



Canadian frostbite

India must consider the impact of its next steps on its diplomacy and image

After a year of frosty exchanges and declining relations, India and Canada have declared diplomatic war, as India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) revealed this week that the Canadian government had sought to investigate and even interrogate the Indian High Commissioner and five other diplomats, naming them "persons of interest" for the killing of Khalistani activist Hardeep Singh Nijjar. Mr. Nijjar, who was shot dead in June 2023 in British Columbia, was wanted by India. In a press conference, the Canadian police (RCMP) detailed their suspicions that the Indian diplomats were somehow involved with an Indian criminal network they believe is responsible for the killing, as well in the targeting of some in the Indian diaspora. The Canadian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has alleged political interference by India's diplomats, something hitherto it had accused China of. India's MEA has called the charges "preposterous", accusing Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau of orchestrating the investigations for political gain with a pro-separatist Khalistani votebank, given his record-long ratings ahead of the 2025 general election. India also accused what it called the Canadian "regime" for providing space to "violent extremists and terrorists to ... intimidate Indian diplomats and community leaders...", in the name of free speech. Delhi and Ottawa have each expelled six diplomats. With the reduced staff strength in the High Commissions in both capitals and an outraged India reserving the right to further action, it could well mean drastic cuts in visas and curtailed direct travel links.

With the die cast for worsening ties, New Delhi must consider carefully the impact of its next steps not only on Indian diplomacy but also India's image. While it is imperative to defend India's diplomats, it is equally important to investigate the allegations that Indian intelligence agencies have overstepped in operations in the case. The RCMP's naming of Indian underworld gangster Lawrence Bishnoi must also be investigated. As India's adversaries seek to draw links between allegations against Indian intelligence and national security operations in Pakistan, the UAE, Qatar, Canada and the U.S., even India's close partners are looking askance. The U.S.'s statement, that India should cooperate with Canada, must be seen as evidence of that. India's dual policy towards the Nijjar case, which it outrightly rejects any connection to, and the Pannun case in the U.S. - it has sent a high-level inquiry team - also raises questions. The government must prove it has nothing to hide. It must also be more transparent about how it expects to deal with this challenge, and to reports that link Canada's allegations to India's top leadership including National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and Home Minister Amit Shah. Above all, New Delhi must step up an international campaign to ensure accountability from Canada: to either present verifiable evidence, or to stop casting this shadow over India's reputation and its diplomats.

Abject failure

India's 2024 Global Hunger Index ranking is a matter of concern

The 2024 Global Hunger Index (GHI) suggests that India's undernourished population this year would effectively rank as the seventh most populous country in the world - with roughly the population of Brazil, a staggering 200 million people. In stark terms, this is about 14% of India's existing population. The 2024 GHI, which is the report's 19th edition, considers comprehensive sets of data in its findings. In India's case, it considers the Sample Registration System statistical reports, that the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation publishes annually, which provide data such as on births, deaths, infant and maternal mortality, based on reports by the Ministry of Women and Child Development and NTI Aayog.

In 2024, the scorecard for the 127 nations analysed ranges from "low" to "extremely alarming". While India is ranked "serious" (rank 105 and score 27.3), it might as well be considered "extremely alarming" if one considers various other relevant factors. It also establishes the abject and systemic failure by the Indian state to address the most basic of human needs - of adequate food and nutrition that are essential to reap the benefits of the much touted 'demographic dividend'. India was the world's fastest growing economy, at 6.8% in FY24, with an estimated GDP of almost \$4 trillion, ranking fifth globally. However, its per capita income, of \$2,485 in FY24, was less than a fourth of the global average of \$12,920 in FY22, indicating the wide income inequality that would result in vastly varied disposable incomes. This is pertinent as food inflation more than doubled between FY22 and FY24, from 3.8% to 7.5%, affecting the poor. Even as the Economic Survey for 2023-24 blames this on 'extreme weather events, low reservoir levels and damaged crops, affecting farm output', India recorded one of its highest levels of food production - 332 million tonnes in 2023-24. This was largely due to bumper crops in rice and wheat, though pulses and vegetables were affected by extreme weather events. But these numbers when read with India's infant mortality - 26 per 1,000 live births in 2022, while the global average was 28 - and child stunting and wasting rates, of 35.5% and 18.7%, respectively, are revealing. They point to a failure of India's health-care and safety net systems and the denial to address what is apparent, namely, climate change that has already begun to cast a long shadow on India's food security.

The battle cry for justice in the 'City of Joy'

The brutal rape and murder of a junior woman doctor at R.G. Kar Medical College in Kolkata, in August 2024, has generated a historic people's movement in West Bengal. Over the last two months, the 'City of Joy' has become a city of processions. People have been active in a variety of ways - women have gathered in large numbers at the stroke of midnight in urban localities across the State; lights have been switched off for some time as an expression of their solidarity with the demand for justice; slogans have been written and poetry recited on the streets, and the police and the administration have been challenged. But, more importantly, the movement has expressed a lack of trust in the Trinamool Congress-led government in the State, a party that won decisively just a few months ago in parliamentary seats in the 2024 general election.

People-government dynamics

As we write, the junior doctors are on a historic hunger strike on a 10-point charter of demands including 'Justice for RG Kar'. Even during the Durga Puja, thousands of people have participated in demonstrations in solidarity with the doctors. The movement began with junior doctors in R.G. Kar demanding justice for the victim. The slogans of the movement, 'Justice for RG Kar' and 'We want Justice', have practically become a part of the Bengali lexicon. A closer look at the movement shows that it has grown without the leadership of any political party. The element of spontaneity is unmistakable. The people have made it clear that it is their movement and are unwilling to accept any political attempt to claim leadership or the moral high ground.

Why are the people, who just a few months ago, voted decisively for the Trinamool Congress, now on the streets demanding justice for a victim of rape and murder, when the State Chief Minister herself has time and again made the same demand and expressed solidarity with the movement? To understand this, we need to take a deeper look at the political economy of Trinamool Congress rule in the State, its relationship with the people in general, and the middle class and upper middle classes in particular.

It is true that the movement is largely a movement of the middle and upper middle classes in West Bengal. An obvious reason is that the case is about a doctor on duty who was raped and murdered. Bengali upper, middle and lower class households attach great importance to education. Given that entrepreneurship is missing in the average Bengali, they are of the view that the upward mobility of the next generation is possible only through higher education, particularly of a technical kind. The rape and murder of the doctor is also a horrific incident under the jurisdiction of a government institution. It has shaken the middle class who now perceive that the dream of upward mobility



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can be shattered even after a child gets the best possible education.

A State's economic decline, corruption

This perception of a serious threat to upward mobility and social position is not merely a result of this incident. Rather, this movement is also a culmination of growing frustration within the middle class about the economy of the State. The relative position of the State in India, in terms of GDP share, has been in steady decline for decades. The investment scenario has also witnessed similar decline. The employment situation in the State is precarious. But this was also true under the erstwhile Left Front government rule. However, the recruitment of school teachers and college professors through a somewhat transparent School and College Service Commission ensured a modicum of fairness in the system. But the Trinamool Congress government has destroyed this idea of fairness with rampant corruption in important government jobs.

In 2022, the incarceration of the erstwhile Education Minister in the School Service Commission scam showed the degree of involvement of top government functionaries in corruption. The arrest of top Ministers and Trinamool Congress leaders in various scams also showed how the system has become highly corrupt and susceptible to rigging by those in power. In the R.G. Kar case too, there are serious allegations of corruption against the former college principal and the presence of a corrupt syndicate operating in the health system. The R.G. Kar murder case is perceived by the people to be a result of this corrupt system. The CBI is also looking at this angle. Allegations of a cover-up by the police and the hospital administration have further strengthened the perception that the system is rigged by the ruling party and its supporters.

The corruption and extortion racket that exists in West Bengal must be seen in the context of the lack of capital investment and development. In the absence of regular inflows of new capital in the State, the ruling machinery's source of finances is said to be outsourced to local leaders, who run their own fiefdoms and extract resources and money from the people at will. The violence during local elections in West Bengal is the result of these political lords trying to protect their 'fiefdoms' at any cost.

The top leadership of the Trinamool Congress grants, what political scientist Dwapaayan Bhattacharya calls 'franchises' to these local lords, in return for votes and complete loyalty to the top leadership. Government schemes are used to politically manage this extortionist regime where active opposition to the ruling party might deprive the poor from accessing the schemes. The large unorganised sector cannot operate without paying a 'levy' to the ruling party and gaining permission for business.

The people's movement, 'Justice for RG Kar', is also a battle against a system that perpetuates many injustices

In other words, the system is based on extortion and corruption on the one hand and a distribution of public goods through the mediation of government and ruling party on the other. In this system of political management and extortion, the idea of 'justice' and fairness takes a beating. It is in this context that the word 'justice' becomes a crucible where people who have faced myriad injustices from the system gather with their discontent and express their dissatisfaction with the government.

The core of the protests

Is this the beginning of the end of the TMC government? The jury is still out on this. At this juncture a few observations can be made. First, this movement, as of now, remains non-partisan as it has not allowed any political party any space. The largest Opposition party in the State, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), tried and failed. The Left, for the time being, is going with the people's sentiment and asking its cadres to participate in the movement wholeheartedly, without any one-upmanship. That people are not allowing the intervention of any Opposition party is also symbolic of 'a no-confidence' in them. The movement's main slogan is 'justice' and not the oster of the government. But the huge mass upsurge will have political and electoral ramifications. What direction this will take remains to be seen.

Second, while the movement has support within the rural and poor populations, they are yet to come out on to the streets in large numbers. This is not surprising given the dependence of the poor on the government and the ruling party for their livelihood. Any challenge to the ruling party by the poor may rob them of their source of livelihood. The poor are assessing the situation in terms of whether a credible alternative to the Trinamool Congress emerges. This also holds true for Muslims in the State. With the emergence of the BJP as the main Opposition party and the waning of the Left and the Congress, the Trinamool Congress has emerged as the option for them to keep the BJP out. It is true that Muslim voters are also victims of the corrupt syndicate raj created by the TMC. However, as long as a powerful secular alternative to the Trinamool Congress does not emerge, it is difficult for the Muslims to decisively move against the TMC.

In short, West Bengal is poised at a critical juncture. State Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and her government are facing the most difficult political challenge. If it is proved that the police and government machinery were involved in destroying evidence and shielding the culprits, then the challenge for Ms. Banerjee will only increase. The people are resolute in their demand for justice. In this system of many injustices, the people, through their collective assertions, want to see 'Justice for RG Kar', in the hope that this will open up the long road to 'justice for all'.

Spotlighting the work of the Economics Nobel winners

The Great Divergence is a term used to describe the gap in economic and political development between the west and the east. It emerges from this idea that in the 17th and 18th centuries, the advantages that western Europe enjoyed due to industrialisation allowed them to project political power elsewhere. This in turn helped them to reap economic rewards. One of the most relevant findings that emerged from this scholarship is the idea that institutions established during colonialism can have persistent effects many years after countries transitioned to sovereign rule.

Institutions and development

The winners of this year's Economics Nobel, or the Sveriges Riksbank Prize awarded for economic sciences, Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson and James Robinson (AJR), pioneers in new institutional economics, emphasised the role of institutions in the direction of development. Institutions are constraints on human behaviour, the rules of the game in the form of law and order that prevent the state or any other party from the coercive use of force on those who cannot defend themselves. This can take the shape of the constitutional limits on the powers of an executive. Institutions exert their effect through incentives, such as the traffic fines on a busy street that nudges a driver from breaking the speed limit.

AJR's work has highlighted the role of extractive institutions in shaping a country's growth trajectory. Extractive institutions are common in history because they still offer the possibility of generating prosperity but distribute the fruits of growth to a small group of elites. Inclusive institutions, on the other hand, have rules and incentives that motivate people. Colonialism established extractive institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, and South Asia while there are relatively fewer extractive institutions in the United States, Canada, Australia and New



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Zealand. AJR's seminal work was in establishing how extractive institutions have a causal impact on economic growth. They assembled archival evidence to show differences in settler mortality rates in tropical and temperate countries. For instance, settler colonies of Australia and the U.S. settled there in large numbers due to a relatively disease-free environment while colonists who settled in more tropical countries were wiped due to disease.

The key to this type of research was the natural experiment. Social scientists usually cannot manipulate the variables they study like natural scientists running a clinical trial. What they can do is create research design innovations that approximate true experiments. They find observational settings in which causes are randomly assigned among units that they can compare such as individuals, villages, cities or countries. A simple comparison across these units exposed to the presence or absence of a cause can provide evidence for the effects that that particular cause has.

Investigations in India

The biggest contribution by AJR is in inspiring several studies that looked at the long-term effects of historical events on economic development where they identified new variables from detailed historical data. Two of the most well-known studies in this genre come from the Indian subcontinent.

Abhijit Banerjee and Lakshmi Iyer (2005) found that landlord-based colonial land tenure systems resulted in lower agricultural investments and productivity in those areas years later. Lakshmi Iyer (2010) showed that areas under direct colonial rule had fewer schools, health centres and roads than those under indirect colonial rule - an effect that seems to be fading away only recently.

Economic institutions are collective choices determined by political power. Political power can be de jure or de facto. The political power for

Joe Biden does not come from the person but the office that he holds, the President of the United States of America. On the other hand, you cannot say the same for Teodoro Obiang Nguema, the President of Equatorial Guinea, one of the world's longest serving leaders. This would be de facto power.

The question of reform of an extractive institution is about the ability to solve a collective action problem through the economic resources available to them. What AJR's research has shown is that it is difficult for groups with conflicting interests to agree on what good institutions look like. Groups with political power will always have an incentive to use that power to change the distribution of resources in their favour.

A perspective

AJR's research came into prominence at a time when the economics profession was moving away from a presumptive policy framework to something more diagnostic. There was a deliberate move away from universal remedies such as the erstwhile shock therapy in Latin America or the Washington Consensus. Their approach is not without criticism. Acemoglu and Robinson have been sceptical about China's spectacular growth that is expected to slow down due to the eventual spread of extractive institutions.

However, scholars such as Yuen Yuen Ang have argued that AJR's approach tends to privilege western liberal institutions. When the U.S. was a developing country, they were as corrupt or engaged in risky practices quite similar to those undertaken in China today. The narrative of the import of inclusive institutions from western Europe is at odds with America's chequered history with slavery, exclusion of women from property rights, and genocide of Native Americans. Other scholars such as Omur Ulac Ince (2022) have also pointed out the reluctance of AJR to critically engage with the complexity of actually existing colonialism and capitalism.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Fraying ties

The question that India has to ask itself is this: why has Canada come out with such startling allegations about our 'fundamental error' in violating its sovereignty in the matter of the Nijjar killing? The Prime Minister of Canada has eschewed

diplomatic euphemisms and done plain-speaking about Indian machinations. India owes Canada a suitable reply instead of outright repudiation, casual dismissal, and expulsions of Canadian diplomats. Stout denial cannot be our foreign policy. Had there been a

reversal of roles, there is no doubt that the Indian media would have gone to town with righteous indignation. Our credibility is at stake. R. Thomas Paul, Bengaluru

The row is definitely getting murkier. However, it is a

sort of an odd compliment to the power of the Indian diaspora - that in the course of history, the Prime Minister of a G-7 country not only wows an Indian migrant community in his country for votes but is also ready to 'walk the extra mile' to defend some

terrorist elements. S.R. Pattnaik, Bhubaneswar, Odisha

Problem solving

Authorities responsible for flood mitigation do not seem to learn from past experiences. Citizens, as mentioned by a letter writer

from Chennai ('Letters to The Editor', October 16), are never in the loop for consultation or problem solving. This is because elected counsellors or their proxies rarely interact with people living in their wards. Mohan Thomas, Chennai

Reimagining access to justice

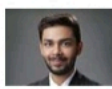
In the heart of India's legal system, from the Supreme Court in Delhi to modest district courts in rural Bihar, a quiet revolution has been in the making for decades. This revolution is not about abrogating colonial laws, drafting new laws, or ensuring speedier verdicts. Instead, it centres on the question — who foots the bill for justice? In this context, the idea of Third-Party Litigation Funding (TPLF) has quickly emerged as a game-changer, potentially opening courtroom doors for many who felt they had been shut out.

A small shopkeeper from Pune's markets, waging a lonely battle against a deep-pocketed e-commerce behemoth, or tribal villagers from Odisha challenging a polluting industrial giant — these are not just David and Goliath tales but real-life legal struggles that often end before they begin, not because of weak cases, but empty wallets. The idea behind TPLF is to rope investors in that would bankroll such legal battles in exchange for a cut of the winnings. The need for such an idea in India is painfully clear, given the massive pendency and skyrocketing litigation expenses. Unfortunately, we have reached a stage where justice is increasingly becoming a luxury only a few can afford.

'Potential equaliser'

The Supreme Court in a landmark judgment *Bar Council of India v. A.K. Balaji* cautiously gave a green signal to TPLF, viewing it as 'a potential equaliser in the courtroom' and categorically holding that TPLF was not off-limits as long as lawyers were not the ones bankrolling such cases. This stance is built on solid historical foundations from the 1876 Privy Council judgment *Ram Coomoo Coondoo v. Chunder Cantoo Mookerjee*, which held that old English laws on champerty against such funding would not apply to India.

The ripple effects of TPLF could reach every corner of India. In



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fact, we may witness situations with consumer groups in Mumbai possibly banding together against food adulterators, Bengaluru's tech startups withstanding pressure against industry giants, tribes supported by NGOs taking on mining mafias without fear of financial ruin, and workers in textile mills facing unfair treatment being able to seek justice. In specialised fields such as medical malpractice or IPK, which heavily depend on expert testimonies, TPLF could honestly turn out to be the difference between a case being heard or silenced. TPLF might breathe new air into Public Interest Litigation, a powerful tool for social change since the 1980s.

