requirements from alternative sources like captive plantations and/or agricultural lands by forging links with farmers to grow required tree crops. Had this policy not been in place, such a tremendous growth of agro forestry with farmer-industry collaboration (3.9 million hectares of Eucalyptus alone) could not have been possible. But wood-based industries



The concerns and needs of 5 million farmers associated with agroforestry (FAO, 2021), traditional wood-based artisans and forest-dependent communities who constitute the primary stakeholder group should take precedence over the demands of industries while working out policy recommendations pertaining to agro forestry. The demands of the farmers include robust mechanism to prevent cartelisation of industries in price determination, introducing price guarantee/minimum support price, strict enforcement of forest laws to arrest illicit leakage of material from forests so as to maintain price stability

will obviously have issues with this policy as it had put an end to concessional raw material supplies from forest in order to give preference to the needs of the local communities and poor.

The Supreme Court judgement (1996) pertains to imposing restrictions on unregulated felling of trees in notified forests and other non-notified forests with natural growth having ecological significance. This judgement has nothing to do with manmade plantations including agroforestry farms. These two important steps have not only acted as saviours of the environment and natural heritage for greater good of the people but also stimulated the growth of agro forestry by way of reducing competition from supply side on one hand and increasing the demand for raw materials on the other. Any measures to undo the results of these two landmark initiatives are not only regressive but also counter-productive to agro forestry growth.

Long term native tree crops for agro forestry - relevance: In order to justify deregulation of Teak

and other high valued native trees some interesting grounds are shown. These grounds do not stand to reason. First, nativity and the abundance in natural forests need not necessarily favour cultivation by the farmers as the suitability of a species is determined on the basis of various factors such as fast growth, high yields, marketing demand and financial viability. This is the reason why some tree species like Eucalyptus, Poplars, Subabul, Casuarina and other occupy a dominant place in agro forestry though they are not indigenous to the country. It is misleading to say that high price of teak as compared to Eucalyptus for the same unit can result more income to the farmers as both have different maturity periods and Mean Annual Increment (MAI) growth values. Third, the statement that Teak provides an opportunity to push our country from being import-dependent to being an export leader can gain validity only if one can explain as to how the future (anticipated) production that will be after a long period of time can address the present problem of

imports.

If Teak cultivation starts now, the yield of low to medium value timber can be expected after 25 to 35 years (For high value it is more than 50 years), provided good inputs and cultural practices are followed. Given, a case study showing the failure of investment based Teak plantations in the past, a cautious approach on promoting teak plantations in private farms especially in the lands of small and marginal farmers becomes necessary. During 1990s around 3,600 plantation companies (Ayer, 1988) promoted the schemes of planting teak and other valuable long term tree species by mobilising investments from public with an assurance to provide handsome returns from the timber harvested after 20 years. These schemes resulted neither in providing the promised returns to investors nor made a positive socio-economic impact on the rural poor and rural economy (Baloni, 2000).

Past experience of liberalisation the regulations - a need for study: The report cites the case of Bamboo which was liberalised from the regulations in 2017 with a principle to promote its production and curb illegal felling as an example to justify similar action for the species like Teak. It would be useful to launch a detailed study to find out the reasons for resulting into not a substantial increase in cultivation and production of Bamboo in farm lands even after seven years and leading to sharp decrease in Bamboo bearing forests to the extent of 10,594 sq Kms from 2019 to 2021 (IFSR, 2021) before suggesting such measures to other species. It is needless to say that Teak with its long growth cycle will have more challenges as compared to

Bamboo for attaining success.

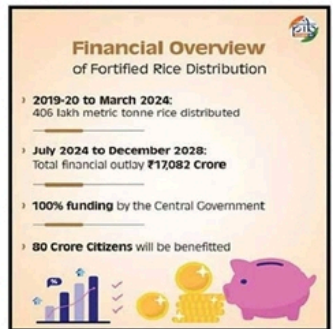
Holistic approach - need of the hour: The concerns and needs of 5 million farmers associated with agroforestry (FAO, 2021), traditional wood-based artisans and forest-dependent communities who constitute the primary stakeholder group should take precedence over the demands of industries while working out policy recommendations pertaining to agro forestry. The demands of the farmers include robust mechanism to prevent cartelisation of industries in price determination, introducing price guarantee/minimum support price, strict enforcement of forest laws to arrest illicit leakage of material from forests so as to maintain price stability (Agricultural Marketing Department, 2016).

If there are genuine problems with regard to regulatory regime, certainly there will be ways to address them without harming the long term interests of the environment. There is a great hope that the Authors, who have good reputation in their fields, will exercise their wisdom and revisit the proposal, capture the concerns of all the primary stakeholders and make the recommendations complete, inclusive and holistic one. Let us not forget that saving of natural forests is of paramount importance for the very survival and wellbeing of the present and future generations. Livelihood security of the forest dependent communities of 400 million people (TERI, 2015) and for averting catastrophic events like recent Waynad disaster.

(Writer is Former Head of Forest Force, Andhra Pradesh; views expressed are personal)

Free Fortified Rice for a Healthier India

“There was a time when India's food security was a global concern, today India is providing solutions for global food and nutrition security” - Prime Minister Narendra Modi. During India's 75th Independence Day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphasised the need to combat malnutrition, underscoring that every citizen, especially the underprivileged, deserves access to nutritious food for a healthier, stronger India. In line with this vision, committed to ensuring the holistic nutritional well-being of the people, the Union Cabinet recently gave its approval to distribute fortified rice under all government schemes. It marks a significant milestone in realizing the Prime Minister's vision for a malnutrition-free India. The Cabinet has taken a pivotal decision to extend the universal supply of fortified rice under all government welfare schemes, including the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMG-KAY), from July 2024 until December 2028. It approved the implementation of the Rice Fortification Initiative under the various schemes of



the government as a central sector initiative to be 100% funded by the Government of India. The existing mechanism of meeting the cost towards the supply of fortified rice as a part of PMG-KAY (Food Subsidy) under the already approved allocation of ₹11,79,859 crore of the PMG-KAY Scheme has been given go-ahead. This initiative aims to provide vulnerable populations with enhanced nutri-

tion by distributing fortified rice enriched with essential micronutrients such as iron, folic acid, and vitamin B12. The distribution will follow the standards set by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI). According to the World Health Organization's meta-analysis, rice fortification can reduce the risk of iron deficiency by 38%. With an estimated annual outlay of Rs 2,565 crore, this initiative



has the potential to avert 16.6 million Disability-Adjusted Life Years (DALYs) per year, resulting in healthcare savings equivalent to Rs 49,800 crore in GDP terms.

Since the launch of the rice fortification pilot scheme in 15 states in 2020, the programme has seen significant progress. Between 2019-20 and March 31, 2024, approximately 406 lakh metric tonnes of fortified rice were distributed through the PDS, enhancing the nutritional intake of millions across the country.

In February 2016, the MoWCD (Ministry of Women and Child Development) highlighted rice fortification to combat malnutrition and anaemia, focusing on children, pregnant women, and lactating mothers, with involvement from key stake-

holders like Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), Food Corporation of India (FCI), National Institute of Nutrition (NIN), Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), and the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI). A task force by the Ministry recommended mandatory rice fortification in government programs via FCI, with phased implementation in May 2016.

In March 2024, 100% coverage of the distribution of fortified rice has been achieved, and custom-milled rice has been replaced with fortified rice under all government schemes. Custom-milled rice has been replaced with fortified rice in every scheme of the Government and 100% coverage of distribution of fortified rice has

been achieved by March, 2024. Fortification is the process of enriching food with essential micronutrients, such as vitamins and minerals, to improve its nutritional value. Food fortification has been used globally as a safe and effective measure to address anaemia and micronutrient malnutrition in the vulnerable population. According to the 2019 Copenhagen Consensus, food fortification is one of the top three priorities for developing nations and plays a vital role in combating malnutrition. In India, fortification has proven successful in the past. For instance, iodized salt has significantly reduced iodine deficiency and diseases like goitre. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) conducted between 2019 and 2021, anaemia remains a prevalent issue in India. In addition to iron deficiency, other vitamin-mineral deficiencies such as Vitamin B12 and Folic acid continue to co-exist and affect the health and productivity of the population. To address these challenges, the government has undertaken significant steps, including the distribution of fortified rice. Why rice? Because in India, rice is a staple for 65% of the population.

Issues in the treatment of 'rare diseases', and what the govt can do

SOHINI GHOSH
NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 13

THE DELHI High Court last week issued directions aimed at improving the availability of so-called "orphan drugs", which are medications used to treat "rare diseases" — defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a debilitating, lifelong condition that affects 1 or fewer people in 1,000.

Around 55 medical conditions — including Gaucher's disease, Lysosomal Storage Disorders (LSDs), and certain forms of muscular dystrophy — are classified as rare diseases in India. The National Registry for Rare and Other Inherited Disorders (NRROID) started by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has the records of 14,472 rare disease patients in the country.

Therapies are available for less than 5% of

rare diseases, leading to less than 1 in 10 patients receiving disease-specific care. Existing treatments are often very expensive. While the Centre provides financial assistance to various Centres of Excellence (CoE) for treatment, stakeholders have gone to court to highlight challenges in accessing funds.

Categories of rare diseases

In India, rare diseases are categorised into three groups based on the nature and complexity of available treatment options.

Group 1 includes diseases that can be treated with a one-time curative procedure.

Group 2 diseases require long-term or life-long treatment which are relatively less costly and have shown documented benefits, but patients need regular check-ups.

Group 3 diseases are those for which effective treatments are available, but they are expensive and must often continue lifelong.

There are challenges in selecting the right beneficiaries for these treatments.

Current funding policy

In 2021, the National Policy for Rare Diseases (NPRD) was launched, under which financial assistance up to Rs 50 lakh is provided to patients receiving treatment at an identified CoE. The CoEs include AIMS in Delhi, PGIMER in Chandigarh and the Institute of Postgraduate Medical Education and Research at Kolkata's SSKM Hospital.

The following year, the Health Ministry opened a Digital Portal for Crowdfunding & Voluntary Donations with information about patients and their rare diseases, the estimated cost of treatment, and bank details of the CoEs. Donors can choose the CoE and patient treatment they wish to support. Each CoE also has

its own Rare Disease Fund, which is used with approval from its governing authority.

In August 2024, the government told Parliament that financial assistance of Rs 24 crore had been released to CoEs for treating rare disease patients until August in the current financial year. Before that, Rs 3.15 crore, Rs 34.99 crore, and Rs 74 crore were released in 2021-22, 2022-23, and 2023-24 respectively. Further, Rs 35 crore has been released for purchasing equipment to improve patient care services.

Cost of orphan drugs

Many medicines and therapies for rare diseases are patented, which makes them very expensive. The market for these drugs is small and the development costs are high, so pharmaceutical companies often don't find it profitable to produce them, pushing up prices.

■ Developing and manufacturing these drugs in India could help bring down prices, but the government will have to offer incentives such as tax breaks to companies.

■ Import of rare disease medicines by patients does not attract customs duty, but companies that bring these drugs to India still pay 11% customs duty and 12% GST. Delhi High Court has now set a deadline of 30 days to process the necessary exemptions for these medicines under the customs, GST, and Income Tax laws.

■ On January 3, 2019, the Department of Pharmaceuticals under the Union Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilisers issued an order freeing orphan drugs from price controls. The High Court expressed concern over this exemption, saying "the position cannot continue in this manner".

■ If treatments or medicines for rare diseases are not available, the government can,

under the Patents Act of 1970, allow a third party to manufacture them against payment of a royalty to the patent holder. The government can also acquire patents to ensure the availability of medicines if the patent holder does not provide them. The court said there was not enough research and development in the field of rare diseases, and stressed that negotiating with pharmaceuticals to boost domestic efforts could help lower costs of treatment.

■ Delays and red tape in decision making is another problem. The National Rare Diseases Committee meeting in June 2023 discussed the delay in getting approval from the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) for US-based Sangre Therapeutics to sell its medicines in India. AIMS and other CoEs were importing the drugs through distributors for patients, and the delay was impacting treatment.

EXPLAINED GLOBAL

WHAT ARE 'DRAGON DRONES', BEING USED IN RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR?

A DEADLY new weapon has taken to the skies in the Russia-Ukraine war. Both sides have posted visuals of drones appearing to rain down fire — earning this weapon the moniker of 'dragon drone'.

What these drones are spewing, however, is a molten metal that burns at 2,427 degree Celsius.

What are 'dragon drones'?

Dragon drones essentially release a substance called thermite — a mixture of aluminium and iron oxide — which was developed a century ago to weld railroad tracks.

When ignited (usually with the help of an electrical fuse), thermite triggers a self-sustaining reaction that is quite difficult to extinguish. It can burn through almost anything, from clothes to trees to military-grade vehicles. It can even burn underwater. On humans, it causes severe, possibly fatal, burns and bone damage.

"Combining thermite with high-precision drones that can bypass traditional defences makes dragon drones 'highly effective' and 'dangerous'," Al Jazeera quoted the United Kingdom-based anti-war advocacy organisation Action on Armed Violence (AOAV) as saying.

Dragon drones are believed to have been first deployed in the Russia-Ukraine war around September. According to a report by *The New York Times*, Ukrainian forces used them to "ignite the vegetation that Russian troops use for cover and burn it out, exposing them and their equipment to direct attack." Soon, the Russians too began to produce and deploy their own dragon drones.

Has thermite been used in weapons before?

Yes. Thermite was used in both world wars. During World War I, German zeppelins dropped thermite-laden bombs which were considered an innovation at that time.

By World War II, thermite-laden incendiary explosives became a part and



Ukrainians soldiers testing a drone in May 2024. NYT

parcel of both the Allies and Axis forces aerial bombing campaigns. According to some estimates, the Allies dropped some 30 million 4-pound thermite bombs on Germany and another 10 million on Japan during World War II. Thermite hand grenades were also used during the war to disable artillery pieces, without an explosion.

In modern conflict, thermite is most often used by espionage agents, or special operations teams due to its ability to burn intensely but without a bang.

Is it legal to use thermite in weapons?

The use of thermite in war is not prohibited under international law. However, the use of such incendiary weapons against civilian targets is barred under the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons — the Cold War-era guideline issued under the auspices of the United Nations.

"The problem with thermite is that it is rather indiscriminate," Marina Miron, a military expert from King's College London, told DW. "Therefore, while it is not banned per se, Protocol III of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons actually limits its use to strictly military targets, given the fact that this munition can produce severe burns and respiratory injuries."

SADAF MODAK MUMBAI, OCTOBER 13

SEVEN MONTHS after he was cleared of all charges of alleged Maoist links and released from jail after nearly a decade, former Delhi University professor G N Saibaba passed away on Saturday in a Hyderabad hospital, where he was undergoing treatment.

The 57-year-old had a 90 percent disability due to a polio infection contracted during his childhood, leaving him paralysed from the waist down. Upon his release from Nagpur jail on March 7, he spoke about the health complications he faced while incarcerated. During that period, Saibaba's family and lawyers often raised concerns and made applications in court about his deteriorating health and the delays in treatment.

The case and conviction

On September 12, 2013, a team of Maharashtra police raided Saibaba's residence in Delhi, where he was an assistant professor at Ram Lal Anand College. Police arrested him on May 9, 2014, claiming he was an active member of the banned organisation Communist Party of India (Maoist) (CPI-M). Five others were arrested as well.

The police claimed they were all CPI-M members who hatched a criminal conspiracy to wage war against the Government of India through unlawful activities by use of violence. It alleged that Saibaba was found to possess documents and electronic gadgets, containing Maoist literature, correspondence between members, and video clips of their meetings.

On March 7, 2017, Saibaba and five others were found guilty by the sessions court under various charges, including the anti-terror law Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). He was sentenced to life imprisonment.

The court said that though the wheelchair-bound Saibaba was disabled, there was no ground to show him leniency as he was "mentally fit" and a "think tank and high-profile leader" of CPI-M. His lawyers argued that the entire trial was vitiated, as the mandatory sanction necessary to prosecute an accused under UAPA was only granted after trial began. However, the court did not consider this valid. An appeal was then filed before the Bombay High Court.

The first acquittal

On October 14, 2022, Saibaba and his co-accused were cleared of all charges by the Nagpur bench of the Bombay High Court.



G.N. Saibaba, 57, was an assistant professor at Delhi University. Aihitnav Sahajfle

The court noted various faults in the procedure followed by the investigating agency concerning the grant of sanction under UAPA. It held that the proceedings before the trial court were "null and void", as there was no valid sanction. Even as the police argued that the invalidity or absence of the sanction is a "curable defect", the court held that every legislatively provided safeguard, however minuscule, must be "zealously protected".

The court held that the sanction to prosecute Saibaba was received on April 6, 2015. By this time, the court had already framed charges against the accused and examined the first witness. Section 45(1) of UAPA states that no court shall take cognizance of any offence under UAPA without the previous sanction of the central or state government or any officer authorised by it.

The Act also states that an authority appointed by the government shall make an independent review of the evidence, before recommending if a sanction can be granted. The high court dealt in detail with the legislature's intent in inserting the requirement of a sanction, and the necessity of an inde-

pendent review.

"The siren song that the end justifies the means, and that the procedural safeguards are subservient to the overwhelming need to ensure that the accused is prosecuted and punished, must be muzzled by the voice of Rule of Law," the division bench of Justices Rohit Deo and Anil Pansare said. The court said it was also conscious of the death of one accused person, named Pandu Narote, during the pendency of the appeal while in judicial custody in 2022, after he contracted swine flu. His appeal was also allowed.

Long wait for release

After the high court order was pronounced on October 14, 2022, on a Friday morning, the Maharashtra government immediately moved an urgent appeal before the Supreme Court by that evening, mentioned by the Solicitor General of India. By then, family members of those cleared of the charges, including Saibaba, had begun with the release formalities at Nagpur jail.

Arrangements for an unprecedented special sitting were made and the matter was

listed on Saturday, a non-working day. A bench comprising Justice M R Shah and Justice Bela Trivedi suspended the high court order, stating that the decision to clear the accused on the grounds of invalid sanction needed to be considered in detail.

Saibaba's lawyers argued that even as the court suspended the order, it could have granted him bail pending proceedings, considering his medical condition. However, the court refused.

Six months later, on April 19, 2023, the Supreme Court sent back the case to the high court to consider all issues raised in the appeal and decide the case on merits. The state had argued that the high court did not consider merits in its previous order.

The second acquittal

Nearly a year later, the high court again acquitted Saibaba and others on March 5, 2024, observing that holding a trial under UAPA without adhering to procedural requirements would amount to a "failure to justice".

While holding the sanction as invalid, the court said that the independent authority, the Directorate of Prosecution, had only given a "half-page communication" to justify the recommendation to grant sanction. On Saibaba, it said, "In sum and substance, the prosecution against No.6 G.N. Saibaba for want of valid sanction is also totally vitiated".

The court also questioned the credibility of his house being searched. It noted that the police chose an illiterate person to be an independent "panch" — a witness mandated to be present during search procedures — though many "highly educated witnesses" would have been available. His residence being on a university campus. Further, the police had not proved any conspiracy to commit a terrorist act. He was then released.

Pleas on health grounds

As early as a year after his arrest, Saibaba's lawyers submitted that he had faced health complications, including in his kidney and gallbladder. He was granted temporary bail by the High Court in June 2015 on medical grounds, saying that if not released, there was a chance that his life would be at risk. In December, he was directed to surrender himself to Nagpur jail.

In 2016, the SC granted bail again, considering his medical condition, and said that the state opposing his bail was "extremely unfair" as he had never misused his bail previously. Following his conviction under UAPA, Saibaba was arrested again.

YOUR GO-TO INSTITUTE FOR GENERAL STUDIES PREPARATION

<p>Prizes can Make</p> <p>General Studies Comprehensive Programme</p> <p>12 Months + 6 Months MSP</p> <p>21ST NOVEMBER 2024</p>	<p>Prizes can Make</p> <p>General Studies Pedigree Comprehensive Programme</p> <p>2 Years + 6 Months MSP</p> <p>16TH NOVEMBER 2024</p>	<p>Membership</p> <p>StepUp Mentorship Programme 2025</p> <p>12 Months</p> <p>NOVEMBER 2024</p>
--	---	--

Available in Classroom and LIVE-Online Mode

080-6220-8330 www.vajiramandravi.com

Han Kang: Empathetic explore of historical trauma and personal loss

UTTARA RANGARAJAN
NEW YORK, OCTOBER 13

IN 2016, Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* became the first Korean language novel to win the Man Booker International Prize. A deeply ruminate book about the consequences of quiet but absolute resistance, *The Vegetarian* focuses on housewife Yeong-Hye and her decision to stop eating meat. Colonialism, patriarchy, violence and meat eating become intimately entangled as various family members — Yeong-Hye's controlling husband, her obsessive brother-in-law, and her overwhelmed sister — respond to Yeong-Hye's vegetarianism and her growing desire to become a plant.

If *The Vegetarian* marked Han's ascendency in the Anglophone sphere, then the Nobel Prize in Literature, awarded on October 10, conferred global recognition to her entire body of work. Han is also the first South Korean literature laureate. In a press release announcing the award, the

Royal Swedish Academy lauded Han "for her intense poetic prose that confronts historical traumas and exposes the fragility of human life".

Han was born in Gwangju in 1970 to a literary family. Her father is a celebrated novelist, and both her brothers are writers. In 1980 the family moved to Seoul and Han went on to study Korean Literature at Yonsei University. Though Han has been publishing since 1993, *The Vegetarian* — first published in 2007 — was her first novel to be translated into English.

Han's writing constitutes a diverse body of work

Human Acts (2014) explores the Gwangju massacre of 1980, when peaceful student demonstrations were violently suppressed by the Korean military. *The White Book* (2017) utilises visceral imagery and a fragmented structure to ponder the death of the narrator's newborn sister. In *Green Lessons* (translated into English in 2023), a woman who has lost the ability to

THE NOBEL PRIZES 2024

NOBEL PRIZE IN LITERATURE

ON MONDAY: THE SVERIGES RIKSBANK PRIZE IN ECONOMIC SCIENCES IN MEMORY OF ALFRED NOBEL, 2024

Han Kang at a press conference in Seoul, South Korea, in November 2023. Reuters

Yet, certain themes recur throughout Han's writing. Her novels focus on the subjective and personal experiences that arise from contexts of trauma, brutality and loss. Yeong-Hye's vegetarianism is a response

to the violent physicality of her world. In one scene her father, a veteran of the Vietnam War, reads her dietary choice as a challenge to the patriarchal control that he represents. Han has explained that she wrote the novel to ask if it was "possible for humans to live a perfectly innocent life in [a] violent world".

Human Acts meditates on the murder of 15-year-old Dong-ho by focusing each chapter on a different person impacted by his short life. Han frequently uses second person narration to immerse readers in the bleak and disoriented lives of her characters.

We Do Not Part anchors its exploration of historical trauma to the intertwined lives of three women, Kyung-ha, Inseon, and Inseon's late mother. Inseon's mother is traumatised by her memories of the Jeju massacre, and the novel unfolds how these experiences shape her relationship with her daughter. Across her work, Han depicts the intimacy and minutiae of human life in the wake of trauma.

Han is also a biographer of women's experiences

The White Book examines the poetry of life and death that surrounds pregnancy and childbirth. In gorgeous, evocative prose, Han explores the unsettling dimensions of mourning a sister whom the narrator never knew.

Han's women are quietly stubborn, they exert their questioning and agency in ways that might not register within western feminism. They tend to trouble patriarchal structures through acts of negation and withdrawal. In *Greek Lessons*, the unnamed narrator doesn't "like taking up space" and has "no wish to disseminate herself". In *The Vegetarian*, Yeong-Hye decides to separate herself from meat and eventually humanity, a choice that is met with violent reprisals from her husband, father, and brother-in-law.

The author is a PhD candidate in English at Fordham University, New York. She works on postcolonial South Asia.

THE IDEAS PAGE

The problem with free food

Regime of highly ineffective food and fertiliser subsidies must be reformed. Government needs to summon the courage to bite the bullet, ensure enough lead time to prepare for proper implementation



FROM PLATE TO PLOUGH
BY ASHOK GULATI

OCTOBER 16 IS observed as World Food Day every year by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). It is a reminder of the commitment made at the highest level to ensure food and nutritional security. The world has made tremendous progress in increasing food production by large-scale adoption of better seeds, more irrigation, and higher doses of fertilisers and pesticides. Farm machinery has become more efficient. All this could not have been done without increasing incentives to farmers — input subsidies, higher prices for their produce, or a mix of some of the two. On this day, many people who are committed to the cause of food and nutritional security, including scientists, technologists, economists and agri-business entrepreneurs, renew their vows to eliminate hunger and malnutrition. Globally, as per the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI report) of FAO, roughly 2.33 billion people still face moderate to severe food insecurity. This a challenge to those committed to providing food and nutritional security to all.

This year's theme of FAO's World Food Day is "Right to Foods for a Better Life and a Better Future". The "Right to Food" approach of the FAO encouraged the UPA government led by Manmohan Singh to pass the National Food Security Act (NFSA) in 2013. It was to cover roughly two-thirds of the Indian population in providing rice, wheat or coarse grains (5kg/person/month) at Rs 3/kg, Rs 2/kg, and Rs 1/kg, respectively. These prices could be revised upwards after three years of the Act, keeping in view the ballooning magnitude of food subsidy on account of this Act, and the overall finances of the government. At that time, the erstwhile Planning Commission had estimated the headcount poverty ratio was about 21 per cent. This figure was contested by some NGOs, and as a result, it was revised to about 29 per cent by the Rangarajan Committee. Even at this higher estimate of poverty, questions were raised by many economists, including this writer — I was part of that government — why such highly subsidised food should be available to two-thirds of the population.

The Atal Bihari Vajpayee government (1998-2004) reformed the food subsidy regime and made PDS a targeted scheme. Under that scheme, the *anyadya* (most vulnerable) people got free food, while those above that had to pay at least half the minimum support price (MSP) being paid to the farmer, and those above the poverty line had to pay 90 per cent of MSP. I still feel that was the most rational policy decision. "Right to Food" does not mean that everyone, or two-thirds of the population, get free food. The government's job is to make sure that food is easily available and access-



C R Sasikumar

sible. But distributing free food to more than 800 million people today is economically irrational, to say the least.

The current NDA government, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has used a different definition to measure poverty. The NITI Aayog's Multi-dimensional Poverty Index says that the poverty ratio has declined from 29.13 per cent in 2013-14 to 11.28 per cent in 2022-23. If this is truly the case — in fact, the government does not stop speaking in congratulatory terms about this achievement — why are we still distributing free food to more than 800 million people? Remember even a tiny ant also has to work a lot to get food, and you can see ants storing food, working in a long chain of cooperation. Why can't humans work and earn and have their basic food?

To me, as a policy analyst, if the government wants to give free food to even 15 per cent of the population, I have no problem. But above that, everyone must pay for food. Free food beyond this 15 per cent of the population is nothing else but a vote-catching tactic. This must be resisted by taxpayers. I am saying this because food subsidy is the largest subsidy in the Union budget. Along with fertiliser subsidy, it cuts down much more rational and productive investments in agri-food space, such as in agri-R&D, precision agriculture, micro-nutrients, women's education and sanitation. These investments are almost 10 times more effective in ensuring the food and nutritional security of our people than free food and highly subsidised fertilisers and power. Subsidies, when they are abundant and almost open-ended, become an instrument

To me, as a policy analyst, if the government wants to give free food to even 15 per cent of the population, I have no problem. But above that, everyone must pay for food. Free food beyond this 15 per cent of the population is nothing else but a vote-catching tactic. This must be resisted by taxpayers. I am saying this because food subsidy is the largest subsidy in the Union budget. Along with fertiliser subsidy, it cuts down much more rational and productive investments in agri-food space, such as in agri-R&D, precision agriculture, micro-nutrients, women's education and sanitation.

of corruption. ICRIER research shows that a substantial part (almost 25 to 30 per cent) of these two subsidies, food and fertilisers, never reaches the intended beneficiaries. If one looks at the inefficiency in the use of these two subsidies, and adds that to the leakages, the overall loss easily goes to 40 to 50 per cent of the total amount of resources being spent on them. This defeats the very purpose of "Right to Food".

Can this regime of highly ineffective food and fertiliser subsidies be reformed? The short answer is "yes". Provided the government summons the courage to bite the bullet and has enough lead time to prepare for proper implementation. The lead time is not many years, but just six to 12 months. A group of dedicated people is also needed who are committed to this cause of rationalisation.

Digitalisation of the agri-food system can come in very handy in chalking out a more rational and robust system that can help achieve the Zero Hunger goal of SDGs by 2030. In this process, one has to be beware of engaging roadside consulting companies who open their shops to make quick money and get contracts from the government through their friends in their bureaucracy. And, they are mushrooming in India.

If the Modi government can take up this challenge, it can make Indian agriculture more vibrant, climate resilient, and nutritious, helping to overcome the curse of malnutrition. Else, slowness mongering will go on without much change in the agri-food space.

Gulati is Distinguished Professor at ICRIER. Views are personal

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Mr Trump's chaotic term as president showed that he often means what he says. Certainly, voters should examine Ms Harris's record and rhetoric. But they should also take seriously the words expressed by her opponent."

— THE WASHINGTON POST

He never says die

Rafael Nadal gave his all to keep the ball, and the game, alive. His retirement leaves fans with a lifetime of priceless memories



SANDEEP DWIVEDI

RAFAEL NADAL ALWAYS kept his side of the bargain with the paying public. No one ever walked out of a stadium that Nadal had graced, feeling cheated. Statistically, he might be the second-best tennis player, but Rafa, without doubt, was the ultimate paissa-vasooli sports person.

Nadal's biggest contribution to tennis will be his undying commitment to get his racket behind every ball that was hit towards him, throughout his 25-year-long career. For him, nothing was too far or irremediable. He would stretch every sinew in his body to lunge at serves that were certain aces. He would scamper behind clear winners that most players would merely stand and watch.

Like some old childhood friends, he and the ball would constantly try to out-run each other. At times, the opponent across the net was utterly indignant, for Rafa's real rival was the two-ozone fuzzy yellow object. Even the GOAT Novak Djokovic, as part of his tactics, is known to drag his feet and slow down the game. But not Nadal. He would be trailing, fighting a losing battle, but he never toned down his intensity. There were no yawning periods of lull when Rafa was on court.

This mad obsession to chase every ball would take a toll on his body. Rafa would play in pain but never give up on his unrelenting pursuit of the tennis ball. That was his life's primary goal, the joy he got addicted to when he first took up tennis as a five-year-old in the Spanish island of Mallorca.

Nadal's game didn't have the effortlessness of a Roger Federer or the slyness of Djokovic. He wasn't even a moody artist like Stan Wawrinka. Nadal was an earnest trier who gave his all. He gave hope to the world's also-rans, busted the myth about champions born with unique gifts.

On the very first page of his autobiography, he talks about the one routine he follows to be an incessant opponent with the least unforged errors in modern tennis. "What I battle hardest to do in tennis is to quiet the voices in my head... and concentrate every atom of my being on the point I am playing."

That famous wishful forehand beautifully captures the concept of "every atom in the body working in tandem. To impart heavy top spin, the racket starts its path from way above the right shoulder, comes down well below the knee and rises again — this time like an angry wave. It is this important upward arc of the racket, with

wrists locked to generate power, that makes Nadal grunt as he tries to pipe up the energy stored in his strong core to brush the ball and send it in a frenzied spin. Be it the first stroke he hits in a match or the last, the grunt never stops. The effort he puts in isn't just visible, it's audible too.

His typhonic forehand makes orthopaedics wonder why the Spanish great's shoulder hasn't yet popped out of the socket and made his wrists break into pieces. It also forced Federer to have doubts about his famed single-handed backhand. Djokovic jokes that he dreads facing his son on court since he has started imitating the Nadal forehand.

But how does the nicest man on the circuit, the modest-to-a-fault star, the utterly sentimental friar who cried uncontrollably when Federer retired, turn into the fierce and unforgiving foe when on court? It's a magical transformation that those close to him have observed. Maybe, it's the sight of a tennis court that wakes up the little demon in him, who dutifully retires to bed when Nadal walks to the net to shake hands with the opponent.

His long-time coach Francis Roig gave the scary details about the changes that creep into Nadal when he is all but ready to enter the playing arena. "The simple action of wrapping his bandana is so frighteningly intense; his eyes, far away, seem to see nothing that's around him. Then, suddenly, he'll breathe deep and kick into life, pumping his legs up and down and then, as if oblivious to the fact that his rival is just a few paces away across the room, he'll let out a cry of 'Vamos! Vamos!'"

Age and injury didn't see Nadal play smart tennis — a euphemism for diluting his intensity, coming up with a little version of his forehand. He was also informed that he would have to manage pain for the rest of his life. But then, what is pain for those who are driven, like Nadal. Till he quit at 38, Nadal never hit an un-Nadal shot or gave up during a rally.

This year, while attempting his one final comeback after sitting out most of the 2023 season, he would be sprinting frantically around the court like always. But it was sad to see the helpless face when he would slide towards the ball with the same old gusto but prove to be slow. His old friend, the ball, was winning most races now.

After the two defeats to Zverev and Djokovic, the crowd would try and cheer him up, but Nadal would have an apologetic expression on his face. He seemed to be saying sorry to the stands, almost guilty of not giving the fans their money's worth.

During his final days as a pro, Nadal had ceased to be the paissa-vasooli player he once was? Never. For the few dollars spent on stadium tickets or OTT subscription, Nadal gave a lifetime of priceless memories. He gave it all to keep the ball, and the game, alive.

sandeep.dwivedi@expressindia.com



BALBIR PUNJ

THE INDIAN EXPRESS editorial ("The long arm, October 4) contradicts itself. It accuses the Income Tax department of "steering far beyond [its] remit." But aren't the NGOs it seeks to defend, guilty of the same? Haven't many of them diverted funds from abroad for causes without any connection to their declared objectives?

The editorial says the IT department is guilty of constricting spaces "for free expression and civil society action in a democracy." The boot is on the other foot. Many NGOs, fuelled by foreign funds, hijack an elected government's mandate and ruin various projects, some of which may have been a part of their manifesto. Isn't this a subversion of the democratic process?

The charge of weaponising "the rule book's fine print against the targeted NGOs" reeks of entitlement. Rules, mandated by law, have to be followed. The suggestion that "NGOs must be allowed to do their work without constantly looking over their shoulders" implies that foreign-funded NGOs are beyond scrutiny. Why? Is it because the government should have different yardsticks while dealing with foreign-funded NGOs and the rest?