Any novel concept cannot evolve without thorough analysis and criticism. Some worry that funders will cherry-pick only the most profitable cases, leaving socially crucial but less lucrative claims in the dust. Further, there is a thorny question of how much say a funder should ordinarily be granted in matters of case strategy. These concerns underscore the need for careful regulation. While States such as Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, and Gujarat have dipped their toes by amending their civil procedure codes to accord recognition to 'third-party financier of litigation', India still lacks a comprehensive national framework for TPLF. Such a regulatory framework is needed to ensure funders are both financially sound and ethically upright, to mandate transparency in funding deals, to protect clients' decision-making rights, and to cap funders' profits reasonably.

A more accessible legal system should also bring stronger consumer safeguards in a country plagued by fake products, better environmental protection in rapidly-industrialising regions, and more accountable institutions across the board. With over 80,000 cases pending at the top court and 140 million pending cases across the nation, TPLF does offer more than a ray of hope. In a

nation where 'justice for all' has long been a constitutional dream, TPLF might help turn it into reality — one funded lawsuit at a time.

As we turn to the question of structuring a regulatory framework governing TPLF, several significant issues crop up. One crucial consideration is whether litigation funders should be licensed as financial service providers. Its suitability pertaining to India requires careful assessment. Establishing a dedicated oversight body to monitor funders and regulate such funding is a topic that requires thoughtful deliberation and discussion. Capital adequacy is another critical concern in TPLF regulation. For instance, Hong Kong's Code of Practice for Third Party Funding in Arbitration 2019 mandates disclosure of financing details, information on adverse costs, liability for costs, and the extent of funder control. Similarly, India must evaluate if its mechanism of ordering security for costs addresses similar risks in the broader litigation context.

Determining the appropriate level of court involvement and the extent of court approval in TPLF arrangements is a complex question that requires resolution. Identifying the right degree of court intervention and recognising specific arrangements that necessitate such oversight will become foundational pillars in shaping a well-defined regulatory framework. This must reconcile access to justice with preserving legal integrity.

As India takes active steps toward reimagining justice, TPLF presents both a challenge and an opportunity. By developing targeted and comprehensive regulations tailored to India's unique legal landscape, the country can foster a thriving ecosystem while safeguarding all parties' interests. In doing so, India might set a new global standard, balancing financial innovation with the fundamental right to justice.

Kerala's nuclear power dilemma

Experts suggest exploring alternative energy sources, such as solar power

STATE OF PLAY

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After a long gap, Kerala is again grappling with the merits and demerits of nuclear power plants. The topic grabbed headlines following a meeting earlier this year between the Chairman and Managing Director of the State-run Kerala State Electricity Board (KSEB) and the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd., where the possibility of building a plant in Kerala was discussed.

The State's Electricity Minister K. Krishnakutty has sought to tread lightly on the contentious issue. According to him, the government can scarcely embark upon such a project without consensus and public approval. In the just-concluded session of the State Assembly, Mr. Krishnakutty stated that the government has not adopted any policy decision regarding the construction of nuclear power stations.

In the meantime, there are reports that the KSEB has suggested Athirappilly in Thrissur and Cheemini in northern Kasaragod as potential locations for a plant. Notably, the KSEB move came on the heels of the 2024-25 Union Budget announcement concerning plans to partner with the private sector for establishing Bharat Small Reactors. What makes the KSEB proposal significant is that its timing coincides with Kerala's struggle against a soaring demand for electricity. Internal generation, which largely hinges on hydropower, satisfies a mere 30% of the requirement, forcing the southern State to bank heavily on power purchases.

In 2023-24 alone, spending



on power purchases touched ₹12,983 crore, according to the KSEB. This fiscal year, it could rise to ₹15,000 crore. While the KSEB has set an ambitious target of achieving an installed power generation capacity of 10,000 MW by 2030, the State's present capability stands at a mere 3,419 MW.

Over the last several decades, ecological concerns have prevented Kerala from pursuing large hydro or thermal power projects. Most of the big hydel schemes are situated in the Western Ghats. On the other hand, the electricity demand has surged, placing Kerala under the perpetual threat of power shortages in the summer months. In April, power consumption surged by 15.62% and peak power demand by 12.38% compared with April 2023, according to data released by the electricity Minister's office.

While supporters of nuclear energy see it as a safe, relatively cheaper power source for energy-starved Kerala, detractors counter that it is a disaster waiting to happen.

The former argue that Kerala is already drawing electricity from the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant (KKNPP), built with Russian assistance in neighbouring Tamil Nadu. The latter points to the Chernobyl, Kyshtym, and Fukushima Daiichi disasters, highlighting the long-term implications of radioactive contamination, the un-

answered questions regarding sustainable storage and disposal of radioactive waste, and the complexities of evacuation in a densely-populated State such as Kerala in the event of a disaster.

Experts in the State's power sector have instead suggested safer alternatives, such as solar power and pumped storage projects, to resolve the energy dilemma. In tapping solar energy, Kerala has made significant progress, with the capacity up from 16.99 MW in 2016 to 121.65 MW today, according to State Power Department figures. Proposals for establishing a nuclear power plant in Kerala had begun doing the rounds in the 1980s; however, public outcry regarding safety prompted the State governments of that time to let such proposals fade away.

The debate re-emerged later in connection with the KKNPP. In 2012, CPI(M) veteran V.S. Achuthanandan stirred a political hornet's nest when he supported anti-Kudankulam demonstrations defying the party line.

Commenting on the recent KSEB move, the current Leader of the Opposition, V. D. Satheesan, advised a serious discussion rather than jumping to conclusions. In Kerala, a wider public debate on this issue has yet to emerge.

However, in shaping any opinion, the question of whether a nuclear power station is absolutely essential for Kerala cannot be ignored. While energy requirements cannot be overlooked, such discussions must also consider the State's population, its peculiar and ecologically-sensitive geography, and its vulnerability to major disasters, the recent being the deadly landslides in the Wayanad district on July 30.

Cauvery awards work only during good monsoons

An overview of the water releases month-wise, since 2018, shows that the order was adhered to when rains were bountiful

DATA POINT

T. Ramakrishnan

The Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal (CWDT)'s prescription of the monthly schedule of the release of water by Karnataka to Tamil Nadu has been a bone of contention since the Tribunal's interim order in June 1991. Though the CWDT's final award, delivered in 2007, was modified by the Supreme Court 11 years later to address certain stakeholders' concerns, the court did not disturb the scheme of the monthly schedule.

Also, considering the growing requirements of Bengaluru city for drinking water, the court awarded an additional 4.75 TMC to Karnataka, along with 10 more TMC. Consequently, Tamil Nadu's overall allocation went down to 404.25 TMC from 419 TMC, as stipulated in the Tribunal's final award, and that of Karnataka rose to 284.75 TMC from 270 TMC. Of the total allocation for Tamil Nadu, Karnataka should release water from its reservoirs in such a manner that 177.25 TMC is realised by the lower riparian State annually (June-May) as per the monthly schedule.

The first four months of the water year — June-September or southwest monsoon (SWM) — are crucial for both the principal riparian States of the Cauvery river, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. It is during the June-September period that the upper riparian State, Karnataka, receives the most rainfall. For Tamil Nadu, these four months account for nearly 70% of the annual quota — 123.1 TMC — of inflows into the State.

This year's SWM was bountiful for both the riparian States compared to the previous year. Last year, the lack of adequate rainfall led to emotions running high in both States over the lack of water supply for irrigation. This year, however, as the social media handle of the Karnataka State Natural Disaster Monitoring Centre

(KSNDMC) revealed, the gross storage of four reservoirs of the Cauvery basin at the end of the monsoon period (September 30) was almost 60% higher than what it was on the corresponding day last year.

In terms of TMC, this year's storage was about 110.83 TMC against the previous year's 59.85. This year's storage amounted to 97% of the gross capacity, 114.57 TMC. Karnataka's four reservoirs in the basin — Krishnaraja Sagar, Kabini, Hemavathi, and Harangi — received at least 80 TMC; more than the previous year's 30-year average of cumulative inflows. According to the KSNDMC, a total of 338 TMC was received by the reservoirs during this year's SWM. With the bountiful rains and the reservoirs filling up, water supply should not be an issue in the coming months for both agricultural and drinking water purposes in Karnataka.

The story for the lower riparian State, Tamil Nadu also coheres with the above; this year's figure of Cauvery water realisation exceeded the 200 TMC mark, with nearly 204 TMC released to the State. The receipts are vital as Tamil Nadu's Cauvery delta relies mainly on water from the upper riparian State during the SWM since the northeast monsoon (NEM) is relatively unpredictable and erratic in terms of rainfall patterns. This is evident in the way the India Meteorological Department views the NEM — as one of large spatial variations.

The eastern part of the Cauvery Delta, also closer to the coast, receives heavy rainfall many times in November and December, but the rest of the State does not receive this frequency of rainfall.

Considering these factors, the CWDT and the Supreme Court retained the scheme of a monthly schedule for the release of water from the Karnataka reservoirs. This was done to ensure that Tamil Nadu receives the maximum amount of water from June to September. The measurement is done

by taking the flow calculated at the Central Water Commission's gauge and discharge site in Biligundlu as the reference point.

The overall water requirement for Tamil Nadu, assessed in the CWDT's report (volume 5, pages 85-86), is 390.85 TMC to provide irrigation to 24.71 lakh acres of cropping land. This figure includes 10 TMC for reservoir losses.

Even though this year's total figure of realisation has crossed the annual share, Tamil Nadu, at meetings of the Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA) and Cauvery Water Regulation Committee (CWRC), at regular intervals, modified the stipulated quantum of water release for a few months, the cumulative realisation during June-September fell short of the prescribed quantity only in two out of six years. Table 1 shows that since 2018, the highest quantity around 452 TMC — during the southwest monsoon was registered in 2022-23. The lowest was around 45 TMC in 2023-24, going purely by the statistical average.

Chart 2 showing average figures of realisation month-wise for the SWM since 2018 — the year of the Supreme Court's judgment — reveals that August accounts for about 47% of the season's overall figure. July's share is 27% followed by September at around 23% with June constituting the rest.

This break-up across months is in line with the 42-year-long average figures (1974-75 to 2015-16) worked out by the Central Water Commission (CWC) which calculated August's share at 44%, July 26%, September 27% and June 6%.

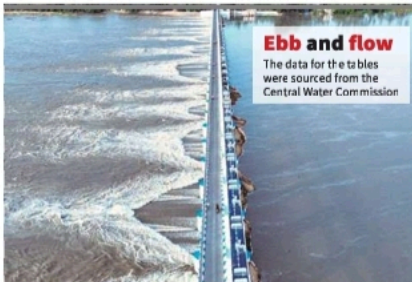


Table 1: The table shows the average figures of realisation month-wise for the southwest monsoon since 2018 — the year of the Supreme Court's judgment

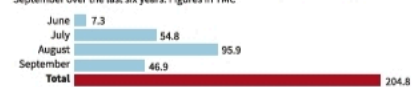
STATEMENT OF FLOWS REALISED AT BILIGUNDLU		Figures in TMC			
Month/period	Quantity as per Supreme Court's judgment of February 16, 2018	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
June	9.2	13.3	2.1	6.2	
July	31.2	124.7	7.4	11.3	
August	46.0	176.5	92.3	57.5	
September	36.8	31.5	71.7	45.2	
Southwest monsoon season	123.1	346.0	173.5	120.2	
Excess/shortfall		222.9	50.3	-2.9	
Annual	177.3	405.4	275.2	211.4	
Excess/shortfall		228.2	97.9	34.1	

N.A. = not applicable. * worked out, if the year in question was a normal one

Month/period	Quantity as per Supreme Court's judgment of February 16, 2018	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
June	9.2	7.7	16.5	2.8	2.3
July	31.2	28.0	106.9	8.7	96.5
August	46.0	22.6	223.6	20.0	78.4
September	36.8	33.1	105.5	13.6	27.6
Southwest monsoon season	123.1	91.5	452.5	45.2	204.8
Excess/shortfall		-31.7	329.3	-77.97*	81.7
Annual	177.3	281.1	667.5	81.4	N.A.
Excess/shortfall		103.8	490.3	-95.9*	N.A.

N.A. = not applicable. * worked out, if the year in question was a normal one

N.A. = not applicable. * worked out, if the year in question was a normal one



Worked out by T. Ramakrishnan

FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindustani

FIFTY YEARS AGO OCTOBER 17, 1974

Indian goods exhibition at London trade centre

London, Oct. 16: Indian manufacturers of products ranging from mass consumption fashion goods to sophisticated electronics products are participating in an exhibition here at the World Trade Centre.

This is part of India's efforts to display a wide range of non-traditional export items. In the same spirit, the engineering goods Export Promotion Council office here opens a permanent showroom to-morrow.

India hopes to boost its exports to Britain by several million pounds and there is a concerted effort on the part of the Indian authorities to project a new image of industrial India. Most British importers think of India only in terms of textiles, tea, coffee, jute, and spices.

Over 900 buyers from importing companies, department stores, and mail order houses have accepted invitations to attend the current four-day "India 1974-Buyers and Sellers Meet" Exhibition at the World Trade Centre.

The Indian exhibitors are also expecting buyers from Continental and American companies to show up.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO OCTOBER 17, 1924

Retrenchment at the Tatas.

Bombay, Oct. 16: At a press interview Mr. B.D. Tata confirmed the report that emanated from Jamshedpur, that the Board of Directors of the Tata Iron and Steel Company have ordered retrenchment and economy in all possible ways. He said the copper coke ovens and one blast furnace, had been shut down. Consequently, one of the iron ore mines would not be worked. The requirements of the remaining four furnaces could be met from the other mines owned by the company. Mr. Tata added: Owing to heavy imports of steel from abroad, particularly from the continent of Europe, at prices with which it is impossible for the company to compete without incurring heavy losses, there is an unusually large accumulation of stocks in the yards at Jamshedpur.

Consequently, production has to be cut down in order to avoid the locking up of large capital. Asked as to the number of men thrown out of employment, Mr. Tata could not give the actual figure, but feared the number must run into hundreds.

NEWS IN NUMBERS

The funds approved by the Cabinet for PM-AASHA

35,000 In ₹ crore.

government has approved funds for PM-AASHA with an aim to provide remunerative prices to farmers. **AP**

Number of Indian flights disrupted by hoax threats

10

At least 10 flights have been disrupted due to bomb threat messages received by airlines. The issue of hoax threat messages to various airlines has led to the diversion of flights including one bound for Chicago. **AP**

Magnitude of the earthquake recorded in eastern Turkey

5.9

The tremor was felt at Kale in Malatya, a province which was hit by the violent 7.8-magnitude earthquake which struck on February 6, 2023. This time, the tremor was strongly felt in several large cities. **AP**

The number of people killed in a fuel tanker explosion in Nigeria

94

A fuel tanker explosion in northern Nigeria has killed at least 94 people and left 50 injured. Many victims had been trying to collect fuel spilt on the road after the tanker crashed in northern Jigawa. **AP**

Palestinians killed in the Gaza Strip since October 7, 2023

42,409

The toll includes 65 deaths in the last 24 hours, according to the health ministry in Gaza. **AP**

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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How firms like Samsung view labour

Why is the South Korean electronics giant adamant on not recognising the Samsung India Workers' Union? What is Kaizen, the Japanese production method, and how does it influence East Asian capital? How do Chaebols operate in South Korea?

EXPLAINER

Anand P. Krishnan

The story so far:

On October 15, the Tamil Nadu labour department announced that the month-long strike at Samsung's manufacturing facility in Sriperumbudur has ended after successful negotiations between the workers and company management. The Samsung India Workers' Union (SIWU), affiliated to the Centre for Indian Trade Unions, announced the withdrawal of the strike and said they will return to work on October 17. While workers have raised various economic demands such as an incremental increase in their salaries over the next two years, at the heart of their protest is the demand for the recognition of SIWU. The management has continued to stonewall this particular demand, and the workers have resorted to the judicial route, with the matter now pending before the Madras High Court.

When did Samsung India start?

The South Korean company, Samsung commenced its operations in India in 1995. The biggest generator of revenue for the company in India are smartphone devices, with most of these manufactured at its second plant in Noida, Uttar Pradesh. Its facility in Sriperumbudur was established in 2007, and produces consumer durables such as televisions, refrigerators, washing machines and air conditioners. It employs close to 5,000 workers. In 2022, the company signed an MoU with Tamil Nadu government, through an investment of ₹1,588 crore, to set up a new plant to produce compressors for refrigerators.

How do East Asian firms view unions?

Forming a workers' union in a foreign-owned enterprise in India is a challenge in itself, with the need to pass through several political-bureaucratic loops to get it registered. However, getting



Across borders: The National Samsung Electronics Union workers shout slogans in front of the Samsung Electronics Nano City Hwaseong Campus in Hwaseong, South Korea on July 8. **REUTERS**

it recognised by the management has often proved to be even more difficult. Labour subordination and disciplining has remained the default setting of most East Asian companies operating in India, especially in the past two decades. Some notable workers' protests in different parts of India have been at manufacturing facilities with East Asian capital – Honda Scooters and Motorcycles in 2005, Maruti Suzuki in 2011-12, Wistron in 2020 and Foxconn in 2021. The stressful working conditions in these factories are shaped and determined by their management philosophy, which largely draws inspiration from the Japanese production method called Kaizen – that is, continuous improvement to increase work intensity and reduce idle time. Over the years, through offshore supply chains, global manufacturing in the electronics industry has been reordered into just-in-time production – a system in which products are created to meet

demand rather than in surplus or in advance of need. As companies adopt this model to increase efficiency, the output is ramped up ahead of product launches and peak sales periods. It leads to punishing work ethic, regimented culture of rules and unyielding deadlines.