Various leaders have raised red flags against this impending danger across the political spectrum. At the 18th Congress of his party in 2005, CPM leader Prakash Karat said, "While foreign funding to governments is one category, another category is foreign funding to voluntary organisations or what is known as Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). Our party has consistently warned that a large amount of foreign funds are coming in to fi-

Let's follow the money

Action against NGOs with suspect funds and motives is lawful and justified

nance a host of activities of NGOs. Such funds from Western agencies are meant to de-politicise the people and to keep them away from the organised left."

In 1984, in an article, Karat stated, "All organisations receiving foreign funds are automatically suspect and must be screened to verify their bona fides."

Are the IT Department charges against such organisations baseless and a part of "free-speech-painting and broad-brush conspiracy-mongering?"

The debilitating impact of such deep-rooted conspiracies on India's development was brought out by Forbes (2019) in a study titled "Why the Chinese Economy Flew and India's Just Grew". It pointed out that the GDP per capita for China and India in 1985 was almost the same, \$293. China's GDP per capita is now above \$13,000, while India's is just over \$2,700. The Chinese economy in 2024 is valued at \$18.5 trillion, nearly five times India's GDP at current prices of almost \$4 trillion.

Why such a yawning gap between the two neighbours? Here is a case study of constructing two dams — one in China and another in India — possibly explaining how China leaptfrogged India. China built the Three Gorges Dam, the world's largest hydroelectric work, in 15 years. A much smaller Sardar Sarovar dam in India took 56 years to complete. However, the half-cent-

ury-long completion period helped many enterprising individuals.

In February 2012, speaking to a science magazine, the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said, "You know, for example, what is happening in Kudankulam. The atomic energy programme has got into difficulties because these NGOs, mostly I think based in the United States, don't appreciate the need for our country to increase the energy supply." Why should America-based NGOs take interest and fund protests against a project based in faraway India?

Recently, when the Modi government sought the Supreme Court's (SC) approval to widen the roads up to 10 metres along the China border (as a part of the Char Dham Highway project), NGO Citizens for Green Dood approached the National Green Tribunal in 2018 and then the SC, against the project.

When the central government presented a sealed envelope to the Supreme Court detailing the extensive construction activities being carried out by China across the border, the court approved the road widening in the Char Dham project and observed, "This Court, in its exercise of judicial review, cannot second-guess the infrastructural needs of the Armed Forces..."

While the Vizinjam International Seaport in Thiruvananthapuram was coming up, there were massive protests by the

local fishermen. On August 23, 2022, Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan told the state Assembly, "The protest that is happening now cannot be seen as a protest by local fishfolk. The protest in some regions looks like it is orchestrated".

Agitations against Sardar Sarovar Dam in Gujarat, opposition to setting up nuclear reactors in Kudankulam, the stir that brought copper-producing Sterlite plant in Tamil Nadu to a halt, the efforts to stop the construction of a deep-water seaport in Kerala, or of the Char Dham Road project in Uttarakhand, have one thing in common — the protests are not spontaneous but, as Pinarayi Vijayan said, "orchestrated". This list of projects targeted by the foreign-funded NGOs isn't exhaustive.

The Central Statistical Institute of India reports that the country has over 30 lakh NGOs — twice the number of schools! The Indian school education system, one of the largest in the world, has 14.89 lakh schools. As of October 14, 2023, there were 16,686 NGOs with active Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) registration in India. NGOs nationwide received foreign contributions worth Rs 88,882 crore between 2017-18 and 2021-22.

Why are foreigners pumping so much money into the Indian political and social life? Never forget the adage: There is no such thing as a free lunch.

Modern wars are not confined to borders. Neo-colonialism operates through proxies. While watching for enemies, don't miss the ones within.

The writer is a former Chairman of the Indian Institute of Mass Communications (IIMC)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

END OF AN ERA

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "Rafael Nadal" (IE, October 12). Rafael Nadal's place in history is assured with 22 grand slams to his name, including 14 French Open titles and 92 tournament wins worldwide. He remained world No. 1 for 209 weeks and within the world's top 10 for a record 912 consecutive weeks, all testaments to his ability. The Nadal, Federer and Djokovic trio took tennis to another level, sharing 66 grand slams. Nadal's exit marks the end of a golden era. He will be remembered for his do-or-die spirit at every point, resolve, humility, and the heart he poured into every match.

Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

A FITTING HONOUR

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "A Nobel lesson" (IE, October 12). The Norwegian Nobel Committee has awarded the Peace Prize to the Japanese grassroots organisation, Nihon Hidankyo, for its efforts to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons and for demonstrating through witness testimonies why nuclear weapons must never be used again. The spectre of Hiroshima and Nagasaki still looms over humanity. This makes the advocacy Nihon Hidankyo is doing invaluable. 2025 will mark 80 years since the two American atomic bombs killed an estimated 120,000 inhabitants in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. No nuclear weapon has been used in war in nearly 80 years.

S S Paul, Nadia

INNOVATION IS KEY

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "The growth drivers" (IE, October 12).

Farmers are the backbone of the Indian economy. However, their adaptability to modern techniques lags far behind. Farming is no longer considered a viable career option. This means that youngsters opt for an education in a different field and then fall back on farming as an easy alternative. Considering that farmers get only around 30 per cent of the market value of their produce, finance and diversification should get the spotlight. Income through crops should be supplemented with subsidiary sources such as dairy farming and poultry — a source of regular income as against twice a year for crops. Overall, big landowners should experiment with crop diversification and help inspire others.

Ramanpreet, via email

IN BAD TASTE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "An own goal" (IE, October 11). In the eyes of the voters of Delhi, this may not be an own goal. People are aware that the BJP's government at the Centre has been meddling in the governance of a duly elected Delhi government. So much so that few concessions and freedoms concerning the administration of Delhi granted by the Supreme Court are almost nullified by central law. It is the LG's office, not the Chief Minister's, which makes crucial decisions for the area. The allegations of over-expenditure and corruption related to the renovation of the CM's residence are being probed. Asking a legitimate CDMO to vacate the predecessor's residence on technical grounds within two days of possession is in bad taste. The process could have been completed without eviction.

L R Murmu, New Delhi

The IndianEXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

LIFE AND DEATH

GN Saibaba's death is a reminder of the injustice when hard laws are invoked indiscriminately, process becomes punishment

ALL HUMANS imagine hell. From Dante to Salman Rushdie, from European to Egyptian civilisations, everyone has their own idea of hell. The Andra cell was just that," G N Saibaba recollected in an interview to this newspaper, a few weeks after he was acquitted by the Nagpur Bench of the Bombay High Court in March. The Court's two-judge bench had described the former Delhi University academic's incarceration as a "failure of the justice system". These words resonate poignantly, after Saibaba died on Saturday due to complications following a surgery for gallbladder stones, aged 57. His untimely death should bring a sobering moment for the state which, as the HC pointed out, did "not follow due procedures" in charging the English lecturer under stringent UAPA provisions. It should haunt the criminal justice system, which heaped indignity on the wheelchair-bound academic by detaining him in a cramped egg-shaped concrete enclosure meant for terrorists and high-security convicts. Saibaba's demise should occasion urgent rethinking and reflection in the judicial system. For, though the HC verdict was a welcome affirmation of the rule of law in a constitutional system, it came after 10 long years. In this period, the Nagpur Bench had rejected several bail pleas by Saibaba's lawyers, including those on health grounds.

Saibaba was arrested in May 2014 and charged by the Maharashtra government with alleged Maoist links. He was convicted by a trial court, three years later. However, in October 2022, a two-judge bench of the Mumbai High Court set aside the order on the ground that the state did not take proper sanction before arresting the academic. Barely a few hours after the verdict, however, the government sought a stay. The SC, in a rare and unusual decision, constituted a Special Bench, which sat on a Saturday morning and suspended the Bombay HC ruling. Six months later, in April 2023, another SC Bench sent the case back to the Mumbai HC. In March, the HC not only reiterated its previous ruling, it also came down heavily on the state for failing to back its charges with sound evidence. The Maharashtra government had argued that under UAPA, the burden of proof shifts to the accused if "certain articles such as explosives are found at the site of the offence". But in court, it produced only electronic documents and a few pamphlets. In a resounding rejection of the state's case, the court ruled that merely "downloading material about the philosophy of Naxalism" or even "sympathising" with the ideology should not invite arrest under UAPA. It dismissed the allegations as "vague".

As Saibaba told this paper, he "lost much more than the 10 years" he spent in jail. He talked of the pain of not meeting his mother before she passed away. Delhi University's Ram Lal Anand College terminated his services and Saibaba's medical complications became more severe. Today, when Saibaba is no more, the judiciary would be failing its constitutional role if it doesn't find ways to correct a system in which hard laws are invoked indiscriminately and, all too frequently, justice is denied through delay. It is, yes, a matter of the citizen's life and death.

TURNING TO THE EAST

Amid escalating global conflicts, ASEAN faces external and internal challenges. There is a new edge to Delhi's regional role

THE ANNUAL MEETINGS of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), including partner countries like India, as well as the East Asia Summit, took place last week in Laos. These discussions occurred amid escalating conflicts in Europe and the Middle East and rising military tensions in Asia. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, attending his 11th consecutive session at the ASEAN-driven summits, reaffirmed India's call for military restraint and political reason, reminding world leaders that solutions to global challenges cannot be found on the battlefield. Modi's visit also marked two significant milestones: The 30th anniversary of India's "Look East" policy (1994) and the 10th anniversary of his refined "Act East" policy (2014). The context in Asia today, however, is vastly different. In the late 1990s, a sense of great power cooperation and the rise of economic globalisation created favourable conditions for regional institution-building and economic integration under ASEAN's leadership. This environment also allowed for India's reintegration with the region.

Today, however, great powers are increasingly at odds, and their rivalry is slowing — if not reversing — the trends toward globalisation. China's regional assertiveness, especially regarding maritime disputes in the South China Sea, has left ASEAN struggling to manage Beijing's growing military dominance. The region's fear of China has made it hesitant to fully capitalise on the US's determination to counter Beijing. Meanwhile, economic de-globalisation is posing new challenges for ASEAN, which has long benefited from US-China commercial cooperation. Compounding these external pressures, ASEAN faces significant internal challenges. The ongoing breakdown of internal order in Myanmar and its military junta's refusal to engage in constructive dialogue have put the organisation in a difficult position.

Where does this leave India in relation to ASEAN? Delhi's relative standing in the region has risen thanks to its sustained economic growth and growing military capabilities. India's active membership of the Quad, with Australia, Japan and the US, has given a new edge to India's regional role. Delhi kept a low profile on regional security issues in the past but is now taking a more affirmative position. PM Modi was unambiguous in opposing China's expansionism and underlining the importance of Beijing abiding by the rules of the Law of the Sea in managing and resolving maritime disputes in the South China Sea. Over the last decade, India has also expanded bilateral military cooperation with several countries, most notably the Philippines. India's trade policy with ASEAN, however, remains problematic — although trade has doubled over the last decade to \$130 billion, the trade deficit with the region is mounting and now stands at about \$44 billion. ASEAN's economic size (\$4 trillion) stands slightly larger than India's (\$3.7 trillion) and its prospects for growth and technological innovation are impressive. Outlining a strategy that focuses on removing internal obstacles and shedding old mind-sets against regional trade is critical for an effective long-term Indian role in East Asia.

FREEZE FRAME

E P UNNY



THE INDIAN EXPRESS
100, 200, 300, 400, 500, 600, 700, 800, 900, 1000

Extending social justice



K SATYANARAYANA AND SATISH DESHPANDE

Disturbingly, arguments used against reservation earlier are being used now to oppose sub-quotas within SCs

IN A DECISION released on October 4, the Supreme Court rejected a set of review petitions challenging its August 1 judgment affirming the constitutional validity of the sub-categorisation of the Scheduled Castes. While the judgment itself points to significant changes in the contemporary discourse on reservation, the vehement criticism of prominent commentators suggests that nothing has changed. Of course, it must be acknowledged that the Court's own 2022 decision ratifying the so-called Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) reservation has "applied dynamite" (to adapt a famous phrase) to its record of mostly progressive jurisprudence on social justice. The sub-categorisation verdict salvages some of the doctrinal ruins that remain.

The 6-1 majority verdict by a seven-judge constitutional bench is a legal landmark that sets aside the Supreme Court's 2004 verdict in *E V Chinaiiah vs. State of Andhra Pradesh* (2000), where sub-categorisation had been declared to be unconstitutional, and the Andhra Pradesh "Rationalisation of Reservation" Act of 2000 (implementing a sub-categorisation scheme) was struck down.

The crux of the judgment concerns the "deemed fiction" by which legal entities are invented. In a lucid and compelling argument, Justices D V Chandrachud and Manoj Mishra establish that, when it creates the legal category of the "Scheduled Castes", Article 341 of the Constitution is not really bringing into existence a new "caste". Rather, it is selecting certain pre-existing castes (or sections thereof) for membership in this new category. Therefore, if Article 341 — and by extension Article 342 on the Scheduled Tribes — are to be considered "deeming fictions", they can be so considered only as acts of selection rather than creation. In this respect alone are these Articles granted immunity from executive interference — only Parliament acting through the President can alter the composition of the Schedules of selected castes and tribes. However, as long as it does not alter the composition of the Schedules, the executive, whether of the states or the Centre, is free to enquire into, and seek to redress, any internal inequalities among the selected castes, including implementing schemes to further the overall intent of the Articles, which is to promote substantive

equality among all citizens.

If this is the legal heart of the judgment, four features of its scaffolding are equally important. First, it enunciates the principle that sub-categorisation, like reservation itself, must be seen as a means of promoting substantive equality rather than an exception to it. Second, it insists that the need to maintain efficiency in administration — used in the past to restrict reservation — must be interpreted in ways that foster equality and inclusion. Third, it rejects the path taken by the 2022 EWS judgment (which excluded the SC, ST and OBC castes from EWS reservation even when otherwise eligible) by stipulating that sub-categorisation must not have the effect of excluding the socially and educationally advanced castes within the SC. Finally, and perhaps most consequentially, the judgment makes it mandatory for sub-categorisation schemes to provide empirical evidence of material inequalities within the Scheduled Castes, especially their disproportionate representation in government services. The judgment also takes the welcome further step of including a section on "Historical and empirical evidence of inter-caste backwardness within the SCs" where it discusses the heterogeneity of the SC list when first created in 1936, as well as contemporary studies that document discrimination (including "untouchability") within the SCs.

The argument that sub-quota seats won't be filled for lack of qualified candidates is one that, if applied to reservation in the 1950s, would have strangled it at birth. It is only several decades after they were first instituted that reservation quotas in the higher levels of the bureaucracy have begun to be filled. Other arguments — like the alleged absence of data, the shrinking public sector and various conspiracy theories — are merely prevarications that refuse to address the proverbial elephant in the room: The reality of growing inequality and continuing discrimination within the Scheduled Castes.

It is this accumulated evidence of internal differentiation, inequality, and discrimination that should be at the centre of public debate around sub-categorisation. Unfortunately, this is not happening. It is true that in the past — notably in the 1990s storm over OBC reservation — internal differentiation was used to oppose reservation itself. But to use the sub-categorisation verdict as enabling something similar is to ignore the vastly different context today. After all, it is this changed context that the Supreme Court is responding to by reversing its own decision in Chinaiiah two decades ago.

In fact, the shoe is on the other foot. It has been particularly distressing to see exactly the same arguments that upper caste-vested interests invoked against the idea of reservation being unthinkingly deployed to oppose sub-categorisation. As repeatedly pointed out, providing economic support and scholarships (in-

stead of reservation) does not address the specificity of caste discrimination and denies the right to adequate representation and share in public resources. The argument that sub-quota seats won't be filled for lack of qualified candidates is one that, if applied to reservation in the 1950s, would have strangled it at birth. It is only several decades after they were first instituted that reservation quotas in the higher levels of the bureaucracy have begun to be filled. Other arguments — like the alleged absence of data, the shrinking public sector and various conspiracy theories — are merely prevarications that refuse to address the proverbial elephant in the room: The reality of growing inequality and continuing discrimination within the Scheduled Castes.

Addressing this reality will not be easy, as the closing sections of Justices Chandrachud and Mishra's judgment note. Transparent, evidence-based and context-specific criteria for subclassification must be developed; its limits have to be worked out, and the modalities of possible judicial review for ensuring that it meets the intended constitutional goals must be explored. Though difficult, addressing these concerns is not impossible. The history of successful struggles for sub-categorisation in Punjab, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh shows the way. In Andhra Pradesh, a cross-section of the public — intelligentsia, ordinary people and political parties — came to a consensus to implement sub-categorisation.

It is our collective responsibility to build a broad consensus so that reservation may be shared among the Scheduled Castes based on principles of social backwardness and representation. As B R Ambedkar realised so acutely in the 1930s, the "depressed classes" were an especially vulnerable minority within the larger grouping of minorities. Today, discriminated minorities within the SCs are even more vulnerable. The Scheduled Castes must remain united to secure their rights. Despite its difficulties, the only sustainable unity is one based on justice.

Satyanarayana is with the English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad. Deshpande is affiliated with the Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bengaluru. Views are personal

SLEEPLESS IN CYBERSPACE

Internet is my world, my pocket of it my city. My city has cut me off from the world



SUKHMANI MALIK

A TAP. A scroll. A like. A troll.

What does your world look like? I first logged onto mine when I was 16. I had been around, floating outside in the universe of the "real", looking for an entry point (device, internet connection, cool clicks, know-how) into the reel. In the time I got in, the split between the two worlds collapsed. Tapped (in) and now scroll, scroll, scroll. Reels, one after the other. Do you know these three ways you suppress your true feelings and what it says about you; a one-pot 24-minute nutritious recipe for 25-year-old neurotypical adults; solidarity and the many ways we fail at practising it; that moment when a South Delhi girl has to hail an auto limo.

Suddenly, a headache. What does your world look like? As my eyes blink open, catch some light, two windows filtering rays in, I am blinded. I grab the screen, the light, that is less blinding, my world awake with me. I jump into my city, my world of this world, itching to get caught up; itching to get away. "Morning Starbucks before submitting my soul to the overflows of capitalism lol," "woke up depressed, today is giving bed rotting, I'm afraid."

The cliché "this city never sleeps," was made for my city, my world. New York got nothing on us. I woke up to 50 (!) notifications today. A friend found seven different reels that perfectly capture our relationship; halfway across the world, more bombs were dropped, 70 people died — the drop-down feature has

THE CITY AND I

The cliché "this city never sleeps," was made for my city, my world. New York got nothing on us. I woke up to 50 (!) notifications today. A friend found seven different reels that perfectly capture our relationship; halfway across the world, more bombs were dropped, 70 people died — the drop-down feature has never been more important. Closer home, two people were arrested for slandering. My city never sleeps.

never been more important. Closer home, two people were arrested for slandering. My city never sleeps.

In my city, all I do 20-somethings care deeply about the world. Some days we care more about it being known that we care: Our billboards have had the word "justice" graffitied on them for a decade. But we care, deeply — about politics, society, expression, community and the injustice that threatens them all. Me and my fellow citizens have travelled through many almost-revolutions together: 2019 and the denial of refuge, the criminalisation of faith; a statehood snatched, toll and mail worth no more than an engineered ploy — and loud protest, 2020, 2021, 2022 and the race for oxygen, beds, a race against death — oh, and loud protest, 2023, 2024 — one year of a massacre that my city livestreams, citizens sit with mouths agape, devastation, fury and loud, loud protest.

Amidst this, we talk — at each other, not with — into the void. Fat-shaming, body positivity or body neutrality? Three hot takes where X marks the spot (it used to be a birdhouse). Is Taylor Swift a saviour or the big bad culprit? Her new album is a hit and a miss. Cancel this, cancel that — I learnt in my city that mistakes are a thing of the past. And yet, subscriptions to those cancelled accounts never see themselves. Just give it a week, a month — a year, if it's especially bad. Here, accountability and decimation look alike — we point fingers at each other in my city, always trying to find a way to justice. Those in ivory towers chuckle at a failed protest, and scream bloody murder if the finger finds them. How many new book and movie deals does hashtag cancelled J K Rowling have now?

This city is cut off from the rest of my (the) world. It was built on, as we call it, vibes. More accurately, it has no grids, no blocks, no districts, no laws. An echo chamber that values virtue; it just does not value cultivating virtuosity — a task accomplished through time and error. There is no pause, no space to breathe, contemplate, or arrive.

So, as I look around this city that floats, suspended from time and space, always awake, always enraged, I realise, my city has made me kind; it has also made me blind. I am floating, with fellow citizens, like my city, far removed from the world, and all citizens not like me. As space that offered connection, and suddenly, I feel as disconnected as I did at 16.

What does your city, your world look like?

sukhmani.malik@expressindia.com

OCTOBER 14, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO

AKALIS' DEMAND

THE AKALI LEADERSHIP is not likely to agree to any settlement with the government on their political demands without the release of the SGPC president, G S Tohra. The government has been in regular contact with some Akali leaders who have been released and are managing party affairs. But the general public is agitated and it might be difficult for the present party leadership to go against their wishes.

AP HOUSE DISSOLUTION

DESPITE HIS REPEATED assertions to the contrary, the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, N

T Rama Rao, is likely to recommend to the governor next week the dissolution of the State Assembly. Rama Rao is credited with the view that he should seek Assembly elections along with the Lok Sabha polls. All 148 ruling Telugu Desam MLAs have been summoned to the city, presumably to make them agree.

IRISH GUERRILLA ATTACK

FIREMEN SEARCHED for a fourth body in the rubble of a Brighton hotel devastated by an Irish guerrilla bomb aimed at the Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, and other British government leaders. Fifteen of the 34 people injured in the pre-dawn blast were still un-

dergoing treatment. Doctors said the trade and Industry Secretary, Norman Tebbit, widely regarded as heir apparent to the Conservative Party, was "stable and comfortable".

BJP CALLS OUT CONG

THE BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY held the Congress (I) government responsible for "jeopardising national unity, subverting democracy, creating conditions of near anarchy and corroding the moral fibre of the society". In a draft resolution on the political situation, the BJP accused the ruling party of scaring the people with a "nightmare of instability".





OUR VIEW



New forms of risk loom on the external horizon

India's central bank needs scenario planning for exposure to the risk of a global currency war. It's prudent to keep a robust defence plan ready in case the rupee ends up as a target

As of 4 October, India had foreign exchange reserves of \$701.2 billion, a slight dip from late September, as the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) sold some dollars to steady the rupee, but almost \$54.8 billion more than at the start of 2024-25. Our memory of a 1991 forex crunch (and the Asian Crisis of 1997) may have turned a swelling stash into an index of security on the external front, but a shadow cast by global geopolitics today calls for a shift in lens. Sure, large foreign assets assure us money to pay for imports, offer a capital buffer against outflows, arm RBI with what it needs for currency stability, and bolster investor confidence in the country's solvency, making foreign funds cheaper to access. Since reserves are mostly invested in low-yield bonds like US Treasuries, their returns are meagre, but forex adequacy also spells policy autonomy as loans need not be sought from multilateral lenders. Yet, ever since the US and its allies froze \$300 billion of Russia's holdings in 2022, forex reserves have willy-nilly been on the world's radar as a geopolitical target. And now with America's disposition subject to further flux as the globe splits into rival blocs again, RBI has new kinds of scenario planning to do.

In the analysis of economist Barry Eichengreen, forex strategies have either a 'Mercury' or 'Mars' orientation. A Mercurial strategy has foreign currencies held in a ratio that satisfies trade (and other payment needs), but the world has been tilting towards a Martian game, under which holdings follow a geopolitical calculus. Wisely, RBI does not disclose the break-up of its reserves by currency. While both Mercurial and Martian logic would ordain a bulky share of US dollars for us, the central bank must plan for

what a potential Donald Trump presidency in the US might imply. Not only would globalization suffer a setback, with his threat of reciprocal tariffs a particular pain-point, he has warned against attempts to 'de-dollarize' trade. What's more, he wants to make US imports dearer and exports more competitive by means of a weaker dollar. This would mainly be aimed at China, possibly with US money deployed to buy its yuan, but such actions could trigger a currency war whose fallout could impact all exchange rates. This may include the rupee's, even if it is not a direct target (given our modest trade surplus with America). A problem, though, would arise if the US clubs India with China to label our forex upswell as a sign of 'currency manipulation.' It has happened before.

RBI's stance has long been clear. It intervenes in the currency market not to peg the rupee at any level, but to calm its volatility. To the extent our dollar accretion reflects investment flows and remittances more than export earnings, it does not distort trade and thus isn't unfair to others. Moreover, RBI has an inflation target. Since capital is free to move in and out (through major channels), it can defend a peg only at the cost of domestic price stability. Buying dollars floods the system with rupees; unless RBI anyway needs to ease its monetary policy, extra liquidity is inflationary if it isn't mopped up with bond sales. While this trade-off between the rupee's external and internal stability does grant RBI some space for operational flexibility, it constrains its ability to deploy a cheap rupee as a trade play. The slide of our currency, now under ₹84 to the dollar, has been gentle. Should it still end up as a target, RBI will need to act. It'll need to shield exports from an inflated rupee without letting inflation slip out of control.



is a journalist, novelist, and the creator of the Netflix series, 'Decoded'

He made entitlement look good. And capitalism didn't look so bad when he was doing it. Ratan Tata, who died on Wednesday, had conveyed through the course of a whole public life that some gigantic public figures can only emerge from privilege. Their coolness comes from a lack of desperation, the near absence of predators and the fact that they probably never had to endure anything that could make them bitter about human beings. Very few people knew him well, and he could well be a man who had a Hindi calendar at home, but in the public myth of him, he was among the last of a generation of Indians who were at once refined and loveable. In him was the best defence of the old elite and the assertion that there is such a thing as class, which cannot be bought with money.

It helped that he looked affluent, and his first language, the language that makes a smart person sound smart, was also the language he was required to speak in—English. Also, he truly loved dogs.

I never met him, even though he took me to court once.

I have seen him, though. Once on the road, in Mumbai's Cuff Parade area. He was at the wheel of an Indigo, a car that one of his many companies made. He looked particularly wealthy inside that 'affordable' car. It was a scene that would make Indians pass that nonsensical national complaint—"Such a humble man."

I also used to see him on occasion at Thai Pavilion in The President. He did seem to go about life without much fuss.

He lived in an unassuming house that we imagine might have been tastefully done with some fantastically expensive thing or two. But from all accounts, his life was austere in a way only a refined rich man's can be. Austerity is possible only when one is able to afford everything it rejects. And what it rejects is most of the useless products that capitalism creates for the super-rich.

The meaning of class is that it recognizes life is not about consuming, and money is not about showing itself. About this worldview, he has spoken a bit.

Class has lost its allure in India. It is probably tolerated only in old people anywhere. Today, those who don't have either money or class aspire to money, almost never to

class. In fact, class is a passionate pursuit only of those don't have a lot of money.

There was a point when the wealthiest people of India began to flaunt their wealth very openly. It was suddenly safe to do that. As a result, some giant billionaire silos sprang up in Mumbai. Intellectuals said that

these houses were vulgar because they were like taunts to the poor. But the truth is that for a majority of people, these giant billionaire homes are beacons of hope.

People today feel that wealth is attainable, but class is something you are born into. But the fact is that in India it is easier to attain class, just by living well or through intellectual pursuits, than to amass wealth, which is a by-product of a system that is more rigged than class.

But this is not the general perception of new Indians. In any case, they care very little for class, their own class. Their new heroes are billionaires. Yet, what they like about Ratan Tata is not just his money, but that abstract halo of refinement.

Ratan Tata lived through the modern revolution of class in India.

He assumed power when it was still very expensive to be rich, by which I mean that an affluent lifestyle was affordable only to the truly wealthy. It was the golden age of the rich. They never had to stand in line for anything; there were very few of them.

At that time, the middle class was closer to the poor than to the rich. We did a lot of things that the poor did and we shared many rooms in many places with the poor, and we almost never met the super-rich. It was a time when class and wealth were the same thing. People who had class automatically seemed to have wealth.

Ratan Tata, as a wealthy Parsi, had liberal views. He appeared 'Western.' It is a way of speaking, chiefly saying humane things, and living true to what you said. It is rare to see that world-view in India among those who are new to great wealth.

Even when Tata acquired the revered British brands Corus, Tetley Tea and Jaguar,

he did it without any nationalistic swag, unlike the Indian media, which reported the acquisitions in a hysterical way.

His personality made Indians make allowances for him. Once he told *The Times* of London, "In my experience, in both Corus and Jaguar-Land Rover (JLR) nobody is willing to go the extra mile." He said it was "a work-ethic issue" of the British. He said Indians, in contrast, worked hard. "I feel if you have come from Bombay to have a meeting and the meeting goes till 6pm, I would expect that you won't at 5 o'clock say, 'Sorry, I have my train to catch. I have to go home.' Friday from 3.30pm you can't find anybody in their office..." Further, he observed, "The entire engineering group at JLR would be empty on Friday evening, and you have got delays in product introduction..."

There was an uproar in the UK over what Ratan Tata said, but Indians were not offended that to a titan of Indian industry work ethic meant workers putting in long hours. It was a concession that Indians on social media did not extend to N.R. Narayana Murthy after he said that young people should work at least 70 hours a week.

There were a bit more serious things Ratan Tata could say and do, yet emerge unscathed.

THEIR VIEW

Entrepreneurs cannot afford to neglect their own mental health

It's lonely at the top and the stress they face is rarely discussed. Let's bring about a paradigm shift



HARSH MARIWALA
is founder of Mariwala Health Initiative and chairman at Marico.

businesses, we simply cannot afford to defer the conversation on their mental health and well-being any longer.

Entrepreneurs operate in flux and uncertainty. They deal with the stressors of market differentiation, profitability, cash flow, investor engagement and competition for talent. Sustaining partnerships is challenging. Varying ambitions and growth plans and a lack of role clarity can lead to conflict and a lot of pressure.

Adding to these, ecosystem and environmental risks such as pandemics, regional wars and disruptive technologies keep business leaders on their toes. For instance, fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) companies, such as Marico, are compelled to reorient their distribution because direct-to-consumer brands are growing. The resulting long hours and pressures negatively impact the work-life balance of business leaders.

The risk is exacerbated for entrepreneurs from under-represented, marginalized and indigenous communities, as also for women. They lack access to established business networks and funding sources. They face social and institutional biases as well as cultural and linguistic hurdles. Their risks are greater because business failure can cause their financial ruin and it is harder for them to make a pivotal recovery after such a setback.

In short, it truly gets lonely at the top. Entrepreneurial leaders talk about employee well-being but hesitate to discuss their own problems with colleagues. They cannot always share the complexities of business with their family. They may worry that a disclosure to clients and investors may have negative consequences, such as reduced funding or loss of contracts.

However, by addressing their own mental health and talking about their stressors, business leaders can bring about social shifts that change the narrative around it.

When entrepreneurs take planned risks with mental health disclosure, they become powerful advocates for wider social acceptance and reduced stigma. They can also create a work culture that encourages stronger and more authentic relationships with investors, clients and employees.

To empower this shift in a practical way, entrepreneurs need relevant, specific and flexible mental well-being support. The mental health ecosystem needs to build capacity and tools that are tailored to their unique circumstances and needs. Business schools, training programmes for entrepreneurship, incubators and accelerators should create space for mental health education and orientation.

In addition, peer support networks can go a long way in improving mental health outcomes for them. Business owners who are not competing can form groups where they feel safe and listen to each other without the fear of judgement. This can alleviate their sense of isolation and provide them with practical inputs. I had such support when I underwent a family business separation in the past and it substantially benefited me.

At Ascent, all 1,000 of its member entrepreneurs work in what we call trust groups of eight or 10 entrepreneurs. We train them on how to discuss the challenges that impact their mental health and provide support to one another.

Business leaders can also seek individual mentors and coaches. They might also explore professional counselling support in case peer support groups are not fully meeting their needs.

Risk lies at the centre of enterprise and many variables needed for success are beyond an entrepreneur's control. Mental well-being tools can empower entrepreneurs—and through them, society at large—to view failure not as a weakness, but as an opportunity for growth, learning and innovation.

10 YEARS AGO



JUST A THOUGHT

Apart from values and ethics which I have tried to live by, the legacy I would like to leave behind is a very simple one—that I have always stood up for what I consider to be the right thing, and I have tried to be as fair and equitable as I could be.

RATAN TATA

MY VIEW | MODERN TIMES

Why Indians liked Ratan Tata despite not knowing him

MANU JOSEPH



is a journalist, novelist, and the creator of the Netflix series, 'Decoded'

He made entitlement look good. And capitalism didn't look so bad when he was doing it. Ratan Tata, who died on Wednesday, had conveyed through the course of a whole public life that some gigantic public figures can only emerge from privilege. Their coolness comes from a lack of desperation, the near absence of predators and the fact that they probably never had to endure anything that could make them bitter about human beings. Very few people knew him well, and he could well be a man who had a Hindi calendar at home, but in the public myth of him, he was among the last of a generation of Indians who were at once refined and loveable. In him was the best defence of the old elite and the assertion that there is such a thing as class, which cannot be bought with money.

It helped that he looked affluent, and his first language, the language that makes a smart person sound smart, was also the language he was required to speak in—English. Also, he truly loved dogs.

I never met him, even though he took me to court once.

I have seen him, though. Once on the road, in Mumbai's Cuff Parade area. He was at the wheel of an Indigo, a car that one of his many companies made. He looked particularly wealthy inside that 'affordable' car. It was a scene that would make Indians pass that nonsensical national complaint—"Such a humble man."

I also used to see him on occasion at Thai Pavilion in The President. He did seem to go about life without much fuss.

He lived in an unassuming house that we imagine might have been tastefully done with some fantastically expensive thing or two. But from all accounts, his life was austere in a way only a refined rich man's can be. Austerity is possible only when one is able to afford everything it rejects. And what it rejects is most of the useless products that capitalism creates for the super-rich.

The meaning of class is that it recognizes life is not about consuming, and money is not about showing itself. About this worldview, he has spoken a bit.

Class has lost its allure in India. It is probably tolerated only in old people anywhere. Today, those who don't have either money or class aspire to money, almost never to

class. In fact, class is a passionate pursuit only of those don't have a lot of money.

There was a point when the wealthiest people of India began to flaunt their wealth very openly. It was suddenly safe to do that. As a result, some giant billionaire silos sprang up in Mumbai. Intellectuals said that

these houses were vulgar because they were like taunts to the poor. But the truth is that for a majority of people, these giant billionaire homes are beacons of hope.