It is in this context that the demand for representative associations is pertinent from a labour-centric perspective. However, past experiences – the ready reference being Maruti Suzuki workers' struggles to form a union – reflect the reluctance of managements. They remain extremely wary of unions, especially those with communist affiliations, and are apprehensive of their militant actions. As is visible in the present case, while there has been some conciliation towards other demands, Samsung has remained adamant on not recognising SIWU.

What about labour in South Korea?

Companies in South Korea such as

Samsung are called Chaebols. These are large, diversified business conglomerates owned and controlled by families or their close kin for generations. Chaebols have dominated South Korean economy since the 1960s and have also had significant links to the country's polity. Their origins can be traced to the encouragement and support provided by the authoritarian military dictatorship to rebuild the economy post the Korean war in 1953. The export-led growth strategy of Chaebols was dependent on their labour management strategies which was a combination of minimising labour costs, and intensification of work. Since then the work environment has moved from militaristic labour control and subordination in the 1970s to more paternalistic management practices such as welfare schemes and subsidies in later years. According to scholars Seung-Ho Kwon and Michael O'Donnell, as independent trade unions emerged in the country in the 1980s, the Chaebols brought in automated production systems, introduced external subcontractors and restructured as well as decentralised their operations to curb labour power (including transnational investments). Presently, Samsung, founded by Lee Byung-chul in 1938, is the country's largest Chaebol.

What are the concerns for India?

The prolonging of the strike causes concerns for both central and State governments – for the former, regarding India's manufacturing ambitions and becoming an alternative to China, and for the latter, who are forced to strike a balance between attracting foreign investments and signifying its political-governing philosophy of dignity and justice. The resolution of the issue is therefore a matter of prestige and urgency rather than any pro-labour development.

Anand P. Krishnan is a Fellow at the Centre of Excellence for Himalayan Studies, Shiv Nadar Institution of Eminence, Delhi NCR, and an Adjunct Fellow, at Institute of Chinese Studies, Delhi.

THE GIST

▼ The South Korean company, Samsung commenced its operations in India in 1995. The biggest generator of revenue for the company in India are smartphone devices, with most of these manufactured at its second plant in Noida, Uttar Pradesh.

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What does the Global Hunger Index 2024 state about India?

Why has the Ministry of Women and Child Development raised concerns over the data collection method?

Saptaparno Ghosh

The story so far:

The Global Hunger Index for 2024 states that a 'serious' level of hunger is prevalent in India. It ranks India 105th among 127 countries, giving it a score of 27.3. A score below 9.9 indicates low levels of hunger, 10-19.9 moderate, 35-49.9 alarming and above 50 extremely alarming.

What does it state about India?

The score is based on four broad parameters, that is, child stunting (share of children under five with lower weight proportional to their age, reflecting chronic undernutrition), undernourishment (share of population with insufficient caloric intake), child wasting (share of children under five with lower weight proportional to their height) and child mortality (share of children who die before their fifth birthday). The report traced 13.7% of the population to be undernourished, 35.5% of children as

stunted, 18.7% of children wasted and 2.9% of children dying before their fifth birthday. As per the survey, India has the highest child wasting rate globally.

However, the analysis states that India has demonstrated "significant political will" to transform the food and nutrition landscape – pointing to the National Food Security Act, Poshan Abhiyan (National Nutrition Mission), PM Garib Kalyan Yojna (PMGKY) and National Mission for Natural Farming. But the report argues there exists room for improvement. To illustrate a solution, the report points to the co-relation between the poor nutritional status of mothers being transferred onto their children. There exists an "intergenerational pattern of undernutrition" where the factors driving India's high child wasting rate entail mothers inflicted with insufficient weight gain during pregnancy and low birth weight among infants.

What about India's GDP growth?

The report states that the relationship

between per capita GDP growth and low levels of hunger is "not always direct or guaranteed". In other words, GDP growth alone does not result in improved food and nutritional security for the entire populace. Thus, the report puts forth the imperative for policies to emphasise pro-poor development alongside addressing social/economic inequalities.

What solutions does it propose?

Broadly, the report proposes a multifaceted approach such as improved access to social safety nets, addressing complementary factors relating to well-being and nutrition, alongside dedicated approaches to assessing and provisioning nutritional needs. The first of the proposed measures entail improved access to safety nets and cash transfers. These, the report states, involve improving access to programs such as the Public Distribution Scheme (PDS), PMGKY and Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS). Other than this, it proposes investments in

agriculture and a holistic food systems approach which promotes diversified, nutritious and ecological food production including nutri-cereals such as millets.

Other dedicated approaches include making effective investments in mother and child health. It recommends a set of factors such as improved water, sanitation and hygiene, among other things. Finally, the report also seeks interventions to consider links between food and nutrition, gender and climate change.

What is the debate about data collection methodology?

The previous year, the Ministry of Women and Child Development had expressed concerns about the data not being accessed from their ICT application 'Poshan Tracker'. The Ministry pointed out that UNICEF, WHO and the World Bank have acknowledged the tracker as a "game-changer". It observed child wasting being consistently below 7.2% on a month-on-month basis as compared to the 18.7% stated in the 2023 index. However, researchers have maintained that they use survey estimates that have been vetted for inclusion in the Joint Malnutrition Estimates and/or the WHO Global Database on Child Growth and Malnutrition. It argues that using the same data source ensures that the numbers are produced using comparable methodologies. "Introducing exceptions to this process for any country would compromise the comparability of the results and the ranking," it states.

THE GIST

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Nobel for microRNA underscores the primacy of RNA in biology

When Victor Ambros and Gary Ruvkun won the Nobel Prize last week, 581 clinical trials involving miRNA had been registered in the U.S. alone. Of these, 215 had been completed and 20 had been terminated over safety concerns, showing the importance of its role in finding cures

Arun Panchapakesan

In 1993, two post-doctoral researchers named Victor Ambros and Gary Ruvkun independently published back-to-back papers in the December 3 issue of the journal *Cell*. In their papers, they described how the roundworm *Caenorhabditis elegans* uses a small RNA molecule to control the production of a protein.

While the work was certainly novel, it did not receive much attention at the time because other scientists thought the phenomenon was unique to worms and of no practical relevance to understanding its role in other life-forms, including humans.

It was not until seven years later that Ruvkun found a similar mechanism existed in nearly all of the animal kingdom. The paper created waves in the scientific community since it represented a whole new paradigm in molecular biology, with potentially far-reaching implications on human health and disease.

Last week, Ambros and Ruvkun were awarded the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for their discovery of microRNA and the latter's role in gene regulation, a process universal to all cells.

What, when, where, why

Every cell in an organism contains a copy of its DNA, the blueprint for how to build and maintain that organism. The building and maintenance activities are achieved by molecules called proteins; the DNA contains instructions on how cells can make these proteins.

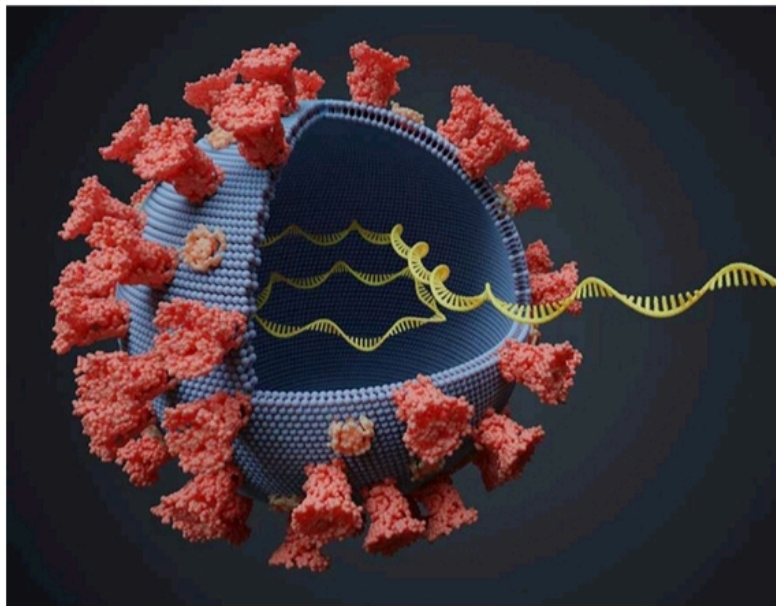
Every protein has a specific function. For instance, haemoglobin is responsible for carrying oxygen from the air we breathe to the cells in the body. Each set of instructions to make a given protein from the organism's total DNA is called a gene.

The DNA of humans has between 19,000 and 20,000 genes. While all cells in the body contain all these genes, and thus the information on how to make all the proteins, no cell makes all 20,000 proteins. Gene expression – the process of reading the information in a gene to make a protein – is specific to cell types. A given cell will only make those proteins it needs for its function. Thus the red blood cells make haemoglobin but not the cells that make up the stomach.

When a cell wants to make a protein, it first makes a transient copy of the gene called the messenger RNA (mRNA). The information in the mRNA is then used to make the protein. This process of making an mRNA copy of the information in the gene is called transcription. A gene is transcribed to mRNA to make a protein only in those cells where that protein is required.

Once the mRNA is made, the cell will continue to make proteins until it is stopped. The protein production process must be stopped when enough proteins have been made because if it isn't controlled, excess protein, apart from being a waste of resources, can be harmful to the cell.

For a long time, this halting of protein production, called post-transcriptional gene regulation, was thought to occur when the mRNA degrades – either on its own (due to its low stability) or aided by special enzymes that the cell makes.



Every cell in an organism contains a copy of its DNA, the blueprint for how to build and maintain that organism. The building and maintenance activities are achieved by molecules called proteins. GETTY IMAGES/STOCKPHOTO

Ambros and Ruvkun essentially identified a new way in which cells regulate protein production. They discovered the existence of tiny RNA molecules called microRNA (miRNA) that bind to mRNAs and prevent protein synthesis.

A vital cellular process

Chemically, miRNA is made of the same material that makes up mRNA. The difference lies in their sizes: RNA is composed of a combination of four chemical bases arranged on a sugar-phosphate backbone, rather like a long bead of strings made of four coloured beads arranged at random. Their length is therefore measured in how many beads, or bases, they contain. Thus, mRNAs range from hundreds to lakhs of bases, while the average miRNA is just 22 bases long.

The composition of these 22 bases – or the order of arrangement of the beads on the string – depends on which mRNA a given miRNA is going to target. Usually, the sequence of bases of an mRNA is complementary to a stretch of bases on the target mRNA, making it specific to that mRNA. Once the miRNA binds to its target, the target mRNA is either marked for destruction or is unable to serve as a template to produce protein, thus switching protein production off. This way, if needed, miRNAs can inhibit the synthesis of a given protein even before it begins. Since Ruvkun's report of the first human miRNA in 2000, researchers have discovered thousands of new miRNAs, playing roles in regulating almost 60% of all human genes.

Switching off protein production at the

Ambros and Ruvkun essentially identified a new way in which cells regulate protein production. They discovered the existence of tiny RNA molecules, called microRNA that bind to mRNAs and prevent protein synthesis

right time is a vital cellular process. Therefore, it was no surprise when researchers found miRNAs to play pivotal roles in animal development, the differentiation of cells into their correct types, cell division, cell death, and – importantly – response to stress and disease, especially in various cancers. The high specificity of miRNAs made them ideal candidates for targeted therapies for conditions like cancer, which involve abnormal protein production. But despite their potential, the story of the research on the clinical utility of miRNAs does not have a very happy beginning.

RNA is important

The rapid academic progress on miRNAs prompted scientists to test the therapeutic potential of miRNAs. Early experiments in mice gave encouraging results, where researchers were able to inhibit the formation of lung tumours using miRNAs.

The first clinical trial of a human miRNA, called miRNA-34a, soon followed in 2013. But the technology to deliver the mRNA to the target cells was not as well developed then as it is now; as a result, scientists had to administer extremely

high doses of the molecule to ensure a small amount would reach the target site. This had the unfortunate consequence of triggering an immune response. When four patients died, the investigators immediately stopped the trial.

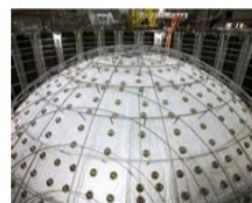
Scientists later made significant advances in packaging and delivering miRNA, allowing others to test multiple other miRNAs against various diseases – including hepatitis C, multiple cancers, and cardiovascular diseases.

When Ambros and Ruvkun won the Nobel Prize last week, 581 clinical trials involving miRNAs had been registered in the U.S. Of these, 215 had been completed and 20 had been terminated over safety concerns.

Since other alternatives are available for most of these conditions, miRNA's time in medicine has yet to come. Hopefully the Nobel Prize will change this field's fortunes: despite the challenges it faces in therapy, miRNAs' relevance to physiology and medicine is unquestionable. This is why Ambros and Ruvkun were awarded the Nobel Prize despite the absence of therapeutic applications.

This is also the fifth instance of a Nobel Prize being awarded for RNA research: mRNA vaccines won in 2023; RNA interference in 2006; RNA's role as enzymes in 1989; the discovery of mRNA in 1965. Indeed, scientists are slowly understanding that RNA, not DNA, is at the core of the delicate balance cells must maintain.

(Arun Panchapakesan is an assistant professor at the Y.R. Gaitonde Centre for AIDS Research and Education, Chennai. arun.panchapakesan@gmail.com)



The Jiangmen Underground Neutrino Observatory (JUNO) in Kaiping, Guangdong province, China. REUTERS

Chinese lab that seeks to crack physics mystery nears completion

Reuters

A giant sphere 700m underground with thousands of light-detecting tubes will be sealed in a 12-storey cylindrical pool of water in the coming months for an experiment that will shine new light on elusive subatomic particles known as neutrinos.

After years of construction, the \$300-million Jiangmen Underground Neutrino Observatory (JUNO) in China's southern Guangdong province will soon start gathering data on neutrinos, a product of nuclear reactions, to help solve one of the biggest mysteries in particle physics.

Every second, trillions of extremely small neutrinos pass through matter, including the human body. Mid-flight, a neutrino, of which there are three known varieties, could transform into other types. Determining which types are the lightest and the heaviest would offer clues to subatomic processes during the early days of the universe and to explaining why matter is the way it is.

To that end, Chinese physicists and collaborating scientists from all over the world will analyse the data on neutrinos emitted by two nearby Guangdong nuclear power plants for up to six years.

JUNO will also be able to observe neutrinos from the Sun, gaining a real-time view of solar processes. It could

Scientists are mulling relaying long-distance messages via neutrinos, which pass through solid matter such as the earth at near light-speed

also study neutrinos given off by the radioactive decay of uranium and thorium in the earth to better understand mantle convection driving tectonic plates.

Due to go operational in the latter half of 2025, JUNO will outpace the far larger Deep Underground Neutrino Experiment (DUNE) under construction in the U.S.

Locations collaborating on JUNO hail from institutions including France, Germany, Italy, Russia, the U.S., and even self-governed Taiwan, which China claims as part of its territory.

Neutrino observatories are also being constructed in other places. "The one in the U.S. will be six years behind us. And the ones in France and Japan... will be two or three years later than us. So we believe we can get the result of mass hierarchy (of neutrinos) ahead of everybody," Wang Yifang, chief scientist and project manager of JUNO, said.

So far, real-life neutrino applications remain a distant prospect. Some scientists have mulled the possibility of relaying long-distance messages via neutrinos, which pass through solid matter such as the earth at near light-speed.

Researchers are keeping their distance from politics to focus on the science, although they remain at the mercy of governments providing the funding.

The passage of neutrinos from the two power stations will be logged by JUNO's 600-tonne spherical detector, which will immediately transmit the data to Beijing electronically. The data will be simultaneously relayed to Russia, France and Italy, where it can be accessed by all of the collaborating institutions, said Cao Jun, JUNO's deputy manager.

For data on the more crucial aspects of the experiment, at least two independent teams will conduct analyses, with their results cross-checked. "When these two groups get a consistent result, we can publish it," Cao said.

THE SCIENCE QUIZ

Remembering a star that was briefly the brightest...

Vasudevan Mukunth

QUESTION 1

This star has gone by the names IES 1727-21.4, GCRV 67121, and PN G04.5-06.8, among others. But before the modern era, it was known simply as X's star, after a German astronomer who described its appearance in a 1606 book. Name X.

QUESTION 2

The book (from Q1) had the extended title *On the New Star in the Foot of the Serpent Handler*. This was because the star was located in a constellation called Serpens Australis. Its common name is _____, from the Greek. Fill in the blank.

QUESTION 3

This star became famous in 1604 when it went supernova, producing light of such intensity that it remains the most recent Milky Way supernova confirmed to have been visible to the naked eye. But in its time, it was the second such star in 32 years. Name the first.

QUESTION 4

What type of supernova (from Q3) explosion did the star undergo? Hint: Astronomers routinely use such supernovae as "standard candles" because they emit a fixed amount of light at their peak and thus indicate how far away they are.

QUESTION 5

Name the German astronomer with whom X (from Q1) had debated the features and causes of the supernova event, including the

Copernican theory that the Sun, not the earth, was at the centre of the universe.

Answers to October 15 quiz:

1. Names of connections between neurons and nodes – **Ans: Synapses and weights**

2. Model that shot to fame during the 2006-2009 Netflix Prize – **Ans: Restricted Boltzmann machine**

3. Generic name for states to which Hopfield network models tend – **Ans: Attractors**

4. Paradox relating protein structure to computation time – **Ans: Levinthal's paradox**

5. Object of AlphaFold's study when analysing amino acid sequence – **Ans: Multiple sequence alignment**

Visual: **Alan Turing**

First contact: Dalbeer Pharswan | K.N. Viswanathan | Anmol Agrawal



Visual: Identify the astronomer in this picture and specify the question number with whose answer he is connected. CREDIT: PUBLIC DOMAIN

Please send in your answers to
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subject 'Daily page'

The
Hindustan Times
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

[OUR TAKE]

Multiple battles
in Maharashtra

Coalitions of convenience seek electoral redemption in a complex polity

With the Election Commission of India (ECI) scheduling assembly elections on November 20, political parties in Maharashtra have a relatively small window to finalise seat deals, decide candidates, and run campaigns, though the state has been in poll mode since the time of the general elections in May-June. Leaders have been travelling extensively while the Eknath Shinde government has been large-hearted with welfare schemes and freebies, among them toll-free travel on the Mumbai highway. The maths of the pre-poll sops will complicate the state's fiscal situation, but that's the least of worries for the ruling dispensation — and the Opposition — in a polity still in churn.

On the face of it, state politics is polarised along two seemingly stable coalitions, which, ironically, are alliances of convenience. The two alliances and their constituent parties that contested the 2019 assembly elections saw major realignments and splits as a dispute raged over who got to be the chief minister (CM) after the results. The BJP and Shiv Sena, allies that bonded over Hindutva in the 1990s, had an acrimonious break-up, with the latter ending up in the Congress-Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) camp. Sena chief Uddhav Thackeray's stint as CM of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA), a coalition that included the Congress and the NCP, was short-lived as his party split, with a section under Shinde returning to the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance's local variant, the Mahayuti. Sharad Pawar's NCP too split and a faction under Ajit Pawar joined the Mahayuti. Parallel to this realignment of parties/factions, there has been a churn in caste relations with the Marathas mobilising for Other Backward Classes (OBC) status. The beneficiary of this churn in the parliamentary polls was the MVA, which won 30 of the 48 Lok Sabha seats in the state.

The MVA may be eyeing a repeat. But the Haryana results have energised the BJP and the Mahayuti. The good monsoon may limit anti-incumbency in Vidarbha and Marathwada. A counter-mobilisation of OBCs is expected in reaction to the Maratha mobilisation under Manoj Jarange-Patil. On another plane, this election is an existential battle for survival for the two Senas and its leaders. For Sharad Pawar, a pivotal figure in Maharashtra politics, this election is about pride, respect, and legacy. A win in Maharashtra will boost the Congress's claim that the party is on the mend. But if the BJP wins, it can assure itself, and everyone else, that the June dip in seats was just a blip.

UP's ordinances will
entrench prejudice

The Uttar Pradesh government's move to bring two new ordinances, with punitive prescriptions for "spitting on food" and "contaminating food with human waste", is an instance of policy's willful capitulation to social media/messaging services' amplification of blatantly communal posts. Mainlining the outrage against such rumoured incidents feeds into the narrative that these alleged acts are common and carried out by a particular community to target another and thus need specific legal provisions to curb.

This is not to say that such complaints don't deserve the attention of law-keepers. Investigate by all means if they are credible and under existing penal provisions, such as extant food adulteration laws which are poorly implemented. But magnifying the allegations with specific legislation and political dog-whistles around these will only feed communal polarisation, more of which the state certainly doesn't need. The provision of 10-year jail terms for such acts, as well as for failing to display food outlet employee/proprietor details, adds another dimension — facilitating targeted harassment and rent-seeking by administrative personnel. Given that death due to food adulteration carries a three-year jail term as per existing provisions, the ordinances not only provide for punishment disproportionate to the offence but also raise questions of legislative wisdom.

Legitimising unfounded claims in viral social media posts won't serve the state's interests. Institutionalising prejudice will create administrative challenges — by diverting capacity from pressing issues such as job creation, health, education, and infrastructure — even as communal wedges divide society further, with concomitant effects on harmony and law and order. The state, which is aspiring to re-emerge as an industrial and agriculture powerhouse, would do well to junk this plan.

In Nicobar, missing
trees for the forest

The mega-infrastructure project in the island calls for scrutiny considering its impact on the environment

In the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, a quasi-government agency called the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation (ANIDCO). Established in 1988 under the Companies Act "to develop and commercially exploit natural resources for the balanced and environment-friendly development of the territory," its main activities include trading petroleum products, India made foreign liquor, and milk, managing tourism resorts, and infrastructure development for tourism and fisheries. Its average annual turnover and profit over the last three financial years have been ₹370 crore and ₹35 crore, respectively.

In August 2020, this little-known entity saw a striking makeover — an expansion of portfolio, capacity, and business interests that the biggest corporations might only dream about. Virtually overnight, it was given charge of implementing a ₹7,000-crore mega-infrastructure project in Great Nicobar Island that involves the construction of a massive trans-shipment port, a power plant, an airport, and a township, and a tourism project spread over 130

sq km of forest land. Two years later, ANIDCO got two crucial clearances from the ministry of environment, forests, and climate change (MoEFCC) for the project. First, in October 2022, the ministry's Forest Advisory Committee (FAC) allowed for what is perhaps the largest single diversion of forest land in recent times. It signed away 130 sq km (larger than Mumbai's Sanjay Gandhi National Park) of some of the most pristine and biodiverse tropical forests anywhere. Then, about a month later, the Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC) granted the crucial environmental clearance, clearing the path for the project to move ahead.

Many serious questions were raised, including the fact that nearly one million trees would be cut for just this one project. The initial estimates started with about 1 lakh trees, but the project documents to 9.84 lakh in a statement made by the government in Parliament. Most were so shocked by the number of trees that had to be sacrificed in an era of accelerating climate crisis that questions about their authenticity never came up.

As it emerges now, and as has been reported in the Hindustan Times, the shockingly high one million number is itself a gross underestimate by at least a factor of three. We stand to lose at least three million trees at a minimum; most likely much more.

If this is indeed true, as the available data suggests rather clearly, several questions come up immediately. What information did the project proponents provide to the ministry when it sought permission for the project and the diversion of forest land? How could it not know the number of trees to be cut when it sought to invest ₹72,000 crore in the island? Was the number underestimated deliberately, or did they not know better?

One could perhaps excuse an entity whose main business experience has been in selling milk, alcohol, and petroleum, but what about the scientific and environmental bodies within the MoEFCC itself? And what about the environment and forest clearances? Should they not be considered violated and therefore invalid?

And the EAC and the FAC, with all the resources and power at their disposal, not ask the right questions? Or is it that they are more interested in facilitating these projects rather than playing the role of law and the Constitution have mandated for them? An insightful glimpse of the EAC's position, scientific capability and skill with language is visible in the conditions it set while granting environmental clearance to the project.

Here are two examples: "No trees will be cut in one go. These will be done in a phased man-



Due to the mega-infrastructure project, we stand to lose at least three million trees at a minimum; most likely much more

ner and depending on the progress of the work on an annual basis... All trees which are exceptionally tall and old in age shall be safeguarded, as far as possible.

What, if one may ask, is an "exceptionally tall tree" and how does one decide the right age for a tree to be considered old? To begin with, how do you estimate the age of the tree? And what does it mean to safeguard them "as far as possible"?

The second example is an even better one: "Trees with nesting holes of endemic owls to be identified and geo-tagged with the help from SACON (Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Nature). Such trees shall be safeguarded, as far as possible."

Ask any birdwatcher, and they'll tell you how difficult it is to see an owl (any owl), considering the bird's behaviour and nocturnal habits. Now compound that with the chance of finding a nesting hole in a forest of three million (sorry, one million) trees. Now compound that with the fact that trees in the Nicobar rainforest can grow more than 300 feet into

the sky. Let's assign just five minutes per tree, and the total time required for a million trees would be over ₹3,000 hours. This is about six calendar years even if 10 of our best bird-watchers simultaneously spent eight hours a day for six months a year (monsoons will consume the other six) doing nothing but surveying these forests.

Now read this clearance condition again and see what sense you can make of it. This is when ANIDCO has already invited contractors to enumerate, cut, and transport these trees.

And let's also hope our bird-watchers from SACON are not still dangling 100 feet from the ground looking for nesting holes when the axe meets these trees that should have been safeguarded. But only as far as possible.

Pankaj Sekhsaria has authored/curated five books on the Andaman Islands, the latest being *The Great Nicobar Betrayal*. The views expressed are personal.

Pankaj
SekhsariaIntangible culture as
part of living heritage

October 17 marks the first-ever International Day of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), following a decision by the General Conference of UNESCO in November 2023. October 17, 2023, was the day the General Conference of UNESCO adopted the text of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

So, what exactly is intangible cultural heritage? The answer to that question is both complex and simple at the same time. It is complex because the scope and nature of what has become labelled as intangible cultural heritage, otherwise known as living heritage, is as vast and diverse as the myriad cultural forms and expressions we human beings have created. Simple because the convention came about to fill a glaring lacuna in what was considered internationally as constituting cultural heritage and place. It moved the concept beyond objects, sites, and monuments to include living traditions or expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants.

As the convention was being negotiated, it became evident that this broadening of the concept of cultural heritage needed to be accompanied by a shift in approaches, methods, and philosophies. After all, this form of heritage is entrenched in people's lives, their daily routines, and is safeguarded by ensuring its continued transmission across generations. Ensuring this inter-generational continuity requires a different set of skills, expertise, and approach, than the protection of architectural or archaeological buildings and sites.

And so the 2003 convention broke with its "parent" convention, the 1972 Convention for the Protection of the World's Cultural and Natural Heritage, by eschewing the concept of "outstanding universal value", which is central to the designation of the world heritage sites. This was because all parties understood that it was neither scientifically feasible nor socially desirable to compare and contrast one community's expression as having "outstanding universal value" in relation to another.

It was agreed, therefore, that the assessment of the value of a particular expression would have to be by the custodian community, the practitioners themselves, rather than by any outside expertise. Furthermore, in order to keep these traditions "alive" across generations, and not freeze them as folkloric performances harking to a nostalgic past, living heritage needed to be understood as dynamic, rather than static. The definition of ICH, therefore, recognised that ICH is "constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history."

Since the adoption of this UNESCO cultural convention in 2003, over 730 elements have been inscribed on its lists, of which there are three, and of which the most populated is the

WHAT EXACTLY IS INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE? THE ANSWER TO THAT QUESTION IS BOTH COMPLEX AND SIMPLE AT THE SAME TIME

Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. India has 15 elements on the representative list, ranging from Ramallah to Koodiyattam to the Buddhist chanting of Ladakh to Kalbelia of Rajasthan, Yoga, Durga puja from Kolkata, and more. The latest inclusion in UNESCO's representative list was Garba from Gujarat.

The journey to achieve ICH status is a collaborative and multi-layered process that begins at the community level. Communities first identify a cultural practice or tradition they wish to safeguard and approach their respective State authorities. The State then compiles and submits a formal application to UNESCO on behalf of the community. After these submissions, the files undergo expert evaluation by cultural specialists and heritage experts. This evaluation culminates in recommendations that are presented to an inter-governmental committee of 24 member states, which decides on which elements will be recognised as UNESCO ICH. This years-long process underpins the convention's primary purpose — to safeguard living heritage for future generations.

The 2003 convention also highlights the importance of "transmission, particularly through formal and non-formal education" as central to safeguarding living heritage. To implement this, UNESCO has launched a global programme on Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage in Formal and Non-Formal Education, which promotes the teaching and learning of intangible heritage across multiple disciplines, embedding cultural understanding into educational systems. This initiative not only recognises the crucial role education plays in safeguarding ICH, but also, critically, that incorporating intangible heritage into curricula also makes education more relevant and context-specific, enhancing both the quality of learning and the appreciation of cultural diversity.

As we move forward, the goal must extend beyond mere safeguarding and transmission. We need to explore how this generational accumulated knowledge can be used to address the challenges we face today. The insights derived from local knowledge systems — such as sustainable environmental practices, community living, and fostering social cohesion — can offer invaluable guidance for today's global challenges. UNESCO's work has reduced heritage as a collective resource, not confined to monuments and buildings but encompassing the ways we eat, sleep, and gather — reflecting the diversity of human experience.

As vehicles of identity and social cohesion, these traditions need to be valued and safeguarded in all their diversity. The recognition of ICH reflects a broader understanding of culture as an integral part of daily life. As we celebrate the significance of safeguarding these living traditions, let us recognise that this effort goes beyond preservation — it is a celebration of our shared humanity. Today serves as a reminder for all of us to cherish, sustain, and actively engage with the living heritage that shapes our collective future.

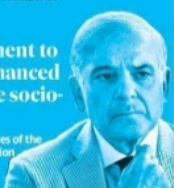
Tim Curtis is director of the UNESCO South Asia Regional Office and served as secretary to the UNESCO 2003 convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage from 2018 until 2023. UNESCO is part of the United Nations system working in India. The views expressed are personal.

Tim
Curtis

SHEHBAZ SHARIF | PRIME MINISTER OF PAKISTAN

I affirm Pakistan's commitment to regional peace, stability, enhanced connectivity and sustainable socio-economic development

While addressing member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

Ways to design India's
AI safety architecture

Following the United States, United Kingdom (UK), and Japan, India plans to establish an Artificial Intelligence (AI) Safety Institute by the end of the year. The established AI institutes focus on evaluating and ensuring the safety of the most advanced AI models, popularly known as frontier models, and prepare for the prospect of new AI agents with General Intelligence capabilities. Does India need an AI safety institute at all, and if so, how should it be modelled?

India has much to contribute to the global conversation on AI safety. While the West is debating the potential harms of frontier models, they are already being used in critical social sectors in India. For example, several pilots are underway to help frontline health workers access medical information and support teachers and students with new learning tools. India is thus uniquely positioned to share insights on the real-world impacts of these models.

However, India's AI safety institute need not blindly follow the same model as other countries. For example, the UK AI Safety Institute's core focus is testing and evaluating frontier models; the trouble with this is that these models are not static. The test you run today may have completely different results just a few months later. An essential measure for evaluation is that it should be reproducible, but as these models evolve, such replicability even possible?

Moreover, the criteria against which we evaluate these models are unclear — what are the end goals for assessment? Goals such as ensuring safety or preventing harm are neither tangible nor measurable. And who should have the power to decide whether something is safe in a more pluralistic world? We should be wary of creating new gatekeepers without a robust process to ensure they represent a wide range of social identities and contexts and are willing to be held to the highest accountability standards.

This is not to say that model evaluation and establishing standards for safety are not required. Instead, we must enter this space with a clear view of its challenges and limitations.

India's AI safety institute could focus on four key goals in its early years. First, it should monitor the post-deployment impact. Given how widely these models are expected to be used, in a more diverse use cases and social contexts, this could help build a critical body of empirical evidence about societal impacts, including unintended ones. Such continuous monitoring

and evaluation are particularly important with generative AI models because they rely on how users interact with these models.

Second, as India is in the early stages of building its language models, it has a unique opportunity to learn from the mistakes of existing model providers. Whether from Google, Facebook or other Big Tech companies, these are built by the non-consensual use of personal and copyrighted data. Many of the data sets used to train these models also contain illegal content, such as pornographic images of young children. Is there a way to build these models without these data harms? What kind of licensing arrangements are required to ensure fair use? This is the challenge India has an opportunity to address — the safety institute could help establish global standards for data collection, curation, and documentation.

Third, the institute should build critical AI literacy among key stakeholders. While certain sections of government are well-versed, for many others, AI is still a new technology, and their understanding of opportunities and risks is limited. Similarly, end-users need to be educated on the limitations and risks of these technologies so that they can exercise caution and avoid overreliance. Without these capabilities, other measures to ensure safety and reliability will not realise their promise.

Finally, we must recognise that the discussion on AI safety and advanced capabilities distracts from some of AI systems' current uses and their understanding of opportunities and risks is limited. Similarly, end-users need to be educated on the limitations and risks of these technologies so that they can exercise caution and avoid overreliance. Without these capabilities, other measures to ensure safety and reliability will not realise their promise.

The emerging discourse around AI safety shifts the social goals that should steer AI innovation, leading to a de-prioritisation of aligning AI developments with human rights and accountability. It is essential, but it is not a high enough standard to judge AI and the companies building it. Restoring a rights and accountability-based agenda to AI governance is particularly important for countries like India.

Urvashi Aneja is director, Digital Futures Lab. The views expressed are personal.

Urvashi
Aneja

EXPLAINED

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Trudeau's troubles & Canadian Sikh vote

Escalation could be struggling PM's last throw of political dice

ARJUN SENGUPTA
NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 16

INDIA HAS rejected Canadian accusations of involvement in the killing of Khalistani separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar, and they are part of "the political agenda of the [Justin] Trudeau Government that is centred around vote bank politics".

"Prime Minister Trudeau's hostility to India has long been in evidence", the Ministry of External Affairs said on Monday. The allegation that senior Indian diplomats, including High Commissioner Sanjay Verma, were involved in Nijjar's killing "serves the anti-India separatist agenda that the Trudeau Government has constantly pandered to for narrow political gains", it said.

Khalistani separatism on Canadian soil has long been Trudeau's blind spot. More than a year after he first alleged Indian government links to the Nijjar murder, what explains this week's escalation?

Trudeau is on the brink

By all accounts, Trudeau's days as prime minister are numbered. Elections are due in a year from now, and his party is trailing the opposition conservatives by nearly 20 percentage points in the CBC News poll tracker. According to most experts, there is virtually no chance that his Liberal Party will win a third straight term.

In fact, Trudeau might not even make it until then. After defeats in by-elections in Toronto and Montreal, and amidst the abysmal polling numbers, Liberal MPs are building pressure on him to step down. The *Toronto Star* reported earlier this week.

At least 20 MPs have signed a document calling for Trudeau to resign. CBC News reported, Liberal MP Sean Casey told the broadcaster on Tuesday: "The message that I've been getting loud and clear — and more and more strongly as time goes by — is that it is time for [Trudeau] to go. And agree."