People today feel that wealth is attainable, but class is something you are born into. But the fact is that in India it is easier to attain class, just by living well or through intellectual pursuits, than to amass wealth, which is a by-product of a system that is more rigged than class.

But this is not the general perception of new Indians. In any case, they care very little for class, their own class. Their new heroes are billionaires. Yet, what they like about Ratan Tata is not just his money, but that abstract halo of refinement.

Ratan Tata lived through the modern revolution of class in India.

He assumed power when it was still very expensive to be rich, by which I mean that an affluent lifestyle was affordable only to the truly wealthy. It was the golden age of the rich. They never had to stand in line for anything; there were very few of them.

At that time, the middle class was closer to the poor than to the rich. We did a lot of things that the poor did and we shared many rooms in many places with the poor, and we almost never met the super-rich. It was a time when class and wealth were the same thing. People who had class automatically seemed to have wealth.

Ratan Tata, as a wealthy Parsi, had liberal views. He appeared 'Western.' It is a way of speaking, chiefly saying humane things, and living true to what you said. It is rare to see that world-view in India among those who are new to great wealth.

Even when Tata acquired the revered British brands Corus, Tetley Tea and Jaguar,

he did it without any nationalistic swag, unlike the Indian media, which reported the acquisitions in a hysterical way.

His personality made Indians make allowances for him. Once he told *The Times* of London, "In my experience, in both Corus and Jaguar-Land Rover (JLR) nobody is willing to go the extra mile." He said it was "a work-ethic issue" of the British. He said Indians, in contrast, worked hard. "I feel if you have come from Bombay to have a meeting and the meeting goes till 6pm, I would expect that you won't at 5 o'clock say, 'Sorry, I have my train to catch. I have to go home.' Friday from 3.30pm you can't find anybody in their office..." Further, he observed, "The entire engineering group at JLR would be empty on Friday evening, and you have got delays in product introduction..."

There was an uproar in the UK over what Ratan Tata said, but Indians were not offended that to a titan of Indian industry work ethic meant workers putting in long hours. It was a concession that Indians on social media did not extend to N.R. Narayana Murthy after he said that young people should work at least 70 hours a week.

There were a bit more serious things Ratan Tata could say and do, yet emerge unscathed.

THEIR VIEW

MINT CURATOR

Reality check: Inflation has been getting the better of our assets

Indian households remain under-invested in equity despite evidence of how this leaves us shortchanged over the long haul



SWARNAND KELKAR
is managing partner at Breakout Capital.

For the typical investor, a bank fixed deposit (FD) loses money. Assuming 30% tax on interest, a one-year fixed deposit with State Bank of India offered less than consumer inflation in 10 of the past 13 years. Cumulatively, over those 13 years, the investor ended a full percentage point behind inflation. If one invests in an FD on 1 January, the odds are that over the next 12 months, one will lose money relative to inflation and end up being poorer in real terms.

The bulwark of Indian household savings, real estate, performs only marginally better. Using PropEquity's house-price data for India's top seven cities and looking at returns adjusted by the prevailing tax on long-term capital gains, real estate beat inflation in only four of the last 13 years. It does worse than even FDs on a cumulative basis.

What about gold? Considering similar taxation as real estate, gold beats inflation in nine of the past 13 years, but with much greater price fluctuations, including outright losses in some years.

If the judicious investor were to invest a third of her assets in each of these three asset classes, she would still not be able to beat inflation in six of the past 13 years. On a cumulative basis, she would have lagged inflation and thus ended up being poorer in relative terms.

The conclusion of this exercise is straightforward. If one wants to retain purchasing power in India, having some equities in your portfolio seems like a must.

While the exact extent of equity allocation will depend on the investor's individual circumstances, one can simulate a scenario where our judicious investor invests a fourth of her portfolio in equities. With 25% each in the other three asset classes, this portfolio's post-tax return trumps inflation in 11 of the past 13 years, cumulatively beating it by a respectable 1.8% annualized. The years in which this balanced portfolio lags inflation are 2013 and 2015, when there was a large drawdown in gold prices.

It is instructive to compare this suggested allocation with the actual portfolio of Indian households. While official statistics on the aggregate household balance sheet are hard to come by, using estimates from the Reserve Bank of India, World Gold Council and Jefferies India Research, one can piece together the asset side of the household balance sheet (see pie chart). Note that this is a snapshot of aggregate household savings and not the annual flow of savings into various asset classes. This data does not account for financial liabilities, nor does it include liquid assets held for transactional purposes like cash or current and savings account balances. Also, equity value classified as promoter holdings is excluded from this exercise as it seeks to construct the investment portfolio of a household.

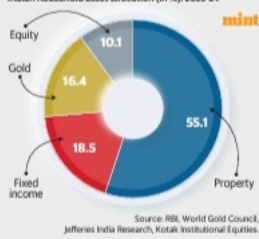
Given the bleak real returns of most assets except equities, this allocation seems surprising. If one were to compute households' actual return



Why it's hard to beat inflation

Indians have most of their money in investment classes whose value rarely outpaces inflation.

Indian household asset allocation (in %): 2023-24



over the past 13 years, that number would be about 3.7% annualized—barely keeping up with inflation. Even the catching up that households have done has happened only in recent years, thanks primarily to their increasing allocation to equity.

What could have led Indian households, which are generally astute in their financial planning, to allocate their savings in this sub-optimal way? Increased investment in capital markets, thanks to India's financial inclusion drive, digital public infrastructure and innovative fintech firms, has been a recent phenomenon. In earlier years, public awareness of—and access to—the entire bouquet of investment options was limited. Another reason could be the way individuals and households mentally account for their savings. Property and gold, which in many cases are ancestral, do not form part

of the usual asset allocation arithmetic.

While it is true that many households do not intend to sell these family heirlooms, properly accounting for them is important to estimate the overall allocation correctly. And while one is at it, it is also crucial to include oft-overlooked forced-saving instruments like pension schemes and/or insurance products in the overall math.

Data from Kotak Institutional Equities shows that even within financial assets, almost 40% of household financial assets are invested in pension and insurance products. These products are skewed towards fixed-income instruments and equities, the overall financial asset allocation of households turns out to be 65% in favour of fixed income and 35% in equities. Given that financial assets account for a little over a fourth of all household assets, we can infer that equities account for barely 10% of the overall household balance sheet.

The Personal Finance section of *Mint* occasionally carries an interesting feature that highlights the asset allocation slice-up of financially savvy people, from private bankers and fund managers to wealth advisors. What's common to these individuals is their large allocation to equities, especially compared to the average household.

If beating inflation over a long span of time is the holy grail of personal finance, the critical first step for every investor would be to draw up a comprehensive inventory of all household assets—discretionary, forced and ancestral.

Chances are it is not going to look anything like a neatly spliced chart of a quarter assigned each to property, gold, equity and fixed-income instruments.

These are the author's personal views.

DeepMind's Nobel is a tribute to the therapeutic value of AI

AI's ability to crack protein structures is a big leap for healthcare



LISA JARVIS
is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist covering biotech, health care and the pharmaceutical industry.



Google DeepMind's AlphaFold algorithm holds enormous promise

This year's Nobel Prize in chemistry is an incredible vote of confidence in the potential of artificial intelligence (AI) to transform the way medicines are invented by using AI to illuminate and manipulate proteins, life's most basic building blocks. The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences honoured University of Washington professor David Baker and two scientists from Google DeepMind, CEO Demis Hassabis and senior research scientist John Jumper.

Hassabis and Jumper were recognized for winning a decades-long race to use computers to predict a protein's structure based on only its genetic code. Baker's prize nods to his use of computers to invent never-before-seen proteins.

In 2020, DeepMind offered its first big advance, showing its AI algorithm AlphaFold could correctly 'solve' the structures of proteins that scientists had already worked out in the lab. Just a couple of years later, it offered a more stunning feat with the release of snapshots of nearly every protein in existence—all 200 million building blocks for humans, animals, plants, fungi, bacteria and more.

Considering that not so long ago, capturing an image of a single protein was a very painstaking process that sometimes didn't even work, So AlphaFold may be new, but it's already changing the industry. For the last few years, whenever I visit pharma companies to learn about their latest science, it's become my habit to ask: And what do you think about AlphaFold? Are you using it? The answer, always, is 'yes.' In 2022, Jay Bradner, then head of research at Novartis (now chief scientific officer at Amgen) told me, "I'm on it more than Spotify."

Why does protein structure matter so much? Proteins are the targets of most medicines. At times, proteins themselves can be a medicine. Chemists want to be able to 'see' them in intricate detail to design drugs that can wedge into just the right spot—a hidden pocket or a sticky bit—to turn them off, on, or even tune their activity to address a disease. Yet, if you flip through a biochemistry textbook, you'll see the challenge: They are amazingly varied in structure, from blobs to squiggles to pinwheels.

No, we aren't in a world where someone presses a button on a computer and it spits out the blueprint for a novel drug—and I doubt that we'll ever get there. Nevertheless, biotech and pharma companies have quietly integrated the protein prediction technology into their daily work in ways that trim time from the difficult, slow pro-

cess of inventing new medicines. And DeepMind scientists continue to make the technology even more useful. This spring, the company unveiled a version of the technology that can predict the interactions between proteins and other key players in the cell, whether that's DNA, RNA, small molecules or other proteins. And last year, scientists analysed the structures within AlphaFold to figure out which changes in a protein are harmful and which are benign, a tool that can help researchers much more easily pinpoint the cause of rare genetic diseases.

Many more advances are needed. Not all the structures in AlphaFold are perfect—some far from it—and so further refinement is in order. And people in the field of AI drug design would like to be able to create a drug that not only locks into its target, but is also safe and has the kind of properties that make it a viable commercial product (for example, one that sticks around in the body long enough to do its job and can be packed into a pill for easy consumption). All of that is still a work in progress.

The other winner of the Nobel Prize is University of Washington's David Baker, who has spent his career trying to do something quite extraordinary: designing proteins not found in nature. That first required understanding how proteins fold (as the DeepMind work underscores, no easy task), and then tinkering with the genetic sequences to come up with new structures.

While the applications of this approach span many disciplines, in medicine, that could mean anything from tiny tweaks in just the right spot to address an existing drug's shortcomings, or dreaming up something never before seen.

How promising is this approach? Last spring, investors promised to sink more than \$1 billion into Xaira Therapeutics, a biotech firm whose foundational technology came from Baker's lab. That puts the company into the upper echelons of not only AI-focused companies, but all biotech startups.

What's incredible about the work done across both Baker's lab and DeepMind is the pace of progress. We're getting closer to a place where the drug-discovery process is more efficient and successful. That's something to celebrate. **@LOMBORG**

THEIR VIEW

India's 25% manufacturing target could prove elusive

VIDYA MAHAMBARE



is a professor of economics and director (research) at Great Lakes Institute of Management.

The secret sauce of economics is arithmetic," said American economist Larry Summers in 2022. The context was how excess money in an economy, if not complemented with an increase in production, results in high inflation. Inspired by his simple yet profound statement, this article outlines how India's target of raising the share of manufacturing in GDP to 25% requires it to expand rapidly in at least two states: Uttar Pradesh (UP) and West Bengal. Without it, in absolute terms, manufacturing will grow, but expanding the relative importance of this sector in the economy will become ever more difficult. Why is that? In the 1950s, manufacturing was about 10% of India's economy. Since 2010, it has averaged about 17.7%. When the 'Make in India' campaign was launched in 2014, it was 17.3%. As the economy expanded over the years, the share of agriculture declined while that of services rose. The share of manufacturing has never reached even 20%. The reasons for this are well documented: Diffi-

culties in obtaining a multiplicity of required licences, delays in acquiring key requirements such as land, hundreds of stringent labour regulations that make taking on the same. While Maharashtra's contribution to the manufacturing sector fell over this period, that of the other three states increased, especially Gujarat's.

The next three states were also ranked the same in 2004-05 as in 2021-22: UP, West Bengal and Haryana. Their combined share in the sector's output fell from about 17.7% to 16% during this period.

Now consider the share of manufacturing in the state economy. In all the four states that contributed the most to the sector, the share of factory output in their respective economies reduced between 2004-05 and 2021-22. The largest fall was in Maharashtra,

while it was marginal in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Except Gujarat, in all the other three states, manufacturing now contributes less than 25% of state GDP. In Karnataka and Maharashtra, the sector contributes about 15% and 17%, respectively. In short, though our better-industrialized states continued to account for about half the country's manufacturing, the sector's relative contribution to their state economies fell.

The key reason is this: As incomes rise, our consumption patterns tend to shift towards services. We spend more on hotels and restaurants, tourism, education, healthcare, transport and personal services such as grooming salons and gyms. As demand for services increases, the local production of services must also rise, since these cannot be imported, unlike manufactured goods. So, the share of services in the economy inevitably rises.

Also, India's relatively prosperous states have seen a significant improvement in education levels. Young people have been going

in for higher education because they do not want to work on factory floors. These jobs not only pay less, they are seen as lower in social status than service jobs. The country's young aspirate and pharma companies have a cab's preferred, which lets them earn more than one would in a factory while retaining the flexibility of work hours. These preferences mean manufacturing in these states is increasingly reliant on migrant labour.

These trends that favour the demand and supply of services mean that even if manufacturing in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka continues to expand, its share in their state GDP and thus India's economy is unlikely to increase.

For India's share of manufacturing to reach 25% of GDP, we need the sector to expand rapidly in other states such as UP, West Bengal and Haryana. Yet, even in UP and Haryana, the share of manufacturing in their state economies has not risen. Can these three states, together with Odisha and Bihar, with about 40% of India's population,

replicate the success of the top four?

They can attract local labour and workers from nearby states. However, private businesses will build factories in these states only if they are assured of good and stable governance, easily obtainable licences and land, and also of quality physical infrastructure, apart from safety. They will also have to compete with rivals on quality and price. As UP, Bihar and Haryana do not have ports for the export of manufactured goods, industries that need to access global markets face higher transportation costs.

The challenge is steep, as the scale of factory expansion needed is massive. For example, UP's manufacturing share in state GDP is about 14%. It would need to reach over 30-35% for India's factory sector to attain a share of 25% and act as a generator of jobs by the million.

These states have a window of a decade or so to industrialize at the pace required. As their youth ascend the aspiration curve, they too would not want to work in factories. We should not forget that services will continue to account for the largest part of the Indian economy, providing jobs to an increasing number of youth.

Arithmetic, as Summers said, can be a powerful tool to understand reality.

Peacekeepers' peril

India joins 34 other countries contributing troops to the UNIFIL in condemning Israeli military actions that threaten peacekeepers

The ongoing hostilities in the West Asia have drawn global concern, with recent escalations along the Israel-Lebanon border highlighting the risks faced by United Nations peacekeepers. As Israeli airstrikes target Gaza and tensions spill over to southern Lebanon, the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) finds itself in the line of fire. India, along with 34 other countries that contribute troops to UNIFIL, has endorsed a joint statement condemning actions that jeopardise the safety of peacekeepers and calling for the protection of UN personnel as per existing United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions. The situation along the Israel-Lebanon border has become increasingly volatile, with Israeli military operations intensifying in Lebanon. On October 11, two Sri Lankan UN peacekeepers were wounded in an Israeli airstrike near their watchtower in Naqura, south Lebanon. This was second attack in 48 hours where UNIFIL's main base in the region was subjected to blasts amid the cross-border conflict. UNIFIL is a peacekeeping mission established in 1978 to monitor the cessation of hostilities in the area. It is the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon.

In the wake of the attack, India has condemned the threat to peacekeepers' safety. The Indian Permanent Mission to the United Nations reaffirmed that the "safety and security of peacekeepers are of paramount importance and must be ensured in accordance with extant UNSC Resolutions." India's stance underscores its long-standing commitment to UN peacekeeping operations, where it has historically been one of the largest contributors of troops. Of the 9532 troops deployed, 895 happen to be Indian. In fact, India happens to be the second largest contributor to the peacekeeping mission next to Indonesia. So far UNIFIL has endured 334 casualties. The UN's efforts aim to bring a halt to hostilities that have resulted in significant casualties and infrastructure damage, exacerbating an already dire situation in the region. The UN Security Council has called for restraint from all parties involved and emphasised the importance of allowing humanitarian aid to reach civilians in Gaza. However, the complexity of the conflict, with multiple factions and external parties influencing the dynamics, has made the path to a ceasefire fraught with obstacles.

India's response to the recent escalation along the Israel-Lebanon border reflects a pragmatic approach. While it has avoided direct condemnation of either side in the broader conflict, its alignment with the UNIFIL countries signals support for international peacekeeping standards. By calling for the protection of peacekeepers and adherence to UNSC resolutions, India is positioning itself as a responsible stakeholder in upholding international law and maintaining regional stability. The path to a sustainable ceasefire remains uncertain, but with global powers like India endorsing diplomatic initiatives and supporting the UN's peacekeeping mandate, there is a stronger impetus for pursuing non-violent solutions to the ongoing crisis.



Devotees immerse an idol of Goddess Durga, in Nadia

Gandhi's philosophy in the age of AI

As we forge ahead into this digital age, embracing Gandhi's philosophy could pave the way for a more humane and equitable future

Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly shaping our world, making the relevance of many ancient philosophies seem distant. People may find it difficult to comprehend the hardships our predecessors endured during their lifetimes. Even people may find it difficult to believe that great philosophers, who have provided us with a wealth of knowledge, once lived on this planet. We will accept only those incidents and individuals whose photographs or videos are accessible. As of now, we are fortunate to have documentary evidence of our nation's father, Mahatma Gandhi. Otherwise, people would have forgotten him. But even in this digital world where AI rules humanity, Gandhi's philosophy remains profoundly relevant. The core values that Gandhi stood for—such as non-violence, truth, self-reliance, simplicity and social justice—offer timeless guidance for managing the challenges humanity faces even today. We can



interpret non-violence (Ahimsa) in this digital era as ensuring the ethical and responsible use of AI technologies. Gandhian principles have high relevance today as we start integrating AI into aspects of human life, be it healthcare, economy, agriculture, or warfare. As we indulge in digital warfare, Gandhian's non-violence principle prompts us to develop technologies that prioritise human welfare and minimise harm. Cyberbullying is on the rise, and many people are falling victim. Cyberbullying fundamentally involves the use of words, images, or exclusion on the internet as a means of violence. Unfortunately, even political parties sometimes encourage such behaviour for gain, which

fosters enmity between communities—a divide that can be challenging to bridge. By embracing ahimsa, individuals can practice empathy and kindness online, refraining from harmful or derogatory comments. Promoting non-violence in digital spaces could lead to reduced aggression and a more supportive online environment. Gandhian's emphasis on truth serves as a powerful antidote to the deceit and falsehoods that often fuel cyberbullying. Many online bullies hide behind anonymous profiles, spreading rumours, lies, or misinformation. Truthfulness can also empower victims to speak out against bullying, creating a culture of transparency and accountability. In the digital age, where people can react instantly and sometimes impulsively, applying self-discipline is crucial. In a world where major tech companies dominate AI development, Gandhian's philosophy of self-reliance (swadeshi) is highly applicable. It encourages nations, especially third-

world countries, to build their own AI capabilities and not rely solely on foreign technology. Fostering digital independence and ensuring the use of AI in ways that benefit local economies and cultures is crucial. One of Gandhi's most enduring legacies was his advocacy for the marginalised. In the AI-dominated world, we must ensure that these technologies do not exacerbate inequalities. We should use AI to promote inclusivity, reduce the digital divide, and provide technology access for all, which is in line with Gandhi's vision of social justice. In essence, Gandhian philosophy, with its moral clarity and human-centred approach, serves as a vital guide for shaping the AI-driven future. Even in a world where technology seems to dominate, Gandhi's philosophy has high relevance for building peace and happiness in the world. (The author is a Dean at Garden City University and an adjunct faculty member at NIAS, Bangalore; views are personal)



BIJU DHARAMAPALAN

The steadfast diplomat who crafted India's foreign policy

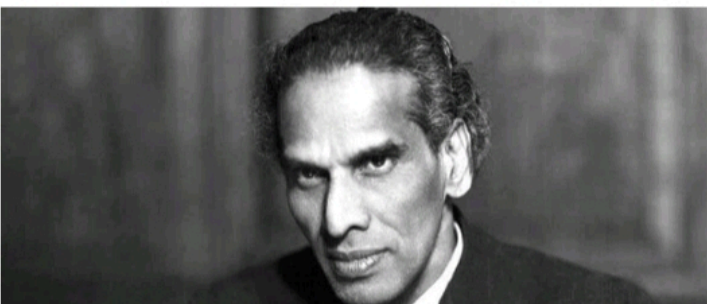


SANTHOSH MATHEW

As India marks the 50th anniversary of V K Krishna Menon's passing, it is a fitting moment to remember a man whose brilliance shaped the nation's global diplomacy

Fifty years since Vengalil Krishnan Krishna Menon's passing, the significance of his contributions to Indian diplomacy and global politics remains evident. Hailed as one of India's most brilliant yet controversial statesmen, Menon's legacy is inextricably linked with the evolution of the country's foreign policy. Born in Kozhikode, Kerala, his journey from a young boy in South India to a pivotal figure on the world stage was marked by intellectual rigor, steadfastness, and an unyielding commitment to India's sovereignty and values. When he passed away on October 6, 1974, then-Prime Minister Indira Gandhi described his departure as "a volcano has been extinguished," aptly capturing the intensity he brought to every role he undertook. His contributions, despite the passage of time, continue to influence India's diplomatic posture.

Menon's early life in Kerala and subsequent education in the United Kingdom set the stage for his distinguished career. His association with Jawaharlal Nehru, whom he befriended while in London, was instrumental in shaping his path. Quickly emerging as a prominent voice in the Indian independence movement abroad, Menon's articulate speeches and sharp intellect earned him recognition. During his time in the UK, he co-founded Penguin Books, which revolutionised the publishing industry by making literature affordable and accessible. However, his foray into publishing was merely the precursor to his true calling: crafting India's foreign policy. It was Menon who proposed the term "Non-Aligned Movement" (NAM), a cornerstone of India's Cold War-era diplomatic stance. He championed neutrality, ensuring that India, as a newly independent nation, did not align itself with either the United States or the Soviet Union. For Menon, non-alignment was more than just a diplomatic position; it was an assertion of India's sovereignty and self-respect. He fiercely defended this stance on various international platforms, particularly at the United Nations, where his eloquence and conviction



made him a formidable figure. As India's representative at the UN, Menon achieved global recognition, notably delivering the longest speech in the forum's history—a marathon eight-hour defence of India's position on Kashmir during the 1957 General Assembly. His unwavering defence of India's claim to Kashmir earned him the title "Hero of Kashmir." Yet, his confrontational style also attracted criticism, especially from Western media, which often portrayed him as the "Indian Rasputin," suggesting he exerted undue influence over Nehru's policies. Menon's relationship with Nehru was undoubtedly significant, with the Prime Minister recognising his brilliance and appointing him to government roles, first as a minister without portfolio and later, in 1957, as Defence Minister. Together, they steered India's post-independence strategies in both foreign relations and defence. The 1962 Sino-Indian War marked a turning point for Menon. As Defence Minister, he was widely blamed for India's crushing defeat by China, with critics accusing him of failing to adequately prepare the military. Western media, particularly "Time" magazine, infamously depicted him on its cover as a "snake charmer," manipulating Nehru into a disastrous conflict. While Menon's detractors held him

largely responsible for the debacle, such an assessment does not acknowledge his broader contributions to defence and foreign policy. Menon was a proponent of self-reliance in defense, laying the groundwork for indigenous military production—policy India pursues to this day. Furthermore, his role in the Goa Liberation movement of 1961, which ended Portuguese colonial rule, reinforced his image as a dedicated patriot. Despite the setback after the Sino-Indian War, Menon's career was not over. In 1971, supported by the left-leaning EMS Namboodiripad, Menon made a comeback to Parliament, representing Thiruvananthapuram. His return was a testament to the enduring respect he commanded among certain segments of Indian society. Even in his later years, Menon remained a formidable presence in politics, unfraid to challenge prevailing norms. Menon's personal life remained relatively private, though his wit and often abrasive style earned him both admirers and detractors. He was viewed by contemporaries such as Bertrand Russell as a man of profound intellect and integrity. Yet, his sharp tongue and uncompromising nature also alienated many, leading to well-publicised rivalries, including with fellow Malayali

diploamts like VP Menon and KPS Menon. These tensions added an element of intrigue to his already controversial career. Reflecting on the 50th anniversary of Menon's passing invites a reevaluation of his towering legacy. His contributions to Indian foreign policy, particularly his advocacy for non-alignment and his defense of India's stance on Kashmir, remain integral to the country's diplomatic strategies. The fact that his UN speech still holds the record as the longest ever delivered underscores his place in the annals of global diplomacy. Menon's influence extended beyond India's borders; his advocacy for global disarmament and his warning, "Either man will abolish war, or war will abolish man," still resonates in international forums. At a time when diplomacy often takes place behind closed doors, Menon's readiness to speak truth to power, regardless of personal cost, set him apart. His passing marked the end of an era, but his ideas—particularly his fierce commitment to Indian sovereignty and global justice—continue to shape the country's foreign policy. The "volcano" that Indira Gandhi referred to still casts a long shadow over Indian diplomacy—a shadow that endures. (The writer is an associate professor; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Tennis legend retires

BABA SIDDIQUE ASSASSINATED
Madam — The city of Mumbai has recorded another high-profile targeted killing of NCP leader Bala Siddique. The assassination of Siddique by two shooters at the time he is leaving his sons office and sitting in the car is purely calibrated killing attempts. Despite the fact that his son Zeshan was an elected MLA from Bandra, Mumbai, it is a bit surprising that killing took place in the same area. However, it's too early to claim the killing was politically motivated before a proper investigation is to be done by the Mumbai police. He is known in the entire of India for the glam glitz Ifar Parties, which attract Bollywood celebrities every year. The investigation will shed light on the actual motive of the killer for his targeted killing. Meanwhile, it is extremely sad to note that killing is such an easy task in our country. If politicians and renowned personalities like Bala Siddique are not safe in our country, how could we expect the safety of the locals?

The policing mechanism has to be active all the time to avoid such uncertainties. Also, there must be a rigorous punishment mechanism for the shooters, and harsh penalties to be put in place so that no such miscreants will dare to take such actions on the charm of free money from the actual culprits.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

TACKLE HUNGER CRISIS
Madam—This refers to the article on the paradox of nutritional status. Though the contour of nutritional status has too many curves based on too many factors like urban, rural, poor, rich, middle class, gender and so on, the overall condition is definitely not encouraging. The rank given by the Global Hunger Index needs no suspicion. The country's nutrition-related programmes organised by the Union and State governments need an appraisal to review the improvement or the otherwise. A national programme with area-specific contents needs to be taken up, involving the youth who can contribute nutrition-



related knowledge and implement the program with periodical study on the study. There was news in the media about the lack of quality of the distributed stuff also. In slums, poor eating and non-access to nutritional items are issues, and among the rich, overeating of available items is the issue. Unless nutrition is taken up as a priority to implement with all seriousness and with adequate allocation of funds, there may not be a tangible improvement in the status. Expenditure on improving nutritional status is a productive investment as it helps improve the productivity of the individuals as well as the nation, which is imminent.

A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

MASTERING POLITICAL GAMES
Madam—There is no specific Noble Prize for politics. However, many politicians received the Nobel Peace Prize for their efforts in promoting peace, resolving conflicts and advancing human rights; examples are Nelson Mandela, Barack Obama, and Mikhail Gorbachev. Political manoeuvring and politics are relat-

court mastery. Nadal has won US Open titles four times and the Australian Open two times. On the grass of Wimbledon, a surface considered challenging for him, he secured two championships. Who could forget the 2008 Wimbledon final between Nadal and Federer? Or 2013 Australian Open final between Nadal and Djokovic? Surely Nadal should have inspired millions of children to start playing tennis across the globe. Nadal remained the world's top player for 209 weeks during his peak years, 2005-2023. After Nadal's retirement, will men's tennis ever have another trio, "Federer, Nadal and Djokovic," who dominated tennis for 20 years? Certainly Nadal's retirement from tennis is the end of an era.

P Victor Selvaraj | Tirunelveli

ed but distinct. The former involves a variety of tactics aimed at maintaining or gaining power such as politicians changing parties (turn coats), building pre or post poll alliances with other political parties, contesting elections as independent candidate if ticket is denied and after winning getting favours by supporting government forming party or parties, using the fundamental right of freedom of speech to the fullest extent in criticizing the opponents at will, turning from foes to friends and vice versa with ease by being immune to guilt or shame, directing resources for garnering and maintaining vote banks through freebies & unproductive welfare schemes, toppling governments, poaching elected members from opposition parties and defaming own country's government & its policies abroad etc. Indian politicians are 'Mahins' in the above activities. So, if a Noble Prize is instituted for "political maneuvering," India will always get it.

O Prasad Rao | Hyderabad

FIRST COLUMN

EMOJIS SPEAK WHERE TEXTING FALLS SHORT

Emojis transform otherwise bland exchanges into vibrant and meaningful interactions



ASHA IYER KUMAR

I am a huge fan of emoticons, or emojis, as I prefer to call them. In a new, technically robust world that chooses to conduct most of its private and professional business digitally, the existence of emojis is a lot more valuable than what they seem primary. Emojis fill the gap between one's feelings [thoughts] and words; they arch over the space where misunderstandings breed unintentionally. The trouble with texting is it, more often than not, conveys meanings not meant. The true import of the statements is often dispensed with an unsavoury blandness. Words, for all the power they have, are restricted in their ability to convey true emotions. There is no tone or tenor in a conversation that happens over a typed chat. It is here that the emojis take charge to let people know the precise sentiment behind the words. It's fascinating how something as simple as a tiny, colourful image can carry the weight of an entire conversation.

Emojis have become the silent saviours of our digital dialogues, transforming what could be a dry exchange into something vibrant, relatable and meaningful. I have always believed that words, despite their richness, sometimes falter in delivering the exact shade of sentiment we wish to express. How many times have we sent a message and then wondered: Will they get what I mean? Will they feel my warmth, my concern, or my light-heartedness? Emojis step in at this point, like little emotional cue cards, guiding the recipient towards the intended feeling behind our words.

A simple smiley can transform a blunt response into a kind reassurance. It acts as a gentle nudge, hinting to the reader, "Take it easy; this is friendly." Emojis allow us to soften the blows of formality, sprinkle humour on otherwise serious subjects, or underline the gravity of



what would otherwise seem trivial. Consider this: You've sent a message that says, "Let's talk later." Now, depending on the mood of the person on the other side, it could be read as indifferent, abrupt, or even ominous. But if you add a little smiley at the end, the vibe changes entirely. Suddenly, it sounds casual, almost warm. This is the magic of emojis — they are the unseen bridges in our communication, preventing misunderstandings. They fill in the emotional blanks that text leaves behind. In this world where we don't always get the luxury of hearing someone's voice or seeing their expressions, emojis have quietly become the body language of our conversations. They provide a way to infuse our cold, typed words with a cozy connection. That's where their real value lies, and why I, as someone deeply in love with words and their power, have come to appreciate the humble emoji. Moreover, in a globally connected world where language barriers can stand between intent and interpretation, emojis offer a universal code. A thumbs-up or a heart means the same whether you're in Dubai or Delhi, making them incredibly effective in fostering inclusivity and understanding. As I continue my writing journey, both in traditional and digital spaces, I find myself more often turning to emojis to complement my words, especially when texting or communicating over social media. They are the small, unspoken allies in my digital interactions, helping me stay connected, relatable, and, most importantly, understood. In a time when misunderstandings are as quick as a keystroke, I've come to appreciate emojis as more than just playful symbols. They are, in many ways, the unsung heroes of modern communication, making sure that what we feel and what we say are in sync. And that's a role too important to ignore.

(The author is a columnist and writing coach based in Dubai; Views are personal)

The booklet that redefines Mayawati

Mayawati is launching a revival effort to reclaim lost ground; she released a 59-page booklet outlining the party's roadmap, while emphasising her 'Iron Lady' image



BISWAJEET BANERJEE

Facing a steep decline in electoral performance, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), under the leadership of Mayawati, is now pivoting with a new strategy aimed at regaining its lost political ground. The once-formidable party, which made significant strides in the late 1990s and early 2000s by mobilising Dalit and marginalised communities, has been on the back foot in recent elections. With an eye on the upcoming assembly elections and the 2027 general elections, the BSP has taken an important step by releasing a 59-page booklet, designed not only to recount its past achievements but also to chart a new course for the future. The release of this booklet is a key part of the BSP's revitalisation plan. It features several statements from Mayawati, emphasising her leadership and vision for the party's future. One of the key aspects of the booklet is Mayawati's self-identification as the "Iron Lady," a term that echoes the strong and uncompromising leadership style often associated with female leaders in global politics, such as former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

By using this title, Mayawati seeks to project an image of resilience, firmness and determination, drawing on her previous tenure as the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, where she exercised considerable political influence. Mayawati's attempt to invoke historical symbolism is another notable feature of the booklet. She compares herself to Emperor Ashoka, an ancient Indian ruler known for his governance and promotion of social justice. The parallel is clear like Ashoka, Mayawati is ushering in a new era of social welfare and justice for the marginalised sections of society, particularly Dalits. Through this comparison, she hopes to solidify her image as a leader capable of bringing about meaningful social change, positioning herself as a saviour of the oppressed and aligning her leadership with India's rich historical tradition of justice. The use of such symbolic language is not merely rhetorical; it is a calculated effort to energise the party's traditional voter base, which largely consists of Dalits, while also appealing to other communities. The invocation of Emperor Ashoka, a figure revered for his contributions to governance, inclusiveness and justice, allows Mayawati to appeal to a wider electorate that values strong leadership based on social equity and welfare.

By aligning her vision with that of Ashoka, she is reminding voters that her leadership stands for inclusiveness, fair governance and social justice—values that resonate deeply with her core constituency. One of the most significant components of Mayawati's new political strategy is a renewed focus on social engineering, an electoral strategy that had previously yielded considerable success for the BSP. This approach, which played a crucial role in Mayawati's rise to power in 2007, involves forging electoral alliances across caste lines—specifically between Dalits and Brahmins. By uniting these groups, the BSP was able to create a winning formula that resulted in sweeping electoral victories in the mid-2000s.