After Jagmeet Singh's New Democratic Party last month pulled out of a deal to support the government in return for more social spending, the Liberals were left with only 154 of the 338 seats in the House of Commons, well short of majority. Trudeau will next face a confidence vote late in November or December, when the House has to ratify the so-called "budget update".

An inquiry is ongoing

Trudeau's critics in the Canadian media have said this week's escalation may be intended to deflect from the government's sinking fortunes, and to appear strong on national security — the proverbial Achilles' heel for the Liberal Party historically. A federal inquiry is currently ongoing into alleged foreign interference in Canada's political process. Trudeau appeared before the inquiry commission for a second time on Wednesday (evening India time).

The initial report of the commission published in May identified China as "the most persistent and sophisticated foreign interference threat to Canada", but also named India among "possible foreign interference actors".

"Indian officials, including Canada-based ones, engage in a range of activities that seek to influence Canadian communities and politicians. These activities aim to align Canada's position with India's interests on key issues, particularly with respect to how the Indian government perceives Canada-based supporters of an independent Sikh homeland (Khalistan)," the report stated.

The report cited Canadian intelligence to state that "Indian proxy agents may have attempted to interfere in democratic processes, reportedly including through the clandestine provision of illicit financial support to various Canadian politicians as a means of attempting to secure the election of pro-India candidates or gaining influence over candidates who take office".

The vote bank incentive

According to Statistics Canada, the country's official statistics agency, Sikhs were roughly 2.1% of the country's population in 2021, up from 0.9% in 2001. However, more than half of this population is concentrated in and around Toronto in the province of Ontario, and Vancouver in British Columbia. This has meant that even though only about 1 in 50 Canadians as a whole are Sikh, members of the community are an important votebank in these areas.

"There are five or six ridings (electoral districts) in British Columbia and Ontario where there is a large concentration of Sikhs, and where they can influence election outcomes," veteran Canadian journalist Terry Milewski had told *The Indian Express* last year.

Canadian political parties often rely on support from "power brokers" within the community to garner votes. Many of these community leaders have sympathy for the separatist cause — even though the vast majority of the Canadian Sikh population does not care for Khalistan.

"In British Columbia and Ontario, where the vanguards of the Khalistan movement are most active, Khalistanis have control over many gurdwaras, which then become centres of organisation for the movement," Milewski said.

Community leaders here are highly influential even among those who are not directly involved in the Khalistan movement. This has led to Canadian parties supporting Khalistani leaders, and not objecting to their anti-India rhetoric. "It is not easy to look out at a throng of 100,000 on Vaisakhi Day, knowing they might vote for you if you keep your mouth shut, and then to open it instead and risk losing the votes," Milewski wrote in his book *Blood for Blood: Fifty Years of the Global Khalistan Project* (2021). "The Liberals under Trudeau in particular seem to have mastered the art of pandering [to the Khalistanis] in recent years," Milewski said. This has happened despite strong pushback by Sikhs within the party.

"In 2014, a large group of Sikhs walked out of the Liberal Party after it picked Harjit Singh Sajjan, backed by the pro-Khalistan World Sikh Organisation, over the moderate and staunchly secular Barj Dahan for the Vancouver South seat. But this ended up working for the Liberals, with Sajjan winning in 2015 and becoming Trudeau's Minister of Defence," Milewski said.

But it's unlikely to work

The Trudeau government's latest actions could be seen in this context, especially given that his party's near-term survival rests in the hands of Jagmeet Singh, whom the MEA has described as a "leader [who] openly espouses a separatist ideology vis-à-vis India".

But it is hard to imagine how this can save the sinking Liberal ship. The party's dismal polling is due to a host of issues, including inflation and rising rents, concerns about immigration, as well as Trudeau's own unpopularity.

In an interview with *Global News* in September, Darrel Bricker, CEO of polling, research, and analysis company Ipsos Public Affairs, said that it was not just the government message that is unappealing to voters but the messenger himself.

Only 26% Canadians chose Trudeau as their preferred PM candidate in an Ipsos poll last month, much less than the 46% support for his Conservative counterpart Pierre Poilievre.



Jagmeet Singh (left) has pulled support to government of Justin Trudeau (centre). Reuters

SEPARATIST HARDEEP SINGH NIJJAR'S KILLING AND AFTER

JUNE 18, 2023: Hardeep Singh Nijjar, 45, who was designated a terrorist by the NIA in 2022, shot dead in the parking lot of a gurdwara in Surrey, Canada.

SEPT 18: Trudeau tells Canada's parliament "agents of the Indian government" were linked to murder.

SEPT 19-22: India expels senior Canadian diplomat, suspends issuing new visas for Canadians, asks Ottawa to reduce diplomatic presence in India.

OCT 20: Canada withdraws 41 diplomats from India, halts visa and consular services in Chandigarh.

Mumbai, and Bengaluru.

OCT 13, 2024: Canada says senior Indian diplomats are "persons of interest" in Nijjar investigation.

OCT 14: India expels six Canadian diplomats, withdraws its High Commissioner to Canada.



MANRAJ GREWAL SHARMA
CHANDIGARH, OCTOBER 16

JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS against the four men arrested for the June 18, 2023 murder of Khalistani separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar on the premises of a gurdwara in Surrey, British Columbia (B.C.), have made no substantive progress.

The case has been adjourned five times since May this year, when the accused were arrested. It is now scheduled to be taken up on November 21.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and other officials have repeatedly claimed to have provided credible and irrefutable evidence of links between Nijjar's killers and the Indian government. India has said that not "a shred of evidence" has been provided by Canada over the past year, since Trudeau first alleged an Indian hand in the murder in September 2023.

All four accused, who allegedly played roles as shooters, drivers, and spotters on the day Nijjar was killed, remain in a police holding facility. This is what has happened since their arrests.

ON MAY 3, 2024: Karan Brar (22), Kamalpreet Singh (22), and Karanpreet Singh (28), were arrested in Edmonton, the capital of the Canadian province of Alberta.

All three men were charged with first-degree murder and conspiracy to commit murder in the Nijjar case. Police said they had travelled from Edmonton to Surrey to carry out the killing.



(From top) Amandeep Singh, Karan Brar, Kamalpreet Singh, Karanpreet Singh. BHT via PTI



Karan Brar (left) and Karanpreet Singh (right) were arrested in Edmonton. Reuters

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Karan and Karanpreet agreed through their lawyers to make a next appearance on May 21. Kamalpreet sought legal representation, and another date was set for him.

Karanpreet's lawyer Jay Michi said the defence was beginning to wade through a "massive wave" of disclosures from the Crown to find out what could be challenged in court. He said the process would take time.

THE FOURTH SUSPECT, Amandeep Singh (22), was arrested in Brampton, Ontario, on May 11. *The Globe and Mail* reported that three weeks before Nijjar

was shot, Amandeep was charged by Surrey RCMP with dangerous driving and fleeing police.

Court documents showed that Amandeep had signed an undertaking on June 6, 2023, agreeing to appear in court. He had also declared that he did not possess firearms.

Twelve days later, Amandeep allegedly opened fire on Nijjar in the parking lot of the B.C. gurdwara. As per court filings, hours before the shooting, he was seen in the vicinity of the gurdwara, allegedly behaving erratically.

Amandeep first appeared in court on May 15, but the case was adjourned to May 21.

ON MAY 21, all four men appeared together before the Provincial Court for the first time. Karan, Kamalpreet, and Karanpreet appeared in person, while Amandeep appeared by a video link. Judge Emmet Duncan spoke to the men through an interpreter and put them under a "no-contact order," which is a bar on establishing direct or indirect contact with specified individuals.

The case was adjourned to June 25. On that day, the case was adjourned again to August 7.

ON AUGUST 7, defence lawyers appeared on behalf of their accused clients via video on Microsoft Teams, alongside Crown Prosecutor Louise Kenworthy, who requested another adjournment.

She informed the court that the Crown had been working to provide disclosure to the defendants, but the process was expected to take several more months. Local media in Surrey reported that Kenworthy said the defence had received "in the region of about 10,000 pages of disclosure," and that the Crown hoped to disclose "about 10,000 more by the end of next week".

Local media reports said the voluminous nature of the court filings indicated the RCMP had carried out a comprehensive investigation, and that a lengthy trial could follow.

Provincial Court judge Mark Jetté adjourned the matter to October 1. This was the fourth adjournment since May 15.

A FIFTH ADJOURNMENT came on October 1, again on the request of Crown Prosecutor Kenworthy, who appeared in person before Provincial Court judge Jodie Harris. The four defence lawyers appeared virtually before the court, the *Surrey News-Leader* reported.

"We have not yet provided all the disclosure to my friends, and we are not at a point where I could say substantive disclosure has been completed," Kenworthy said. "I will advise the court that options are being considered for the transfer of the file to Superior Court. So these are the two matters unfolding, which is why I'm asking for the long adjournment today."

The judge adjourned the case to November 21. She agreed with Kenworthy's request to mark the next date as a fixed date and not a bail hearing, "given this court doesn't have jurisdiction to determine bail on this matter".



The gurdwara in Surrey, B.C. in whose premises Nijjar was shot dead last year. AP

None of the men were known to police previously. Superintendent Mandeep Mooker, Officer in Charge of the Integrated Homicide Investigation Team (IHT), told reporters at the B.C. headquarters of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) in Surrey.

Later that day, RCMP Assistant Commissioner David Teboul said the probe included "investigating connections to the Government of India", and was "certainly not limited to the involvement of the people arrested today".

According to the RCMP, all three men had arrived in Canada on non-permanent visas over the past three to five years, and were residents of Edmonton.

Karan, who hails from Kotkapura in Punjab, arrived in Canada on a student visa in 2019, when he was still in his teens. Canadian media reported that Bow Valley College in Calgary had said that one Karan Brar had enrolled in 2020 for an eight-month course for a health care clerk, but could not say whether he even attended classes or completed the programme.

Kamalpreet too, arrived in Edmonton in 2019, when his sister lives. Karanpreet was his friend, and shared a home with him. Karan met the two at the wedding of Kamalpreet's sister in 2023.

FOUR DAYS LATER, on May 7, the three men, wearing orange jumpsuits, appeared before B.C. Provincial Court judge Delaram Jahani. The Provincial Court is the first level of trial court in B.C., below the Supreme Court and the highest court in the province, the Court of Appeal.

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EXPLAINED SCIENCE

CAN LIFE EXIST ANYWHERE ELSE IN THE SOLAR SYSTEM? WE MAY KNOW SOON

EUROPA CLIPPER, the biggest interplanetary spacecraft that NASA has ever built, lifted off from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida on Monday afternoon with a mission to tackle one of biology's core questions: Can life exist anywhere else in our solar system?

The spacecraft's destination is Europa, a moon of Jupiter, where water sloshes beneath a shell of ice that could be more than 10 miles thick. Such ocean worlds are fairly common in the outer Solar System. That has created speculation: Could there be life swimming in any of those oceans? For now, the answer is: Maybe.

The \$5.2-billion Europa Clipper mission



Mission lifts off on Oct 14. Reuters

is the first by NASA devoted to filling in the blanks on the question of habitability on these ocean worlds.

"I think Europa is certainly the most likely place for life beyond Earth in our solar system," said Robert Pappalardo, the project scientist for Europa Clipper. "And that's because it is the most likely to have the ingredients to life in abundance and for there to be enough time for life to get going."

After a journey of five and a half years and 1.8 billion miles, Europa Clipper is scheduled to enter orbit around Jupiter on April 11, 2030. It will make 49 flybys of Europa over four years.

THE NEW YORK TIMES

ANAGHA JAYAKUMAR
NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 16

SIMMERING TENSIONS between North and South Korea, are now seemingly boiling over.

North Korea on Wednesday announced that more than 1.4 million citizens had applied to join the army. This came a day after it blew up a section of roads and railway lines on its southern border, in response to South Korea allegedly sending drones with anti-Pyongyang propaganda leaflets across the border last week.

Technically, the two Koreas have been at war for more than 70 years, and periodic flare-ups are not uncommon. The recent escalation is nonetheless significant.

Historical context

The Korean peninsula had been under Japanese control since 1910. After Japan's surrender in 1945, which brought World War II to an end, the peninsula was split into two. The Soviet and the Chinese communists propped up the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in the North, while the Americans supported the creation of the Republic of Korea in the South.

In 1950, North Korean forces under founder Kim Il Sung invaded the South, triggering the three-year-long Korean War.

Despite the North making initial gains, support from the US helped South Korea fight back. Eventually, neither side secured a decisive victory, and an armistice was signed in 1953. The Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), dividing the peninsula into half roughly around the 38th Parallel, was created but no permanent peace treaty was signed.

Since then, both Korean nations have dreamt of "reunification", by force if necessary. But the likely human and material cost of an all-out war has meant that the status quo has, by and large, prevailed.

Starting in the 1970s, both sides held negotiations towards achieving a "peaceful reunification", with agreements in 2000, 2007, and 2018 significant in this regard. However, very little tangible progress was made.

Meanwhile, North Korea pursued the development of nuclear weapons, inviting heavy sanctions from the UN Security Council, the US, and its allies.

Genesis of current tensions

In 2019, then US President Donald Trump and North Korea leader Kim Jong Un met in Hanoi, Vietnam. This was their second meeting, after Trump in 2018 became the first sitting US president to meet the North Korean leader. Many had hoped that

the summit would see US and North Korea make headway regarding denuclearisation and consequent ease of sanctions.

However, the summit ended abruptly with not even a joint statement being signed. Robert Carlin and Siegfried Hecker wrote in an article in 38 North, a US-based publication specialising in policy and technical analysis of North Korea, that this was "a traumatic loss of face for Kim", which pushed DPRK to completely end its attempts to normalise relations with the US (and consequently the South). The country also restarted its nuclear programme.

Tensions between North and South Korea have been escalating since then. In January 2024, Kim notably announced a shift in DPRK's outlook towards South Korea. Renouncing further attempts at reunification, Kim said that the South was now to be viewed as the "primary foe and invariable principal enemy".

In July, North Korea announced that it had further fortified its southern border. All year, it has been sending helium balloons carrying trash across the southern border, in response to South Korean activists sending "propaganda-laden" balloons to the North. By blowing up the Gyeongju and Donghae rivers, which connect North and

South Korea, DPRK formally laid to rest any hope for peaceful reunification.

Could there be war?

Carlin and Hecker described the current situation as "more dangerous than it has been at any time since early June 1950". Notably, they wrote that North Korea's "increasing closeness to Russia and China has meant that it is not wary of the 'ironclad deterrence' presented by South Korea's alliance with the US."

"There is a belief, entirely understandable, that more and more frequent symbols of our intent to retaliate will keep the North at bay, as will our oft-stated conviction that if the North attacks, the counterattack will totally destroy the North Korean regime. Yet, in the current situation, clinging to those beliefs may be fatal," they wrote following Kim's declaration in January.

However, this does not necessarily mean that a war is impossible. "I doubt the situation would escalate to the level of war. North Korea is exploiting military confrontation to strengthen internal cohesion," Professor Kang Dong-wan, who teaches political science and diplomacy at Dong-A University in Busan, told the BBC.

"Whenever tensions rise, North Korea emphasises external threats to boost loyalty to the regime," he said.

THE IDEAS PAGE

As the world warms and cools

Insurance can mitigate vulnerabilities to unpredictable events, climate disasters.
Human security, displacement is also a national security issue



SYED ATA HASNAIN

FOR ALL OUR efforts within the disaster management community, it's often extremely challenging to get people to realise that disasters happening around them could one day affect them directly. The common citizen tends to believe that disasters and other disruptions are meant for others. Very few realise that a devastating earthquake could render a well-to-do middle-class person and his family homeless, even relegated to a government relief camp. Elevate this personal security issue to the national level and imagine the effect of natural and other disasters in different parts of the country around the year, hugely denting the national aspirations of making India a \$5-trillion, and then a \$10-trillion economy. Such an economy could improve the status of many people, and make the poverty-stricken upwardly mobile. Yet, that can only happen if there are no downturns. Disasters are major causes of economic downturns. Those who perceive national security as something related just to borders being secure have to remember that without the ability to secure our aspirations there can never be any national security.

Where does disaster risk insurance come into all this? The connection starts with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech at the Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) held in New Delhi in 2016. In that speech, PM Modi outlined the Ten-Point Agenda for DRR, a mantra now linked positively and inextricably to the Indian Prime Minister's name. The second point of the Agenda states: "Risk coverage must include all, starting from small households to SMEs, to multinational companies".

Risk coverage has two connotations. First, physical safety from disasters through early warning systems, mitigation, and effective responses when everything else fails. The second is the necessity of the hope of receiving optimum compensation for losses. It is difficult for the state to compensate individuals in full to rebuild lives and livelihoods, and simultaneously recoup losses in terms of infrastructure and other aspects of recovery. That is where different forms of risk insurance come in. Many countries around the world insure people, their properties and infrastructure so that adherence to the principle of "build back better" can be promised more realistically. Insurance companies have analysed disaster risk in a professional way at the international level and found that there are doable business models.

We should be extremely happy that disaster-related insurance is at last receiving due attention in India too because disasters will never stop occurring and there is enough scope for reasonable business opportunities for insurance companies and fair deals for both government and private players to receive the benefits of insurance coverage. The National Disaster



C R Sankumar

Management Authority (NDMA) of India recently conducted a daylong workshop on this theme along with the heads of several important insurance companies and intellectuals from the financial world. It provided several takeaways that can be developed into insurance instruments in ways that satisfy the objectives of insurance companies, government and private individuals. These will, of course, need to be researched and modelled. Parametric insurance is the sought-after financial domain by disaster managers with no apparent objection from the insurance world. It ensures that on the occurrence of certain mutually accepted parameters related to identified hazards, insurance will be available to the insured without verification of individual claims. This cuts down time-consuming and often annoying bureaucratic scrutiny and approval spirals.

Disaster risk insurance can enhance key aspects of human security. It's important to realise that human security holds the key to national security, especially in regions where proxy wars, based upon terrorism, abound. Bangladesh lost 1,40,000 people and innumerable of the country's citizens were injured and displaced due to the fury of the super cyclone in 1991. Human security in the underdeveloped environment of the nation has been a nagging factor ever since then. Displaced and homeless people have always been targeted by radical ideologies around the world. Their vulnerability is exploited to the hilt. Such vulnerabilities invariably lead to illegal migrations and restiveness in the receiving societies. The spiral never ends. Remember Haiti and the earthquake of 2011, which measured 9 on the Richter scale. 3,16,000 people died and many Haitians were forced to migrate due to the inability of the country's government to assist them in rebuilding their lives. There was no question of insurance there. The wave of migration

It's important to realise that human security holds the key to national security, especially in regions where proxy wars, based upon terrorism, abound. Bangladesh lost 1,40,000 people and innumerable of the country's citizens were injured and displaced due to the fury of the super cyclone in 1991. Human security in the underdeveloped environment of the nation has been a nagging factor ever since then. Displaced and homeless people have always been targeted by radical ideologies.

from that event haunts the US even today and is a major issue in the current presidential contest. Africa's frequent tryst with drought has had an immense impact on nations such as Somalia, Sudan and Western Sahara. It has been one of the reasons for societal turbulence that has afflicted a large number of countries in Africa and pushed them into severe debt traps.

Perhaps the greatest potential for disaster-related security issues exists right across India's border, in Pakistan. A precedent needs recall. In 1981, three million refugees came out of Afghanistan as a consequence of the Soviet invasion. They were housed in tented camps in Pakistan along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border and fed by UNHCR. However, the presence of hundreds of radical preachers ensured the birth of the young Taliban who 15 years later captured power in Kabul and changed the dynamics of the international order. That was not a natural disaster-related event. But just like the vulnerabilities of the Afghan refugees were exploited in the 1980s and 1990s, the insecurities of an estimated 2.6 million displaced people from Pakistan's flood-ravaged areas of 2022-23 can also be exploited by elements in Pakistan's badlands. The nation has no scope to offer compensation or promise to "build back better", now or any time in the future. It's worth recalling that India's problems with radical terrorism commenced with the rise of elements who were nurtured in the IDP camps on Pakistan's western border.

As the world warms and cools, it needs to look at human security much more pragmatically and be more focused on bringing disaster risk insurance to the fore, everywhere.

The writer, a former corps commander of the Srinagar-based 15 Corps, is member of the National Disaster Management Authority

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The US is likely to regret allowing further weakening of the UN. Benjamin Netanyahu and his colleagues' refusal to respect it makes it all the more important that others do so, and do so vocally."

— THE GUARDIAN

The \$500 billion opportunity

PM's target for electronics manufacturing can be realised by reforming regulatory environment, building thriving hubs



ASHISH DHAWAN AND VINAY RAMESH

LAST MONTH, PRIME Minister Narendra Modi announced a \$500 billion target for electronics manufacturing in India by 2030. We must applaud and support the ambition — growth in electronics manufacturing will help solve India's jobs challenge. For example, the Apple ecosystem alone exports around \$14 billion and employs 1.6 lakh people. At the same time, we must recognise that the ambition is audacious — India's entire manufacturing output in 2023-24 was roughly \$650 billion. Meeting the target would mean sustaining growth rates few countries have achieved and will require equally audacious reform.

The government already realises that much of this growth will have to be exported, as statements by the minister of electronics and information technology have made clear. However, while achieving export competitiveness at scale is the right strategy, executing it is no mean task. How can we do it, especially given our legacy ecosystem that has proven so resistant to reform?

The answer lies in the history of manufacturing growth, which has been a story of regional clusters. The electronics industry is no different. From its beginnings in Silicon Valley to its later centres — Taiwan, Japan, South Korea and then more recently Shenzhen in China and Northern Virginia in the US (NORTEL) in Vietnam — competitive regional clusters have driven growth in electronics.

In India too, clusters in regions like Sripurambudur in Tamil Nadu and Noida in Uttar Pradesh have recently been growing fast, and account for nearly 50 per cent of our electronics exports. To sustain and accelerate growth in electronics, we need deep and ambitious region-led reform that can create large, globally competitive electronics manufacturing regions.

Studying successful regions around the world reveals three key factors for success — large size with anchor investors, customised regulations to suit export activity and devolution of administrative power down to the industrial park level. We go into some detail on each of these to explain why a new policy should incorporate these factors.

Large size is essential for competitiveness. Shenzhen, a Chinese special zone, which alone exports around \$350 billion, is 2,000 sq km, while the largest Indian electronics cluster, under the government's Electronics Manufacturing Cluster (EMC) scheme, is 2.5 sq km. Large size helps in co-locating suppliers and buyers, which is important for ecosystem competitiveness. It also helps invest in large, efficient shared industrial infrastructure like effluent plants and testing facilities that lower costs for everyone.

Electronics factories can employ thousands — the Foxconn factory in Sripurambudur has 21,000 workers — and is important to house workers close to factories. Large zones make it possible to have social infrastructure like worker housing,

schools, hospitals and recreation facilities. Given the political difficulties and prohibitive costs of acquiring large tracts of land, it will be better to develop around existing electronics manufacturing regions. This would mean declaring a large — say 300 sq km — special region incorporating existing factories and new parks. Within the zones, the focus needs to be on attracting lead brands and their partners as anchor investors and they can, in turn, attract their downstream partners.

To give a sense of the importance of scale, Shenzhen (2,000 sq km) generates manufacturing employment for 4.6 million workers and exports of more than \$300 billion. By contrast, Mundra EMC is just 2.5 sq km and employs 5,000 workers.

Large size and anchor investors alone will not be enough. These regions need a regulatory environment that is conducive to exports and comparable to the best manufacturing regions. The priority would be pro-employment labour laws — allowing longer shifts, globally competitive overtime rules and removing restrictions on employing women, who make up a majority of electronics workers.

The other key area of customised regulation is taxation and tariffs. Electronics manufacturing requires movement of lakhs of components with designs changing frequently. Extremely specialised supply chain participants mean that much of this movement is cross-border, even in countries with much greater value added. Thus, all our competitors like Vietnam, China, etc., already allow foreign vendors or brands to manage component inventory seamlessly across borders without tax or tariff implications. This has been a big part of their success.

However, current Indian tax laws make inventory management by foreign entities unviable, making manufacturing needlessly complex. Interestingly, the required tax exceptions have been allowed previously in "national interest" for the Oil & Gas industry. Electronics today is no less strategic. Corporate tax and GST rates too need to be benchmarked against those in Vietnam and China to attract large global players. Finally, Indian factories are encumbered by various laws governing buildings, green cover, pollution norms, etc., that are globally uncompetitive. EMC authorities need to be able to relax these within the region.

To ensure responsive governance, central and state governments also need to devolve requisite powers to the EMC authority so that it can provide all necessary approvals and permissions. Global examples have also shown that PPP models that attract private players to manage the region and build plug and play parks are a good way of speeding high-quality execution.

The current government has shown the willingness to enable such a differentially regulated zone for financial services in GIFT city, and needs to do the same for electronics manufacturing regions. Reforming India's regulatory cholesterols across the country is a long and arduous road, but we can start by reforming the regulatory environment in geographically limited areas. Without thriving manufacturing regions, the ambitious goal set by the PM will remain just another manufacturing target we have no hope of achieving.

Dhawan is founder and CEO of The Convergence Foundation and Ramesh is COO of Foundation for Economic Development



MARY E JOHN

Not just the foreign hand

Social, economic changes are also blame for sex selection

A RECENT ARTICLE ('Don't outsource development', Bibek Debroy, Sanjeev Sanyal and Aditya Sinha, IE, October 10) offers a garbled account of why colonial policies earlier and INGOs today are responsible for the spread of sex selection in India. Debroy, Sanyal and Sinha (henceforth DSS) approvingly cite a 2011 book by the American journalist Mara Hvistendahl, *Unnatural Selection: Choosing Boys Over Girls and the Consequences of a World full of Men*. I will not discuss DSS's claims on British colonial policy because this has been well covered by historians. Female infanticide — an existing pre-colonial practice amongst groups such as the Rajputs — intensified and spread as an unintended consequence of British land and revenue policies, as families tried to match their sudden resource constraints by resorting (among other things) to female infanticide so as to escape the humiliation of an unmarried daughter with too little dowry. DSS do not acknowledge that this sense of humiliation, born of what the historian Barbara Miller Pritchard called "pride and purse", was indeed part of Indian culture.

But the main argument of the DSS article draws from a section of Hvistendahl's book — whose chapters race across the globe and decades in bewildering fashion — to focus on an American population expert Sheldon Segal who spent some years during the 1960s advising doctors in AIIMS, Delhi on population control. Hvistendahl's claim is that he trained them in sex selection technologies (though it

is quite unclear what these were) with huge backing from US foundations and INGOs. DSS use this claim that Segal engineered the direct and immediate spread of sex selection methods across the country, offering as proof the Child Sex Ratios (CSRs, in the 0-6 age group) from the Census. The figures they quote (of girls per 1,000 boys) are: 943 in 1991, 941 in 1961, 930 in 1971, 934 in 1981, and 927 in 1991. They see 1971 as the critical turning point with significant drop in the CSR because of the sex determination tests introduced by Sheldon in the 1960s.

However, the figures DSS quote are not CSRs at all but the overall sex ratios (for all ages), which are irrelevant as evidence of sex selection. As early as the 1960s, Indian demographers were worried over a declining trend in the overall sex ratio from the turn of the 20th century, indicating a comparatively greater neglect of women compared to men. But CSRs are the relevant Census figures for considering the effects of pre-natal sex selection (though they would also be indicators of any excess female child mortality). CSRs began to be estimated from the 1971 Census (created to determine literacy rates accurately). The CSRs for 1971 onwards are: 964 in 1971; 962 in 1981; 945 in 1991; 927 in 2001; and 918 in 2011. If, as DSS acknowledge, 950 girls per 1,000 boys is the standard, then the impact of sex selection is visible not in 1971 (as they claim) but two decades later, in 1991. It is in 1991 that Haryana and Punjab recorded huge CSR drops,

and it is only in 2001 that the national CSR dropped below the overall sex ratio. There is no statistical evidence of prenatal sex selection in the 1960s and 1970s; sex selection became significant only from the 1980s.

DSS are quite right to point to the influence of INGOs motivated "by Malthusian fears of overpopulation" in post-independent India. These fears led to the excesses of the Emergency under Indira Gandhi. But DSS are quite wrong when it comes to dating sex-selection technologies, and charting their spread. Amniocentesis (first introduced in 1975) never became a mass method for sex selection; this happened only with the arrival of ultrasound technology in the 1980s. Unlike amniocentesis, ultrasound scanning was part of general prenatal care; its misuse for sex determination followed later. What DSS do not mention is that, beginning with amniocentesis, it is the mobilisation by women's organisations and health activists that led to a ban on such testing in government hospitals in 1978, but this did not stop private practitioners. Later, it was the interventions of activists that resulted in a legal ban on sex determination, first in Maharashtra in 1986 and then nationally in 1994.

That the law was poorly implemented tells us about the nexus of private medical practitioners and government officials. That families in certain regions pushed women into sex selection to bear a son tells us about the complex relationships between the desire for a small fam-

ily, the devaluation of daughters, and the constraints of contemporary economic development shaping such family-building strategies.

Who, then, is to blame? Hvistendahl is right to question the easy answer — the traditional family. A better answer would be the modernising family buffeted by rapid social and economic change, wanting a small family (backed by the Indian state's two-child norm), hoping for at least one son for their economic future and at most one daughter to be successfully settled "elsewhere". Technology has a necessary part in this story, but it is not the main protagonist.

So, yes, we need more research on the geopolitical implications of independent India's tryst with population control and US imperialism. However, Hvistendahl's simplistic conspiracy theories will not do, nor will the DSS article, which only misleads.

Speaking from the ramparts of the Red Fort in 2019, our Prime Minister declared "population explosion" to be one of India's main problems. He asked: "With an ever-increasing population, we have to think, can we do justice to the aspirations of our children? Before a child is born in our home, we must ask if we have prepared ourselves to fulfil the child's needs, or are we going to leave the child to its fate?" How should Indian families answer these questions today?

The writer is a retired professor of Women's Studies

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CONSIDER THE RISK

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Facing off' (IE, October 16). Relations between India and Canada have reached a new low. This downward spiral sharply contrasts the previously cordial ties, which have been significantly shaped by trade and the large Indian immigrant community in Canada. India is the single largest source of foreign students for Canadian universities. Diplomatic prudence is crucial. Both nations need to let diplomacy take its course. If Canadian policy have evidence, as claimed, they should pursue the investigation while respecting international diplomatic immunity. Ultimately, both countries must recognise that their future relationship is more important than their past conflicts.

Khokan Das, Kolkata

STATE ELECTIONS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Two straws in the wind' (IE, October 16). Considering the differing results of the recent Lok Sabha elections and assembly elections in Haryana held within a short span of four months, it may be somewhat difficult to predict the impact of the present poll on the next round of polls. The differences in terms of political parties and what issues matter to peo-

ple are not only visible in national and state elections but also in state assembly elections. For instance, in Maharashtra, the BJP faces vertically divided local parties whereas its position in Jharkhand is essentially a local party in power. On the bright side, if this notion of uncertainty persists, political parties have to be on their toes for every election in the future, be it local or national.

Y G Choudhary, Pune

INDIA-CANADA TIES

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'A tough road from the brink' (IE, October 16). The recent downgrading of bilateral ties between India and Canada doesn't augur well for the current global geopolitical milieu. PM Justin Trudeau seems to have been hemmed in by his domestic political considerations. His ally Jagmeet Singh has fallen out of Trudeau's coalition, endangering majority support to the government. In case of imminent elections in Canada, the Conservative Party is set to get 42.8 per cent of the votes as against 22.8 per cent for the Liberal Party as per the recent opinion poll. How this spree of events affects the \$75 billion worth of investment by the Canadian pension fund into India interalia, is yet to unfold.

Vinay Saroha, New Delhi

The IndianEXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

DESTROYING TRUST

UP ordinances on food are regressive. They exploit notions of pollution and purity, stoke a larger distrust in society

ALL THE OFFICIAL talk about consumer safety around the Uttar Pradesh government's decision to bring in two ordinances on food contamination, making the offence cognisable and non-bailable, cannot divert attention from a disquieting intent, and effect. They will act as a communal dogwhistle that preys on the majority's notions of purity and pollution, and targets an already insecure minority. Titled Prevention of Pseudo and Anti-Harmony Activities and Prohibition of Spitting Ordinance 2024 and Uttar Pradesh Prevention of Contamination in Food (Consumer Right to Know) Ordinance 2024, some provisions are unexceptionable. That food and beverage sellers should wear head covers, gloves and masks when cooking and serving, and that there should be CCTV coverage of the kitchen and dining areas of establishments, is reasonable. But what purpose of food safety would be served by mandating that personnel should wear identity cards at work? Such identity cards can, and will, come in handy for communal profiling. The legislative power to issue ordinances, as the Supreme Court has clarified, is "in the nature of an emergency power" given to the executive only to "meet an emergent situation". What exigency, which could not have been met by enforcing existing food safety regulations, demanded such a move by the UP government? And what does food safety have to do, anyway, with social "harmony"?

These ordinances come in a larger, sobering context. In July, the Muzaffarnagar police ordered eateries along the route of the Kanwar Yatra to display the owners' names. This was, the police said, so that "confusion" among the strictly vegetarian kanwariyas could be avoided. Two months after the SC stayed that order, correctly pointing out that it was "contrary to constitutional and legal norms", the UP government issued statewide directives for eateries to mandatorily display the names and addresses of operators, proprietors and managers, citing "incidents of adulterating food items like juice, dal, and roti with human waste, inedible, or dirty substances". Now, the two ordinances confirm a disquieting trend -- from "bulldozer justice" to "love jihad" and "encounters" that the police wears as a badge of pride, to the new restrictions in the garb of food safety, UP is becoming a fount of bad laws and governance practices that should not be emulated.

The need to "ensure trust of consumers" has been touted as one of the justifications for the ordinances. But they put at risk, in fact, the trust that citizens repose in each other in an increasingly layered and changing economy. The prime mover of the gig economy, where everything from food to groceries to services reaches citizens' homes on the back of innovations and efficiencies brought in by new technologies, and which provides employment to millions, is that same trust. In threatening to erode it, the UP ordinances are a terrible backward step.

THE BODY SHOP

Investigation of kidney trafficking is a reminder that loopholes need to be plugged, awareness on organ donation increased

OVER THE LAST decade-and-a-half, several cities in India have become hubs for transplant surgeries of organs such as kidney, liver, heart, eyes, brain and pancreas. Close to 18,000 organ replacement operations are performed annually in the country, the highest after the US and China. The bulk of these procedures take place in the private sector and attract patients from other parts of the world, especially countries in India's neighbourhood. They are a testament to the growing capabilities of the country's healthcare sector. However, along with compassionate donors and efficient surgery teams, the ecosystem is rife with dubious networks of doctors, hospital administrators and organ traffickers, many of whose operations extend beyond India's borders. Last year, for instance, a UK newspaper revealed that a Myanmar-based syndicate had arranged paid kidney donors and got transplants performed in a prominent Delhi hospital by falsifying documents. Now, an analysis of police records by this newspaper has shone a light on an international kidney transplant racket centred at two prominent hospitals in the NCR. The investigation has revealed an illicit network stretching from Delhi to Dhaka that relied on fudged documents and questionable tie-ups between big hospitals and smaller health firms. The ring seems to have bypassed screenings at the international border.