The booklet highlights the party's intention to revive this strategy, indicating that the BSP aims to once again bring together a broad-based coalition to strengthen its political position. In the booklet, Mayawati makes a strong appeal to Brahmin voters, asserting that their economic and social upliftment can only be achieved under BSP rule. She takes the opportunity to criticise



rival political parties, including the Samajwadi Party (SP), Congress, and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), for neglecting the Brahmin community and failing to address their concerns. By making this overture to Brahmins, Mayawati hopes to recreate the Brahmin-Dalit electoral coalition that had been so successful in the past, particularly in 2007, when this formula helped her ascend to the Chief Minister's office in Uttar Pradesh. This strategy signals that Mayawati is determined to reconstruct a broad-based support structure, aiming to gain a foothold among both upper and lower castes. The outreach to Brahmins is not an entirely new tactic for the BSP. The party had previously established strong support among Brahmin voters, particularly in the mid-2000s, by emphasising the importance of social cohesion and inclusive governance. In many ways, Mayawati's return to this formula reflects her understanding of the changing political dynamics in Uttar Pradesh. She recognises the importance of rebuilding alliances that cross caste lines, particularly as the political landscape in the state continues to evolve. However, the new strategy does not stop with Brahmins. The booklet also directs sharp critiques at Mayawati's political rivals, particularly Congress leader Rahul Gandhi. She targets Gandhi's recent visit to a shoe repair shop, characterising it as "symbolic politics" that does little to address the real issues faced by marginalised communities. In her view, this gesture perpetuates caste-based stereotypes, reinforcing the notion that certain communities, such as Dalits, should be associated with manual labour, including shoe-making. This critique is

aimed at resonating with her core voter base—Dalits—by emphasising her stance against caste-based occupations and promoting a broader vision of social justice. Mayawati also uses the booklet to revisit past political alliances, notably the failed partnership between the BSP and the Samajwadi Party (SP) ahead of the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. The alliance, once seen as a formidable force capable of challenging the BJP in Uttar Pradesh, ultimately fell apart. In the booklet, Mayawati attributes the breakdown to a lack of communication from Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav, who, according to her, stopped answering her calls. This communication breakdown, she claims, forced the BSP to withdraw from the alliance—a move she frames as one made out of self-respect. By bringing up the collapse of the alliance, Mayawati seeks to remind voters of her independence and self-reliance as a leader, further distinguishing herself from her political rivals. Despite Mayawati's efforts to reposition the BSP, the party faces significant challenges. One of the primary obstacles is the erosion of its traditional voter bank. The BSP, which once commanded a substantial base among Dalit voters, has seen a significant portion of these votes shift toward the BJP in recent elections. In a notable shift in strategy, Mayawati has announced that the BSP will contest the upcoming by-elections. Historically, the party has refrained from participating in by-polls, preferring to focus its resources on general elections. However, the recent electoral setbacks and the changing political landscape in

Uttar Pradesh have prompted a reassessment of this approach. By contesting the by-elections, Mayawati hopes to reenergise the party's cadre and send a message to her supporters that the BSP is still in the fight. The by-elections offer the BSP an opportunity to test its new strategies and alliances in a smaller electoral context before the next general elections. By doing so, the party can identify its strengths and weaknesses, allowing it to adjust its tactics in preparation for larger electoral battles. Additionally, Mayawati's decision to contest the by-elections is also about reinvigorating the party's organisational strength. In recent years, the BSP's grassroots machinery has weakened, with many party workers becoming disillusioned after a series of electoral defeats. By throwing the party into the by-election fray, Mayawati aims to revive its organisational structure and prepare it for future contests. Mayawati's messaging, as outlined in the newly released booklet, signals her determination to reclaim the BSP's former electoral strength. Through a combination of symbolic language, critiques of her rivals, and a recalibrated strategy, she hopes to reposition the BSP as a force to be reckoned with in Uttar Pradesh politics. The upcoming by-elections will serve as a crucial test for the party's new approach and could determine whether Mayawati is successful in her efforts to revitalise her support base and counter growing competition from both established and emerging political players. (The writer is an Associate Editor, of The Pioneer; views are personal)

ONE OF THE PRIMARY OBSTACLES IS THE EROSION OF ITS TRADITIONAL VOTE BANK. THE BSP, WHICH ONCE COMMANDED A SUBSTANTIAL BASE AMONG DALIT VOTERS, HAS SEEN A SIGNIFICANT PORTION OF THESE VOTES SHIFT TOWARD THE BJP IN RECENT ELECTIONS

Haryana's election lesson: Why Tejashwi and Akhilesh must shun caste politics

To secure long-term success, they must cater to broader social sentiments as voters increasingly reject traditional caste-based power structures

The recent election results in Haryana have overturned pre-poll predictions and ground reports by YouTubers, sending a clear message for future elections, particularly in key states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. For leaders such as Tejashwi Yadav and Akhilesh Yadav, who belong to the dominant Yadav caste, the outcome holds lessons. Their political scenario mirrors the situation of the Jats in Haryana, where social dynamics are shifting away from dominant caste politics. In this evolving landscape, they face the challenge of addressing broader social sentiments and responding to the concerns of marginalised groups who feel overlooked or disadvantaged in the traditional caste power structures.



AKHILESH SUMAN

In Haryana, the Jats, a politically influential community, faced a consolidation of other social groups against them, as seen in the election results. This trend is significant for Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, where the dominant OBC groups, particularly the Yadavs, have held power for decades but are now struggling to maintain their influence. The once-powerful Yadav-led governments lost their grip on

power partly because of growing resentment from other communities who felt sidelined. The political history of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh is marked by the rise of leaders like Lalu Prasad Yadav and Mulayam Singh Yadav, who gained initial popularity by championing anti-Congress sentiment and social justice. Their "M-Y equation" (Muslim-Yadav alliance) was a powerful electoral strategy that secured their dominance, but it also instilled fear in other communities. The consolidation of their caste base came at the cost of alienating non-Yadav OBCs, Dalits, and upper castes, creating a sense of marginalisation. Over time, their politics of exclusion backfired, as disillusioned voters began to

seek alternatives, leading to the emergence of leaders like Nitish Kumar in Bihar and the BJP in Uttar Pradesh, who promised clean governance and development for all. The memories of the 1990s and early 2000s, when the Yadav-led administrations were perceived as using caste power to consolidate authority, still linger. While the Yadavs continue to be an important electoral bloc, the rest of society—especially the non-Yadav OBCs, Dalits, and upper castes—often recalls those years as an era of exclusion. The BJP with its "subaltern Hindutva" narrative, has effectively capitalised on this sentiment, attracting marginalised groups by offering a sense of inclusion and an alternative to Yadav-centric



politics. Akhilesh Yadav, upon coming to power, made efforts to bridge the gap between his caste and others. He distanced himself from the old guard, symbolised by his uncle Shivalp Yadav, who represented the traditional power dynamics of the Samajwadi Party. However, incidents involving unruly behaviour

by some of his caste members toward other communities made it difficult for him to secure a second term. His attempts to modernise and adapt the party's image were undermined by persistent social tensions. Similarly, Tejashwi Yadav faces challenges in Bihar, where his efforts to step out of his father Lalu's shadow have been hampered by his own caste groups' oppressive behaviour toward Dalits and upper castes. His political journey involves grappling with the legacy of Yadav dominance, which is often perceived as being dismissive of other communities' aspirations. To succeed in the future, Tejashwi must navigate these entrenched social dynamics with greater inclusivity. The lesson from Haryana is

clear: caste dominance can become a liability if it alienates other social groups. The Jat experience shows that when other communities consolidate against a dominant caste, it can significantly alter the political landscape. For Akhilesh and Tejashwi, this means urging their caste members to adopt a more accommodative stance, rather than projecting dominance. Effective leadership in this context involves advocating for social harmony and cooperation across different segments. Both Tejashwi and Akhilesh must understand that lasting political success cannot be achieved by relying solely on their traditional caste bases. They need to expand their appeal beyond the Yadavs and reach out to other communi-

ties that have felt marginalised. Their strategy should involve building broader alliances that include marginalised communities, addressing their socio-economic needs, and promoting an inclusive vision of governance. The political landscape in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh is undergoing a shift. The BJP's ability to attract non-Yadav OBCs and other marginalised groups has weakened the impact of traditional Yadav-centric politics. Leaders like Tejashwi and Akhilesh must shed the image of their parties as "Yadav-centric" and instead emphasise inclusive governance that addresses the aspirations of all communities. (The writer is a senior journalist; views are personal)

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Unsafe in B'desh

Yunus cannot abdicate responsibility

A SENSE of frustration is visible in India's strong condemnation of the attacks on Hindu temples in Bangladesh. Ever since former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's ouster following the political upheaval in early August, New Delhi has repeatedly voiced concern about the safety and security of Bangladesh's minorities. It is ironic that the targeting of symbols of Hindu identity continues unabated under the watch of Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus. There have been multiple instances of desecration, vandalism and robbery at shrines and puja pandals. Yunus' contention that these attacks are politically motivated and not communal amounts to a singular abdication of responsibility. A systematic pattern of hate is being allowed to gain ground in Bangladesh, despite his assurances of protecting religious freedom and periodic visits to temples.

Certainly, these are testing times for India-Bangladesh ties. New Delhi's reticence over the demand to deport Hasina to face trial is possibly raising hackles in Dhaka. For some in the new regime, riling India is the perfect way with which Bangladesh can look its powerful neighbour in the eye — however misconceived the notion. Still, both sides must be fully aware of the grave consequences of any delay in bridging the growing distrust. Diplomatic channels need to be activated soonest at full throttle. First and foremost, though, Dhaka must crack the whip. To act — or not to act — cannot constitute leverage. Especially not when the reins of power are with Muhammad Yunus, the West's poster boy of all that is noble.

There's a lesson in what's taking place in Bangladesh, for India as well. Side-stepping the elephant in the room would be as deplorable as not calling out Dhaka. Let's not be in denial about minority-bashing at home. This vile absurdity must end. It's a disservice to India and Indians.

Fix Punjab's finances

A daunting challenge for the new advisers

PUNJAB'S appointment of Arvind Modi, a seasoned former IRS officer as Chief Adviser on Fiscal Affairs, along with Sebastian James from Duke University, signifies the state government's recognition of its pressing economic challenges. The two advisers are entrusted with literally bringing back the state from the brink. They will be required to tackle Punjab's entrenched fiscal troubles, including soaring debt, inadequate capital expenditure and the struggle to fulfil basic financial obligations. Their mandate to mobilise resources, rationalise spending and reconfigure fiscal debt is, indeed, ambitious.

Punjab's fiscal health is alarming: the state has found it increasingly difficult to fund essential services, with a significant portion of its revenue going towards repaying debt and servicing loans. Despite attempts to boost revenue — such as increased VAT on fuel, higher property registration fees and raised bus fares — the state remains financially strained. A recent request for an additional borrowing limit of Rs 10,000 crore from the Centre underlines the dire straits. The Centre's delay in releasing critical funds under schemes like the Rural Development Fund and National Health Mission has exacerbated the fiscal crisis.

Reviving Punjab's economy will require more than technical expertise; it will demand political acumen and innovative strategies to engage with the Centre on crucial financial support. While Punjab's recent fiscal prudence is commendable, the challenge lies in translating internal revenue efforts into sustainable development without overburdening taxpayers or cutting essential services. The task ahead is arduous for the advisers. Plus, if the fiscal recovery starts happening at this stage when the AAP government is in the middle of its term in the state, it gives the party greater heft to face the electorate the next time. After the drubbing in the recent Haryana poll, Arvind Kejriwal had pointed out the folly of being overconfident. Let's see if this course-correction pays.

OPINION

India's western flank is on fire

Why US is acting in tandem with Israel to carry out missile attacks against Iran



SHYAM SARAN
FORMER FOREIGN SECRETARY

ON October 11, Iran launched its third missile strike on several targets in Israel, including on the capital city of Tel Aviv. According to an Israeli Defense Forces statement, nearly 300 ballistic missiles were involved in the attack but most were reportedly intercepted and neutralised by Israel and US forces based in Qatar, working together.

The first missile strike took place on April 13, in retaliation for the targeted killing of Iranian diplomats in an Israeli bombing attack on an Iranian consulate in Syria. However, Iran gave advance warning of the attack and avoided causing major damage. It also announced that it did not want to escalate the conflict beyond this retaliatory attack. Nevertheless, this missile attack was the very first direct attack from Iranian soil on Israel and therefore a significant departure from the past.

The proxy war against Israel conducted hitherto through Iranian proxies such as Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon and Houthis in Yemen, had now graduated to a direct clash of arms between the two major adversaries in West Asia and the Gulf.

Israel did not respond directly to the Iranian attack, but it chose to inflict damage on Iran by targeting both the Hamas and Hezbollah leadership in Lebanon. It carried out the brazen assassination of the Hamas chief, Ismail Haniyeh, in the Iranian capital, Tehran, just hours after he had attended the inauguration of the new Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian on July 31. This was a



SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES: We may be on the threshold of another major war, REUTERS

humiliating blow to Iran, demonstrating Israel's ability to strike at will at targets within Iran, leveraging its superior intelligence capabilities. More importantly, Iran's attempt at deterrence by launching its April missile attack on Israel had failed.

Israel then upped the ante with the bold assassination of the Hezbollah chief, Hassan Nasrallah, on September 27 in a suburb of the Lebanese capital, Beirut. Not just Nasrallah but several other senior leaders of this Shia militia were also killed in the targeted bombing of their headquarters. This was a prelude to the start of a major Israeli ground offensive into southern Lebanon with the objective of flushing out Hezbollah forces spread across southern Lebanon.

Iran's second missile barrage against Israel came soon thereafter on October 1. Like the April attack, this, too, reportedly caused little damage. Assisted by the US, Israel was able to intercept and shoot down most of the missiles. Unlike the April attack, however, Iran gave no advance warning about the attack. Nor did it declare its intent to avoid further escalation.

As anticipated, Israel declared

We will now increasingly see the US acting in tandem with Israel to carry out devastating aerial and missile attacks against Iran.

its intention to retaliate against Iran and promised that it would be 'painful'.

While in April, US President Biden had urged restraint on Israel, this time there was no such advice from Washington. On the contrary, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, promised severe consequences for Iran and said the U.S. would 'work with Israel to make that the case'.

This change in US stand has not been fully appreciated. This is no longer just an Iran-Israel conflict.

It is now a US-Iran conflict and that changes the nature of the confrontation unfolding in the region with serious consequences.

It is against this backdrop that Iran chose to launch yet another missile barrage against Israel on October 10, reportedly using hypersonic missiles which it may have developed itself or may have obtained from Russia. There may have been greater damage inflicted on Israel than in the earlier attacks but it is difficult to assess the scale of such damage. The US announced that it had worked together with Israel to shoot down most of the missiles. This time President Biden declared that the US was 'fully, fully, fully supportive of Israel'.

One should now jettison the view of the US acting as a restraint on Israel, in favour of avoiding escalation and a wider regional war. We will now increasingly see the US acting in tandem with Israel to carry out devastating aerial and missile attacks against Iran. Three categories of targets are being mentioned: Iran's nuclear facilities, its oil and gas facilities and terminals and military targets, including the command-and-control centres of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards.

The longstanding effort of Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli leader, to drag the US into a war against Iran, has finally succeeded.

It may be noted that a wider war in the region will have relatively less impact on the US since it is no longer dependent on energy supplies from the region. It would be less worried about an Iran lashing out by attacking oil and gas facilities of the Gulf countries or blocking the Hormuz Straits, through which most of oil and gas supplies are exported to markets both in Europe and Asia. It would be prudent to plan for another era of very high oil prices. India will be seriously impacted.

Iran may be seriously weakened and face a debilitating economic crisis. Its proxies may also be weakened even if they are not neutralised. They will respond as such groups always do — by engaging in asymmetrical warfare. There will likely be an uptick in international terrorism. Even a weakened Iran may finally cross the nuclear threshold and acquire a nuclear arsenal despite the immense sacrifices this may entail. It will be convinced that it is only as a nuclear weapon state that it could ensure its survival. This could have a cascading effect in the region, with Saudi Arabia and Egypt choosing to embrace the nuclear option.

None of the countries of the region can escape a negative fallout from a war against Iran. They have tried to shield themselves by pretending that they do not have skin in the game, but they always did. If they had intervened early in the day to impose some penalty on Israel to stop its brutal war against Gaza and now in Lebanon, the trajectory of events may have been different. But their silence meant that Israel saw no downside to its aggressive policies.

We may be on the threshold of another major war and one on our western flank where nine or more million Indians live and work. Our energy supplies may be significantly disrupted. That India has so few levers to influence events in its strategically critical neighbourhood is a sobering thought.

“ Only the dead have seen the end of war. — George Santayana ”

A lesson learnt from the Israel army

BRIGADHIVYA MADAN (RETI)

MY tenure in Lebanon as the Commanding Officer in the aftermath of the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war will always be etched in the depths of my heart. With a tinge of sadness these days I watch on TV the skyscrapers in Beirut, which I used to drive past, getting zoned to the ground by high-precision air-strikes by the Israel Air Force. The footage triggered a memory of my visit to Israel that year.

It all happened one late night when the Force Commander directed me to represent the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), for a seminar being organised by the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF). The next day, as my convoy of Toyota Land Cruiser Prado, escorted by Quick Reaction Teams, neared the barrier at the Israel-Lebanon border, the leading QRT was flagged down by a smart lady IDF soldier.

My men expected inconsequential queries from her and her team. *Kahan se aye ho, kahan jaa rahu ho, kisko milne ja rahu ho.* (From where have you come, where are you going, whom are you going to meet). But they were in for a rude shock when all of us were instructed to alight from our vehicles, irrespective of our ranks. A body scanner was run over our bodies and all four vehicles thoroughly searched with metal detectors plus a physical search of every nook and cranny. All personnel and vehicles were photographed and details sent to the next check-post by secured digital means. I was then given the most respectful salute by their security chief and left off after about 15 minutes.