India's organ transplantation law recognises three kinds of donations: Those by near-relatives, altruistic donations and swap donations when a near relative is medically incompatible with the recipient, the pair is permitted a swap transplant with another related unmatched donor-recipient pair. Foreign nationals must submit a certificate from their country's embassy to confirm that the donation is not driven by money or coercion. Like most illegal organ trading, the India-Bangladesh illicit market seems to have flourished -- more than eight years by disguising trafficking as "altruistic donation". The newspaper's analysis shows family trees were fabricated and impoverished donors were lured with Rs 4-5 lakh to part with their kidneys.

Over 1.5 lakh patients in India require an organ transplant every year. Most other developing countries also have a large mismatch between needy patients and organs that can be harvested. Several countries in South and Central Asia and Africa have not developed transplantation capabilities. A section of patients from these regions travel to India for medical care. More accuracy by law enforcement agencies can help address part of the problem. The police have usually been up to the mark in busting illicit rings. However, as this paper's analysis shows, they do not bring this zeal to the criminal investigation. Letting alleged organ dealers off the hook reduces trust in the transplantation system. In the long run, trafficking should be seen as more than a law and order problem. There is an urgent need to increase awareness about organ donation, remove misconceptions, address skewness -- women constituting a majority of donors, and men a majority of recipients, for instance.

A SPECIAL FORAY

Europa Clipper mission may or may not find signs of life, but it will fire a million imaginations

THE LAST COUPLE of days have seen two exciting space events. Elon Musk's SpaceX achieved possibly the most stunning feat in recent years when one of its rockets, on its return journey to Earth, was caught mid-air by the large mechanical arms of its launch tower, demonstrating a major advance towards realising the goal of a fully reusable rocket. Two days later, NASA's Europa Clipper mission embarked on a long journey to Europa, one of several moons of Jupiter, to investigate one of the most likely places for extra-terrestrial life in the solar system.

Space exploration has undergone a qualitative transformation in the last few years, with a flurry of high-profile innovative missions being launched, each one breaking new ground. Decades of relatively silent exploration and technology development have resulted in capabilities that now enable space agencies, including private players like SpaceX, to aim for what seemed futuristic just a few years ago. Though a mission to Jupiter is nothing new, and there have been other spacecraft that have travelled further into space, the Europa Clipper mission is special. It has the first realistic chance of encountering life beyond the Earth, or more accurately, encountering conditions that have a high probability of sustaining life. Europa is one of the few planets in the solar system -- a moon of Saturn is another candidate -- suspected of having a large salty ocean beneath the surface, similar to those on Earth.

The Europa Clipper mission may or may not find hints of such life on Europa, but this is just the sort of space mission that fires imaginations. The mission is just the start of humankind's quest of finding extra-planetary cousins in the universe.



GIRISH KUBER

DUSSEHRA 2024, CELEBRATED on October 12, could probably indicate what lies ahead for Maharashtra post the assembly elections. Historically, Dussehra in Maharashtra has been known for two rallies, both in Nagpur. One at Reshimbag, the RSS headquarters, where swayamsevakas gather to celebrate the organisation's anniversary, and the other at Deekshabhoomi, where Dalits congregate in large numbers to commemorate the day in 1956 when B R Ambedkar embraced Buddhism. Other than these, one more mela has, since 1966, been known for making headlines: That of Shiv Sena founder Bal Thackeray. Dussehra in 2024, however, witnessed as many as seven such rallies, including one each by the two Shiv Senas, a rally of predominantly OBCs that was held in Marathwada by the late Gopinath Munde's daughter Pankaja and nephew Dhananjay, and a mega show of Marathas, in Marathwada again, led by maverick Manoj Jarange. Added to these, a newcomer to the Dussehra day rally, Raj Thackeray, addressing his supporters. Each indicates growing social and political compartmentalisation of the state, which the assembly elections are sure to accentuate.

Under the surface of its "developed state" status, Maharashtra has always had social tensions. These came to the fore, thanks to then chief minister Devendra Fadnis's efforts to win over Marathas ahead of the 2019 state assembly elections. It was not as innocuous a move as it may seem. It was an audacious attempt by Fadnis, an RSS-groomed Brahmin, to snatch Marathas away from Congress and NCP. Eager to make a political statement, Fadnis announced Maratha reservation just ahead of the polls, hoping the state's politically strong, single-biggest community would stand by him. Not only did the move backfire, it also opened a Pandora's box. The Supreme Court, quite rightly, did not consider political expediency over the law and shot down the Maharashtra government's decision, reason-

Maharashtra election will showcase a splintered political battle, nuances of social engineering

As the pitch for Marathas became increasingly shrill, it had the collateral effect of bringing together OBCs and pitting them against the Marathas. This put the BJP in a fix, as it had a strong base amongst the OBCs. It would have been foolhardy to antagonise this traditional vote bank to win over a new one. Realising this, Fadnis, now a part of the government led by a staunch Maratha, Eknath Shinde, and which includes another Maratha, Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, found it difficult to keep the reservation pot boiling without having to decide. The ambivalent stand of the ruling trio -- the Shinde-led Shiv Sena, BJP and Pawar-led NCP -- eventually resulted in angering both Marathas and OBCs.

Then came the Dhangers (shepherd community) who feared being left out of this social game of extracting as much as possible from the government. They, too, launched an agitation for reservation. Much to the dismay of the Marathas and OBCs, the state government promised reservation to Dhangers as well. The state's generosity further deepened the social divide. Though no caste or community was actually able to get reservation, many saw an opportunity to demand a share of the rapidly-shrinking reservation pie. As it was not possible to accommodate everyone in the "reserved" category, the state government found another way to buy peace with different social groups. It started setting up independent autonomous corporations with a seed capital of Rs 50 crore each for various communities. As of date, the Maharashtra government has formed as many as 17 corporations for various communities, such as fisherfolk, goldsmiths, Hindu Khatriks (Butchers) and even Jains. Not many of these bodies will have a life outside government files, since this

ing that it would cross the 50 per cent limit set for reservation.

Since then, the demand for Maratha reservation has grown many fold and tops the agenda of every political party in the state. As the pitch for Marathas became increasingly shrill, it had the collateral effect of bringing together OBCs and pitting them against the Marathas. This put the BJP in a fix, as it had a strong base amongst the OBCs. It would have been foolhardy to antagonise this traditional vote bank to win over a new one. Realising this, Fadnis, now a part of the government led by a staunch Maratha, Eknath Shinde, and which includes another Maratha, Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, found it difficult to keep the reservation pot boiling without having to decide. The ambivalent stand of the ruling trio -- the Shinde-led Shiv Sena, BJP and Pawar-led NCP -- eventually resulted in angering both Marathas and OBCs.

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move is nothing but an ego-massage.

The forthcoming assembly elections will test all these innovative ways of fighting political battles with social engineering. On the ground, it has already resulted in further deepening social rifts, percolating to such an extent that, in some places, even newsmen are forming groups based on their castes. Needless to say, the situation is worse in rural areas, especially in the hotbed of Marathwada, where Maratha auto drivers refuse to carry non-Maratha passengers. As a result, the election ahead is a fight to see who has more communities on their side.

After the recent Parliament elections saw Dalits and minorities voting against the BJP en masse, there is now a serious attempt to win as much of their support as possible. The difference this time -- which may eventually prove critical -- is the wholehearted support of the RSS for the BJP. Unlike in the last Parliament election, the RSS is actively involved and its swayamsevakas are out on the field helping the BJP. It is in this changed reality that one can see the RSS chief's statement at the Dussehra rally, where he asked swayamsevakas to "reach out to Dalits and forge friendships with them". One has to be supremely naive not to see the RSS chief's statement in the context of the state assembly elections. It is also not a coincidence that the BJP found itself at the receiving end of the social divide in Maharashtra and as such, more in need of rapprochement with various social groups.

The election on November 20 will be the real test of how successful these attempts have been. Notwithstanding the outcome, Maharashtra will realise soon how challenging it is to mask the social divide that is not only out in the open but is also being encouraged and used by both the ruling alliance and Opposition.

The writer is editor, LokSatta



VIJAY TANKHA

THE US ELECTIONS are around the corner. Though it is the oldest modern democracy, each dollar bill piously proclaims "in God we trust". A secular polity like ours, while it places its trust in the RBI, is noteworthy for the religious tilt each party makes, careful not to offend the sentiments of the gods or their many devotees. In ancient Greece as well, the birthplace of democracy, with its numerous cults and gods, religion was a powerful force.

Public events -- the Panathenaea (dedicated to Athena), the Olympic Games (to Zeus), and the Theatre (of Dionysus) -- were held in their presence. Before every battle, animals were sacrificed for favourable omens. Hellenic gods and heroes were regularly "seen" actively fighting against barbarian invaders. The mountain above the sanctuary of Delphi had hurled rocks at advancing Persians.

Though gods were involved in almost every drama, the Greek tragedians nevertheless flagged their role in the politics of the city. These dramatists, part of the intellectual elite of their times, displayed (and questioned) many of the opinions and beliefs of the audience. Politics and religion were the leitmotif of many tragedies. They showed prophets and priests as important in the affairs of the city, and able to overturn political fortunes. Oedipus, for instance, suspected that Creon and the prophet Tiresias were conspiring to dethrone him. Though the fear proved baseless in that play, it was a reasonable assumption to make.

In two well-known instances, the state was pitted directly against religious beliefs. In Antigone (a favourite with feminists), the King (Creon) refuses burial rites to the traitor Polyneices (Antigone's brother). Religious obligation drove her to disobey him; state policy

OF POLITICS AND GODS

In ancient Greece, as now, religious figures and belief were powerful forces

IN GOOD FAITH

One reason for the negative depiction of Apollo may be because his cult was rooted at Delphi, an oracle politically aligned with Sparta, the 'bete noir' of Athens (surviving dramatic texts are all Athenian). Oracles could be nasty, dispensing ambiguous prophecies often misinterpreted by those who consulted them. Delphi was also open to bribery (the Athenians once bribed the Priestess to convince the Spartans to overthrow the aristocrats who ruled Athens).

compelled him to condemn her. Female emotion confronted male rationality (the king and the girl). Both lost (his son anticipating her death, commits suicide; his mother stabs herself cursing her husband). The play ends with the chorus saying "the blows of fate will teach us wisdom... the gods must be revered". Religious custom (represented by the burial) could outweigh the law.

The god Apollo drove Oedipus to his (fated) doom. His storyline begins with a killing (prompted by a goddess) that leads his family to extinction. In Aeschylus's Oresteia, Apollo orders Orestes to kill his mother, yet the god of ritual and prophecy cannot purify him of the consequent blood guilt. The infernal female deities that pursue Orestes are finally tamed by a judicial process and harnessed as a fearful force that will keep citizens in check.

In The Bacchae, Euripides' last work, the king, again representing civic reason, attempts to suppress Dionysus' new cult (the god's Indian connection is also noted by scholars). His followers are also women: Day confronts night, and the king is decapitated by his own mother who, deranged by the god, thinks him a lion they have torn apart. She enters the city brandishing her son's head. The brutal conflict ends with the god shrugging off responsibility. He exiles the wretched Agave and her father, who complains: "Your reprisals are too severe." Dionysus responds: "I am a god, and you have insulted me." The chorus ends with the homily, "many are the shapes of things divine."

Throughout Greek tragedy, the gods make heinous demands. The poet cannot sail for Troy until a human sacrifice (a virgin no less) placates Artemis, inexplicably upset. In Hippolytus, Aphrodite, waging sea can corrupt Artemis' virgin devotee, implants in

Phaedra, his stepmother, an unholy lust for him. The youth is appalled by her advances. Fearing exposure, Phaedra kills herself but implicates him. His father has him killed. Artemis wins the bet but, being a goddess, can't shed tears for him. Instead, she vows to get one of Aphrodite's devotees someday. "We are playthings of the gods," says the poet.

One reason for the negative depiction of Apollo may be because his cult was rooted at Delphi, an oracle politically aligned with Sparta, the bete noir of Athens (surviving dramatic texts are all Athenian). Oracles could be nasty, dispensing ambiguous prophecies often misinterpreted by those who consulted them. Delphi was also open to bribery (the Athenians once bribed the Priestess to convince the Spartans to overthrow the aristocrats who ruled Athens).

Politics even then fed on religious sentiments. The entire aristocratic clan of the Alcmaeonids was exiled, not for the murder their ancestors committed, but for a violation of religious sanctuary. Socrates was accused, condemned and executed on the charge of worshipping false gods. The tragedians were well aware of the power of religious sentiment. While their plays are read as aiming to incorporate rather than resist the irrational power of the gods, they were wary of the political role religion could play. Religious conflict could overturn, as Luther did, the established order. It should come as no surprise that long-lasting empires (Roman, Persian, Ottoman) were mostly tolerant of different religions, as gave as, paying taxes, their citizens "lived to Caesar" what was Caesar's."

The writer taught Philosophy at St Stephen's College, Delhi



OCTOBER 17, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO

TRIPURA TRAGEDY

THE UNDERGROUND TRIBAL National Volunteers (TNV) struck again, killing four members of a non-tribal family at Katlichera, about 90 km from Agartala. A group of armed men stormed into the house of the family and shot dead four inmates. Four others were said to be injured. The gang was led by a self-styled "Lieutenant" Surendra Dev Barman.

NO BAIL FOR AKALIS

THE GOVERNMENT WILL not release all the Akalis including G Tohra, president, SGPC, against whom there are specific criminal cases and for which they will have to face a trial be-

fore special courts. There are over 400 Akali leaders in jails. Some important leaders including the Akali Dal chief Harchand Singh Longowal, the former Punjab chief minister, Prakash Singh Badal, former Union Minister Surjit Singh Barnala are detained under the National Security Act.

SIX-YEAR PLAN PUZZLE

THE PLANNERS HAVE miraculously reduced the resource gap of the Seventh Five Year Plan from Rs 40,000 crore to a mere Rs 10,000 crore and are now confident of achieving the compound annual rate of growth of 5 per cent in a non-inflationary manner. But mystery surrounds the manner in which this reduction

has been achieved and even the panel of economists were not satisfied with the explanation offered by the Planning Commission. Most of the extra resources are to come from profits of public sector undertakings.

NOBEL FOR TUTU

BLACK SOUTH AFRICAN church leader and anti-apartheid campaigner Bishop Desmond Tutu, 53, was awarded the 1984 Nobel Peace Prize, the Norwegian Nobel committee announced. The committee said Bishop Tutu, general secretary of the South African Council of Churches (SACC), had been a unifying figure in the campaign to resolve the problem of apartheid in South Africa.



OUR VIEW



Allocate or auction? Let our telecom aims decide

Satellite spectrum allotment should go by what our policy hopes to achieve. For the inclusion of underserved areas, go for cheap allocation. In urban India, aim for a level playing field

Communications minister Jyoti Radhika Scindia clarified on Tuesday that airwave spectrum for telecom services via satellite would be awarded by means of administrative allocation. This is what Elon Musk, whose Starlink plans to beam the internet to dishes in India from low-earth orbit, has been asking for. An auction, which is what Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Jio wants held, is not on the agenda. This sets the record straight on the Centre's position on a matter that has split opinion within the industry. Along with Amazon's Kuiper, OneWeb-Eutelsat, a satcom player backed by Airtel's owner, Sunil Mittal's Bharti Group, also plans to enter this new market. Terrestrial service leader Jio has not ruled out taking the issue to court as a "last resort," as reported. Jio's argument is that since satcom will compete with existing services, for which spectrum was bought at exorbitant auction prices, what sky-beamers use must also be bid for, so that incumbents are not put at a disadvantage. Musk, though, has opposed Jio's proposal, saying that auctions would be "unprecedented," given that such spectrum must be allocated under rules of the International Telecommunication Union, a UN agency, to which India is a party. But which approach would serve us better?

As Scindia has said, India's Telecom Act of 2023 mandates the distribution of satellite spectrum through allocation. For terrestrial services, however, the Supreme Court had ordered auctions to be conducted, after which telecom operators had to pay huge sums for it. What satcom debutants are seeking is also a scarce resource, so why the same telecom rules shouldn't apply is a good question. To calm

fears of satcom awards being handouts, the minister has said that charges would be levied. "What that cost is, and what its formula would be, would only be decided by Trai," he stated, referring to the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, which is expected to propose satcom rules. What the Centre charges could shape the cost structure of orbital operators heavily enough to determine how high or low their user tariffs are. Since the advantage of satcom is the geographical expanse it can cover, with dishes receiving signals from the sky to transmit on the ground, there is a valid case for cheap services so that users with modest earnings in remote areas can benefit. Terrestrial coverage has been patchy or missing in parts that incumbents have not found viable to venture into. Low-cost allotment could help meet the goal of inclusion.

Yet, while a promising tech disruption must not be resisted, the plea for a policy of parity also has merit. Should existing players lose customers to entrants with cheaper services riding on globally defrayed costs, deep pockets and low-cost airwaves, the ensuing shake-up is sure to evoke protests. Perhaps a middle path could optimize the country's aims. As Bharti's Mittal has suggested, rural and urban zones could be treated differently. Whether auctions can be used is unclear, but it seems possible to levy charges (and impose conditions) in such a way that the urban playing field stays level. For underserved parts of India, the Centre could charge satcom players token sums to make services as widely affordable as possible. Terminals could be subsidized, too, if it serves the cause of inclusive coverage. Administrative allocations, thus, could be made in a manner that satisfies all stakeholders. To maximize the benefits of satcom, though, Trai must get its math right.

THEIR VIEW

We must take a pragmatic approach to carbon pricing

PRACHI PRIYA & R.V. ANURADHA



are, respectively, a corporate economist based in Mumbai, and a partner at Clarus Law Associates, New Delhi.