Since the seminar was scheduled in the evening, the Israeli Deputy Brigade Commander had, on my request, invited me to attend a Tactical Exercise Without Troops — a discussion on the ground — to get an insight into their functioning. We climbed onto a small hillock where all the young Israeli men and women officers/soldiers were seated on a rocky patch, their weapons slung over their shoulders.

I soon realised they did not differentiate amongst each other across gender or rank. It took me a while to identify the instructor and senior officers as attending the exercise. In the discussion that followed, on the plan of attack on a feature in Lebanese territory, every officer participated. No one deferred to a senior officer. Everyone had a different yet innovative attack plan. No one carried a shred of paper to make notes.

I was highly impressed — here was a pragmatic approach to tactics in which senior officers were giving a carte blanche to their juniors. Soon the lunch break was announced. Everyone unpacked their lunch, which they had carried in their backpacks. I noticed that not a single officer had unhooked his or her weapon from the sling across their chests while eating.

Driving back from the seminar, I realised that the lack of hierarchy between seniors and juniors, across gender and rank, was, indeed, remarkable. Though we are a professional army back home in India, there's always something new to learn.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Homage to Saibaba

Professor Saibaba's tragic passing is a painful reminder of his unjust and torturous incarceration for long years. His life's struggle reminds us both of the power of conviction and the unfairness of our criminal justice system, where the process itself is the punishment. The acts of custodial torture suffered by Professor Saibaba before his eventual acquittal remain an indelible scar on the nation's moral conscience. His suffering should serve as a reminder of the need for collective action to secure our democratic rights, anchored in the inalienability of sacrosanct human rights. An uncompromising assertion against the oppressive invocation of prosecutorial processes is an imperative. The homage to the Professor would be to dedicate ourselves to securing purposive judicial reforms and enacting a comprehensive anti-custodial torture legislation in keeping with the promise of the Constitution.

ASHWANI KUMAR, BY EMAIL

Timeless battles & politics

Refer to 'Gods, demons and political parties'; the timeless battle between good and evil, playing out in myths and politics, reveals uncomfortable truths. From Ram's arrow piercing Ravana to Durga's triumph over Mahishasura, we see deities using deception to secure victory. This mirrors today's political landscape, where parties manipulate to achieve power. The BJP's success in Haryana, for instance, showcases shrewd calculation: working every angle, embracing RSS cadres and exploiting caste dynamics. Yet, the Congress' refusal to face this reality and, instead, blaming the EVMs or infighting, speaks of denial and entitlement. As gods deploy illusions, political parties master strategy; Victory, in both realms, often comes not just from virtue, but from understanding human nature.

SAHIBPREET SINGH, MOHALI

The end of an era

Rafael Nadal's retirement marks the end of an era in tennis, one filled with unmatched passion and resilience. From his tearful farewell alongside Federer at the 2022 Laver Cup to now, Nadal's journey has been defined by intensity and grace. Despite battling injuries and a rare foot condition, he amassed 22 Grand

Slam titles, including a record 14 French Opens, earning the title of 'King of Clay.' Nadal wasn't just a player; he was a force — relentless on the court, humble off it. His rivalry with Federer and Djokovic elevated the sport, while his humility inspired millions. As he steps off the court, the world of tennis loses one of its greatest warriors, but his legacy endures. Gracias, Rafael, for the memories, the fights and the spirit you brought to every match. You leave behind an indelible mark on the sport.

SARGUNPREET KAUR, MOHALI

Govt right in snubbing Canada

Amidst of Ties with Canada hinge upon action against anti-India activities: Govt., India has rightly told Canada that 'decisive and verifiable action' against extremists involved in anti-India activities 'is a pre-condition for restoring normal ties with that country. India voiced its concern over anti-India activities on Canadian soil by Khalistani activists. It raised concerns about the nexus between these forces and criminals involved in drug and human trafficking as well as crimes like extortion. Canada must extradite such criminals to India for legal trial.

VIJAYA SHARMA, BY EMAIL

Zero hunger a distant dream

As per the Global Hunger Index-2024 report, India is on the 105th spot among 127 countries. This is indicative of a serious level of hunger, with child wasting showing a high rate of 18.7 per cent. Even countries like Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka are better placed. Despite considerable industrial and economic growth and self-reliance in food production, India has been unable to provide enough food to large numbers of people. A majority of the pregnant women are anaemic. The kind of offspring such women deliver can be very well imagined. We boast of becoming the fifth largest economy of the world and a developed nation by 2047. But, as of today, free ration to about 82 crore poor people is being distributed, pointing to them reeling under poverty. A NTPI report has also revealed that 74 per cent people can't afford healthy food in India. The country is aiming to achieve zero hunger by 2030. It is a distant dream. The government should pay more attention to this issue.

RAJ KUMAR KAPOOR, ROPAR

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, TUESDAY, OCTOBER 14, 1924

Dissolution

ALTHOUGH it has been generally known for some days that one of two things, either the resignation of Government or the dissolution of Parliament, was about to take place, few had anticipated until the event actually happened that the Government would fall over the question of the prosecution of the *Workers Weekly*. The noise that was made over this matter was justly described by Mr T.P. O'Connor as 'a miserable little tempest in the tiniest tea-cup ever produced in political life,' and what had generally been expected was that after this noise was reverberated in Parliament it would be allowed to die a natural death. It is not meant, of course, that the issue was of no importance whatever. In spite of the explanation given by the Premier, the impression left upon the public mind by the withdrawal of a pending prosecution in a case of this nature was bound to be unpleasant. Granted that the prosecution was a mistake, as it undoubtedly was, on account of the advertisement which it was bound to give to the Communist party, whose organ the offending journal was. Could it possibly be denied that the withdrawal of the prosecution was bound to have substantially the same effect? The answer was that the advertisement which a necessarily prolonged trial, followed either by a conviction and sentence, or what was more probable in this case, the failure of the prosecution, would have given to the party would have been immeasurably greater than what the withdrawal of the prosecution did give. But this was exactly the difference which any Opposition would try to minimise and which the Opposition in this case did actually minimise.

Holding your breath on an India-Pak encounter



NIRUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN
SENIOR JOURNALIST

THE visit of External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar to Pakistan to participate in the October 15-16 meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) is unlikely to have a thawing effect on the 10-year freeze in bilateral relations.

This much the minister has made clear, ruling out any bilateral agenda. "The visit will be for a multilateral event. I'm not going there to discuss India-Pakistan relations. I'm going there to be a good member of the SCO," he said.

Jaishankar's statement is almost identical to that of then foreign minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari in May 2023, before he arrived in Goa for the SCO Council of Foreign Ministers meeting: "My decision to attend this meeting illustrates Pakistan's strong commitment to the charter of the SCO...during my visit, which is focused exclusively on the SCO, I look forward to constructive discussions with my counterparts from friendly countries."

Nonetheless, bilateral drama is written into the script of every India-Pakistan encounter, or even a non-encounter.

That was how it was in Goa, where Zardari and Jaishankar managed to have a showdown without exchanging a single bilateral word. It may be the same in Islamabad.

Jaishankar claimed the other day that he is a "civil and courteous person, and will behave accordingly." That was possibly self-deprecatory humour.

He is no Diljit Dosanjh who won Pakistani hearts the other day by calling up Pakistani singer Hania Aamir on stage during his Europe tour. The galleries back home would be terribly put out if Jaishankar returns without his signature-style tough talk against Pakistan, this time on Pakistani soil.

After all, this is what India-Pakistan diplomacy has been reduced to, not just now, but over several years — a performance for domestic audiences defined by the need to demonstrate toughness toward the other, even in body language. So, Jaishankar's "namaste" to the Pakistan minister in Goa last year got approving media coverage, as "Jaishankar gives the cold shoulder to Zardari."

India and Pakistan are now at a point where even if they want to sit across a table and talk to each other publicly, they cannot do so for fear of enraging domestic constituencies.

This is a logjam that can be broken only with statesmanship and political will. A back-channel process between the two NSAs in 2016-2017, and another the UAE claimed it had mediated in 2020-21 shows a willingness to speak.

When the process makes progress, as in February 2021 when the two armies reaffirmed their commitment to the two-decade-old ceasefire on the Line of Control, things freeze up again, because then the process must be made public.

The lessons of the past are not helpful. Prime Minister



INDIA-PAK DIPLOMACY: Delhi believes it can handle the costs of cross-border terrorism and leave ties in deep freeze. PTI

Atal Bihari Vajpayee's visit in 2004 came after several years of back-channel contacts and a massive shift in relations between the US and Pakistan after 9/11.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh continued the engagement that began then, but India-Pakistan ties have never recovered from the 2008 Mumbai attacks.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's outreach lasted only a week, from his Christmas Day stopover in Lahore on his way back to Delhi, to the Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) attack on Pathankot.

Today, the dynamic has changed from what it was even 10 years ago. Jaishankar will arrive in Islamabad after the successful holding of an election in the post-August 3, 2019 truncated

India and Pakistan are now at a point where even if they want to sit across a table and talk to each other publicly, they cannot do so for fear of enraging domestic constituencies.

Jammu & Kashmir. In Kashmir, the victory of the National Conference (NC) is viewed as a verdict against Delhi and the changes the Modi government wrought on August 5, 2019. But the NC knows, and has said as much, that in running the government, a confrontation with the Centre is not the way forward.

From Delhi's point of view, Pakistan's internal turmoil is a further disincentive for engagement. Who to talk to in Pakistan — the civilian government or the army — was a question even in normal times. But now, General Asim Munir, the embattled army chief, is in the midst of a self-inflicted do-or-die battle with not just the untamable and ever-growing popularity of the jailed Imran Khan, but also sections within his own force.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and his brother, Prime Minister Emeritus Nawaz Sharif, once thought of as the most likely of the Pakistani political class to make a paradigm shift in relations with India, are now beholden to Munir for their survival.

The Beijing-Islamabad relationship, the increasingly communal lens in India on ties with Pakistan plus Delhi's demand for a review of the Indus Waters Treaty further complicate the relationship.

For his part, Munir has not spoken his mind on India. What Delhi can see and feel is that the Pakistan army's preoccupations, including with the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan and its Afghan Taliban patrons, the resurgence in Baloch militancy — with Chinese soldiers in their

crosshairs — have not led to the quietening of groups like the JeM and Lashkar-e-Taiba. A shadowy group, the so-called People's Force Against Fascism, has owned the regular attacks in Jammu since 2021, but Indian security agencies link it to the LeT and JeM.

Delhi believes it can handle the costs of cross-border terrorism and leave ties in deep freeze. But flip the script for a moment. Imagine that Jaishankar is taking with him the message, like Vajpayee in 2004, that Modi has accepted Pakistan's invitation to attend the SAARC summit it has been waiting to host since 2016.

India's unquiet quitting of SAARC due to tensions with Pakistan is one reason why it faces so much resentment from smaller countries in the neighbourhood. When India laments the growing influence of China in the region, it needs to recognise its own role in letting the region go.

A revival of SAARC would put the energy back into India's neighbourhood policy and earn it the goodwill of neighbours. It would certainly put some pressure on Pakistan to conduct itself responsibly.

The revival of SAARC may or may not resolve the differences between India and Pakistan, but it will provide bilateral engagement opportunities, normalise interactions in multilateral form and make them less of a circus than they are now.

Bonus: An India engaged with Pakistan may help Prime Minister Modi to be taken more seriously by the world in his efforts to stop the war between Ukraine and Russia — and give that peace initiative greater heft.

Not criminalising marital rape smacks of patriarchy



SANKAR SEN
FORMER DIRECTOR, NATIONAL POLICE ACADEMY, HYDERABAD

IN an affidavit before the Supreme Court, the Union government has taken a stand against the criminalisation of marital rape. In the affidavit before the apex court, the Home Ministry mentioned that a man has no fundamental right to force sex on his wife as there are enough laws to protect women against sexual violence and that criminalisation of marital rape would be an extremely "harsh measure."

The Supreme Court is hearing a number of petitions seeking to amend the British-era law that a man cannot be prosecuted for rape within marriage, even though violence within marriage is rampant in India. According to a recent

government survey, one in every 25 women has faced sexual violence from their husbands. In January 2023, the Supreme Court appointed two advocates as nodal counsels to streamline the proceedings by compiling a common document of relevant materials from all parties.

Currently, marital rape is outlawed in more than a hundred countries around the world. It was outlawed in the Great Britain in 1991. India is one of the few countries, along with Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Saudi Arabia, where the marital rape law remains in force.

The Indian Government, in its affidavit, highlighted the fact that Parliament, in its wisdom, has deliberately chosen to retain the marital rape exception and urges the court to defer to legislative judgment in such sensitive matters. Parliament is directly elected by the people and is aware of the understanding of the people in such delicate, sensitive issues. In the affidavit, the government urged the court to exercise judicial restraint and leave the regulation of



REPUGNANT: Marital rape violates the right to equality enshrined in Article 14 of the Constitution. ISTOCK

marital relations to the wisdom of Parliament.

A number of petitions have been filed by different women's rights groups to strike down Section 375 of the IPC, which mentions several situations in which having sex is not considered rape, one of them being sex by a man with his wife, if she is not a minor.

According to the campaigners, this kind of argu-

The definition of marital rape was drafted on the basis of Victorian norms that did not recognise men and women as equal.

ment is medieval and unacceptable in modern times. The United Nations, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have raised concerns about India's refusal to criminalise marital rape. The Delhi High Court has given a split verdict, which remains pending for the Supreme Court's final judgment, in which one judge has held that marital rape is "morally

repugnant" while the other expressed the view that the exception to Section 375 of the IPC is valid and should continue to exist.

It has to be borne in mind that the marital exception in the IPC and the definition of marital rape were drafted on the basis of Victorian norms that did not recognise men and women as equal and merged the identity of husband and wife under the "Doctrine of coverture."

Further, marital rape violates the right to equality enshrined in Article 14 of the Indian Constitution. Hence, it creates two classes of women based on their marital status and immunises action perpetrated by men against their wives.

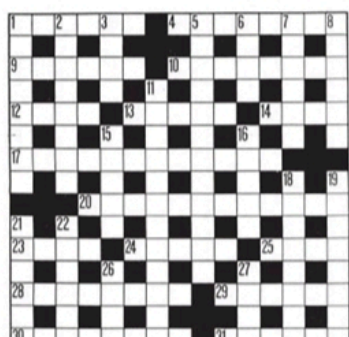
There is no other reason for the victimisation of women other than their married status. Moreover, it becomes difficult for married women to avoid abusive conditions because of their financial dependence on their husbands. The exemption is also violative of Article 21 of the Constitution, which includes the right to life and encompasses the right to health, priva-

cy, and dignity. The Supreme Court has recognised the right to abstain from sexual activity for all women, irrespective of their marital status, as a fundamental right guaranteed by the Constitution.

In 2013, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) strongly recommended that the Government of India criminalise marital rape. The forthcoming judicial review by the Supreme Court will provide an opportunity to eliminate a discriminatory legal relic that violates the fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution and will help to transform women's lives and rights.

However, opponents of criminalising marital rape, including the government, argue that it would threaten the sanctity of family life, increase false allegations, disrupt marital harmony and undermine the institution of marriage itself. But these arguments seem to be presumptions, meant to obscure the harsh realities faced by countless women.

QUICK CROSSWORD



ACROSS


- Sermon (6)
- Theoretical (8)
- Period of instruction (6)
- An uncontested victory (8)
- Uncovered (4)
- Main subdivision of army (5)
- Bringing to nothing (4)
- Falsify accounts (4,3,5)
- Control of expenditure (5,7)
- Inarticulate dense sound (4)
- Group of associated shops (5)
- Medicore (2-2)
- Aristocracy (8)
- Hurt (6)
- Obsolete (8)
- Preoccupy (6)

Saturday's solution

Across: 1. Prone, 4. Diverse, 8. Rye, 9. In advance, 10. Achieve, 11. Least, 13. Stupid, 15. Gimlet, 18. Sheaf, 19. Smother, 21. Upper case, 23. Man, 24. Deplete, 25. Tasty.

Down: 1. Perhaps, 2. Open house, 3. Exile, 4. Deaden, 5. Vivaldi, 6. Run, 7. Elect, 12. All thumbs, 14. Inferno, 16. Tyranny, 17. Escape, 18. Sound, 20. Overt, 22. Pp.

SU DO KU



SATURDAY'S SOLUTION

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

CALENDAR

OCTOBER 14TH 2024, MONDAY

- Shaka Samvat 1946
- Aashwin Shaka 22
- Aashwin Purnimite 29
- Hijri 1446
- Shukla Paksha Tithi 11, up to 6.42 am
- Shukla Paksha Tithi 12, up to 3.43 am
- Ganda Yoga up to 6.01 pm
- Shabdhisha Nakshatra up to 12.43 am
- Moon in Aquarius sign

FORECAST

CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	34	19
New Delhi	35	19
Amritsar	33	19
Bathinda	35	20
Jalandhar	33	20
Ludhiana	34	19
Bhivani	34	20
Hisar	35	17
Sirsa	35	22
Dharamsala	28	15
Manali	23	08
Shimla	23	12
Srinagar	27	07
Jammu	33	19
Kargil	26	08
Loh	13	01
Dehradun	31	20
Mussoorie	23	13