At the recent Energy Transition Summit, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman underscored the adverse impact of unilateral and arbitrary policies such as the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) on India's trade and green-transition pathways, noting that India's decarbonization journey should be guided by its own development needs and not by the Global North. Sitharaman was referring to the EU's measure that would impose a charge on imports into the EU of products of aluminium, iron and steel, cement, fertilizers, electricity and hydrogen beginning January 2026. The CBAM levy will be calculated on the difference between the carbon price determined under the EU's Emission Trading System (ETS) and the carbon price paid in the export country for the production of such products. The EU's move is accelerating trade friction, given the new barrier it sets up. The US is also reportedly examining a carbon pricing system for imports along similar lines.

There are over 78 different carbon pricing and taxation models worldwide. These fall into two broad categories: ETS and carbon taxes. An ETS works on a cap-and-trade principle, capping the total level of greenhouse gas emissions above which producers pay for their emissions, with prices determined by the demand and supply of emission certificates on a trading platform. A carbon tax sets a state-determined price for carbon by taxing every tonne of carbon dioxide (CO₂) emitted by a production process.

While India does not have a formal price for carbon emissions, it is not free. Energy efficiency targets for energy-intensive sectors, including aluminium and iron and steel, are set under India's Perform, Achieve, Trade (PAT) regulations that have been in place for over 15 years. Renewable Purchase Obligations (RPOs) under the Electricity Act mandate the use of a specified proportion of renewable energy by all distribution companies and captive power plants, the trajectory for which is expected to increase. Indian industry is expected to transition from PAT to the recently announced Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS), which, like the EU's ETS, should deliver an explicit price for emissions in India.

The carbon price in India is likely to be

much lower than in the EU, where a tonne of CO₂ has been in the \$80-100 range over the past year. Under China's ETS, which was rolled out in 2021, carbon is priced at around \$10. The difference between Indian and EU prices is likely to be vast, so CBAM charges would still be a heavy burden on our exports.

We cannot expect uniform prices globally for carbon emissions, not least because each country has different targets under the Paris Agreement. This global pact recognized that developed countries, which are responsible for the bulk of industrial pollution, must bear a higher burden of emission reductions, whereas developing countries must straddle the dual challenge of emission reductions while ensuring sustainable economic development. This is often referred to as the CBDR-RC principle: Common but Differentiated Responsibility and Respective Capabilities.

The price of carbon emissions needs to be based on internationally agreed differential climate obligations of countries. In an op-ed

three years ago, the World Trade Organization's (WTO) Director General Ngozi Iswela highlighted the need for a carbon price that is aligned with the Paris Agreement's nationally determined contributions for emission reductions based on the CBDR-RC principle. While this idea makes immense practical sense, any resolution would necessarily have to account for legal principles, not just of the WTO, but also the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the 29th conference of which (COP-29) is scheduled for November in Azerbaijan. COP-29 must address this issue, since the EU's CBAM not only upends WTO principles, it is also an assault on the legal framework under the UNFCCC.

An agreement recognizing differential carbon prices across countries will effectively mean that the EU's CBAM cannot be premised on the EU's ETS price. Achieving a consensus on this, however, appears improbable before January 2026, when the CBAM kicks in. While India's government

should fight unilateral measures like CBAM at both the WTO and UNFCCC, we will need short-term measures to mitigate its impact on Indian industry. First, the Centre must assist industry in arriving at an implicit price of CO₂ emissions by setting a standardized approach for calculating the impact of prevailing instruments such as PAT and RPOs. A second important step would be to explore how multiple levies on coal, mining, electricity, fuels, etc., can be rationalized, as these also contribute to the cost of energy-intensive goods. In the case of some industries, the cumulative impact of PAT and RPOs, along with other taxes and levies, has been estimated at approximately \$25-30 per tonne of CO₂, which is almost one-third of Europe's current carbon price. It is unlikely, however, that the EU's CBAM would allow the adjustment of this entire amount, since not all of these are explicitly tied to price on emissions. Whether the many different taxes that industry pays can be consolidated into a single carbon tax is an important point for consideration. This will potentially ease the compliance burden of Indian businesses, streamline government revenues and also help India seek adjustments for carbon taxes and prices in any form globally.

These are the authors' personal views.

The tariffs Trump has proposed would be a gift to rich Americans

These work as taxes and will increase the cost burden on most Americans while favouring the rich



SIMON JOHNSON is a 2024 Nobel laureate, former chief economist at the International Monetary Fund and a professor at MIT Sloan School of Management.

The heart of Donald Trump's proposed economic policies are big new tariffs on all goods imported into the United States.

The former United States president [who is now the candidate for the Republican Party for the presidential elections to be held in the country next month] claims that tariffs will protect jobs, increase wages and usher in a new era of American prosperity. Apparently convinced that he has found an economic panacea, Trump proudly calls himself the "Tariff Man."

But a tariff is just a fancy name for a tax imposed on people who buy imported goods (and anything produced domestically using imported inputs).

So, the Trump proposal would squeeze all American households, with a particularly harsh impact on working people with lower incomes.

Even if these tariffs do not plunge the world into a self-destructive trade war, United States trade partners would likely retaliate—and that will hurt everyone who works in America's successful and high-productivity export sector.

Trump has a degree from the Wharton School of business at the University of Pennsylvania, and so should know how tariffs work.

Admittedly, he graduated in 1968, but the analysis of tariffs was well

understood 50 years ago—and the basic facts remain the same.

Kimberly Clausing and Mary E. Lovely, two of the world's leading experts on tax issues, estimate that the tariffs Trump wants to enact would cost the average US household more than \$2,600. (This estimate was published by the Peterson Institute for International Economics, with which I was previously affiliated; but I was not involved in this report or any related work.)

Clausing and Lovely analyse a tariff regime that would impose a 60% levy on Chinese imports and a 20% surcharge on all other imports, which is Trump's stated goal.

The \$2,600 per year increase in taxes for the median American household represents an enormous loss of spending power (4.1% of their post-tax income). But for those in the bottom 20% of the income distribution, the "consumer loss from the proposed tariff" is even bigger—more than 6% of after-tax income.

In contrast, for the top 1% of the country's income distribution, the loss from tariffs is only 1.4%.

This differential impact reflects the fact that lower-income people consume more imports, directly and indirectly, as a share of their spending than wealthier people do.

Clausing and Lovely also assess the effects of extending the Trump-era tax cuts, which are particularly beneficial to higher-income people. The combined net effect of extending those cuts—which Trump certainly wants to do—and imposing high across-the-board import tariffs would leave the top 1% better off. But everyone else would lose. So what candidate Trump is proposing is actually a massive redistribution of income to the highest-income Americans.

In effect, Trump wants to increase taxes on working Americans to pay for tax cuts that primarily favour people who are already rich.

The Republican Party repeatedly claims that it is against increasing taxes on most Americans. But that is exactly what Trump is proposing to do.

As Grover Norquist, founder and president of Americans for Tax Reform, says: "Tariffs are taxes." And these taxes will be paid by Americans, not foreign companies, as Trump falsely claims.

Creating more good jobs in America should be a high priority for federal policymakers. But imposing high import tariffs will not do this.

A much better approach would be to promote the development of breakthrough science and encourage the commercialization of these new ideas in companies that are created in the United States.

As Jonathan Gruber and I explained in *Jump-Starting America*, published in 2019, the United States used to do a lot more of this (relative to the size of the economy) in the early decades after World War II.

Fortunately, President Joe Biden's administration, with bipartisan support, advanced this agenda in the 2022 Chips and Science Act, and Trump's opponent in the upcoming presidential election, vice-president Kamala Harris, has put forward proposals that could move the United States further in this direction.

Sufficient funding to support this effort has been too slow to appear, but staying the course makes sense. The Harris campaign has proposed an "America Forward tax credit," which "will be targeted at investment and job creation in key strategic industries."

Seizing and retaining technological leadership matters. If you are the first to invent and the first to market, you have the opportunity to create more of the good jobs that will emerge in any new global industry. The US did this before, in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s—decades of shared prosperity during which tariffs were cut, not increased.

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10 YEARS AGO



JUST A THOUGHT

We need a price on carbon that accurately reflects its real costs on our society and our wellbeing.

KATHARINE HAYHOE



MY VIEW | STATISTICALLY SPEAKING

MINT CURATOR

Why have surveys so often gone wrong with what they predicted?

The conversational method of data collection these use have inherent limitations. We need to review the value we assign them



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The recently concluded elections in Haryana and Jammu and Kashmir came with their usual collection of opinion and exit polls. The election results gave us one more example of how these polls can be at variance with what people actually choose.

There is a tendency among scholars to believe that this problem applies only to political and opinion polls. It is important to realize, however, that the reasons for some of these failures lie in the very nature of conversational data collection, where data is gathered through a structured process of conversation between a data collector and respondent. As most sample surveys and India's population census rely on conversational methods, it is useful to examine the nature of errors that occur in this process.

First, these conversations involve two parties: the interviewer and the respondent. They come into the discussion with very different perspectives and backgrounds. One source of error arises from the fact that the two parties often do not speak the same 'language.' By language, we do not mean merely linguistic considerations, but also the nuances of understanding. Take, for example, the question, 'are you working?' Economists and statisticians understand 'work' to be any effort that yields pay or profit. However, in general conversation, the understanding of what constitutes 'work' can be very different (for example, it also encompasses notions of 'decency' and 'adequacy'). Thus, young individuals preparing for government jobs may describe themselves as being unemployed, even though they may be earning from part-time tuitions. In such cases, survey organizations lay emphasis on the interviewer's ability to parse the language of the respondent, making the accuracy of results dependent on the quality of the interviewers' training.

A similar problem arises when trying to measure income. Even trained economists and accountants can struggle to define what 'income' is for a variety of work settings (consider, for example, today's evolving conversation on what constitutes income for a social media influencer).

Moreover, it is important to understand that these conversations do not occur in a vacuum. They occur usually in a social setting where even quiet bystanders exert their influence on the outcome of the dialogue. For instance, women and people belonging to non-dominant communities may hesitate to express their views in a public space. Just as the respondent's identity matters, so does the setting and identity of the interviewer. The responses garnered can be impacted by factors such as gender, the interviewer's perceived objective and their political/institutional affiliations, among others.



Professor Vikas Kumar of Azim Premji University analyses the power of such influence in the conduct of the census, in which he observes that outcomes were influenced by the sociopolitical settings in which these conversations took place. Professor Kumar showed that the Census results in Jammu and Kashmir in 2001 and 2011 and in Nagaland in 2001 were influenced by political mobilization around the survey itself. In addition to the conversational dimension, there are other challenges. The logistics of data collection pose constraints. Until recently, the National Sample Survey excluded large parts of the Northeast as they were difficult to reach. Even today, parts of the Andaman Islands are formally excluded from conversational data collection to protect primitive tribal groups. Likewise, there is the difficulty of conducting a conversation with the very affluent—not just the super-rich (as popularly conceived), but also occupants of posh gated colonies. Rising non-response rates pose a challenge to surveyors all over the world.

There is a view that technology can be used to mask the public character of conversations and increase respondent openness. However, attempts at anonymization by using technologies such as telephones or the internet create their own sources of bias. For instance, access to households may not equal access to all members of that household. Further, the proliferation of telemarketing, spam calls and scams has led to a decrease in people's willingness to participate in telephonic conversations with unknown third parties. Similar challenges confront the use of the internet for surveys.

As the ability to conduct conversational surveys has improved, the resultant explosion of surveys by a variety of agencies, both public and private, has created its own issues. To illustrate, there is an apocryphal story that villagers in Palampur were the subjects of so many socioeconomic studies and had become so adept at responding that they would ask visiting scholars, 'Aap questions MPHil ke hain poochh rahi ho, ya PhD ke hain?' (are you asking for an MPHil project or for a PhD?) and tailor their answers accordingly.

Understanding the limitations of conversational data collection allows a better interpretation of outcomes. We must also recognize the value of non-conversational data, whose scale and scope has increased enormously in recent years. This includes sources such as administrative data (for example, data collected by administrative agencies in the course of their work) and transactional data (which includes data from e-commerce platforms and payment interfaces such as UPI, FASTag, etc). Commercial entities quickly realized the value of this data and use it extensively, but there continues to be a reluctance on the part of governments and policy analysts to engage with it. To a certain extent, this is an unfortunate legacy of our early success in using conversational data generated by sample surveys to fill the data gaps created by a weak post-colonial administrative structure. Developments over the last few decades in both state capacity and technology have made the biases of this historical legacy obsolete. It is time for us to revisit the weights we assign different forms of data used in social analyses.

MY VIEW | BEHAVIOUR BY BRAIN

India's chess champs have lit up a path to Viksit Bharat

BIJU DOMINIC



is chief evangelist, Fractal Analytics, and chairman, FinalMile Consulting.

Situated on the outskirts of Chennai, M.A. Velayudham started a chess coaching centre with just 10 students. It was initially named Thiruvottiyur Chess Academy. Later, it was rebranded as Bloom Chess Academy. It was parents who were not financially well-off who flocked to this coaching centre with their children in tow. One such parent was Nagalakshmi. She admitted both her kids to this coaching centre. Every day, she would take her kids to the coaching centre and back in a local bus. Her husband Ramesh Babu worked at a bank. His mobility was restricted by a childhood bout of polio that left him with a disability. Overall, it was an ordinary setting. Can extraordinary magic bloom in such a setting?

Two weeks ago, both Indian men and women created history by winning gold medals at the Chess Olympiad in Budapest. Ramesh Babu's and Nagalakshmi's kids Pragnanandhaa and Vaishali were part of that world-beating Indian team. How did Pragnanandhaa and Vaishali, who came

from modest backgrounds, reach the highest levels in the world of chess? That too, in a matter of just a few years? Does the success of these chess champions provide any lessons for India as the country prepares for a Viksit Bharat by 2047?

To answer these questions, we must go back to Madras, as it was called, in the 1970s. Back then, a six-year-old boy named Viswanathan Anand had just started playing chess. He learnt his initial lessons from his mother, Sushila Viswanathan. To teach Anand more about the board game, she enrolled Anand for chess classes at the Tal Chess Club in the Soviet Cultural Centre, Madras. This facility had some books on the chess strategies adopted by a few of the Soviet Union's greatest players. Anand devoured the contents of those books in no time. Later, when Anand's father moved to the Philippines on an assignment, Anand's mother had access to a programme on chess broadcast by a local TV channel. Anand used to be in school while it was aired, so his mother would take notes from that show to discuss with him once he returned home.

There is one significant difference between the times Anand started playing chess and Pragnanandhaa began. Along his learning path to become a world chess

champion, all Anand could depend on were the few library books he had access to and his mother's notes from a TV programme. But today, thanks to the internet, Pragnanandhaa and other chess players have access to millions of times more information on the game than what Anand had.

The kids who are practising their chess game today have access to the strategies of the world's best chess players at the click of a button, and that too at a very low cost. Among all the other factors that helped Bloom Chess Academy create world champions out of ordinary people, widening internet availability in this country and the ensuing democratization of knowledge have played a significant role.

Although the game of chess was invented in India more than a millennium ago, only in 1987 did the country have its first chess grandmaster in Viswanathan Anand. But then, in a matter of just 37 years, India has produced a hugely impressive list of 85 chess grandmasters.

Democratized technology can indeed make a lot of difference.

This stupendous success story could answer another important question: As machines become more intelligent than humans, will technology destroy human craftsmanship?

India's success in chess speaks of what widely accessible information and tech tools can achieve

When Deep Blue, developed by IBM, defeated human chess champion Garry Kasparov, many thought the end game of human chess mastery was near. Today, even a basic level chess program can beat the best of human chess players consistently. So the obvious question is, who wants to play against a machine and lose every time?

Actually, what has happened is very interesting. With even a basic chess program managing to defeat the best human chess player, humans have changed their attitude to machines. Chess-playing programs are no longer opponents to beat, but their coaching buddies. Human players are using chess programs to train themselves better and hone

their skills at the game. So, intelligent chess machines did not kill the game of chess. They actually helped humans improve themselves dramatically.

When people ask me whether India will reach its developed-country goal of Viksit Bharat by 2047, I offer an optimistic answer. The success of Bloom Academy is a good reminder of what magic we can achieve when technology reaches the doorstep of every Indian.

If a simple chess coaching centre on the outskirts of Chennai could take Pragnanandhaa and Vaishali, who come from a family of relatively modest means, to the highest levels of the world, why can't thousands of such world-champion-producing ventures bloom in this country?

In India, there are many ordinary parents like Ramesh Babu and Nagalakshmi with extremely talented kids and also people like M.A. Velayudham who are really passionate about their craft. The success story of our chess players leads me to believe that when this humongous talent pool and passion are force-multiplied by the power of artificial intelligence, much more magic can happen in India. What our chess players achieved in 2024 is just a preview of what is possible for the country by 2047.

Investors expected more from the fiscal authorities in Beijing

The optics of a fiscal stimulus plan are as crucial as its substance



DANIEL MOSS
is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist covering Asian economies.

The stimulus unleashed by the People's Bank of China (PBoC) last month was a tough act to follow. When it was the turn of the finance ministry to describe its role in boosting China's subpar expansion, investors fretted about the absence of fireworks and demanded something more. The risk is that in not consistently exceeding expectations, Beijing will be depicted as not very serious about a major reboot of its economy.

Finance minister Lan Fong conveyed a solid, if unspectacular, message on Saturday. More support will be forthcoming for the troubled real estate industry, government borrowing will likely be stepped up and assistance given to local authorities struggling with high debt. These are worthy undertakings that certainly won't hurt, but more significant moves were anticipated. Prior to the weekend, analysts expected the deployment of as much as 2 trillion yuan (\$283 billion) in new measures, according to a survey by Bloomberg News, along with some initiatives to lift consumption. Lan provided no price tag and little by way of something fresh. Stocks fluctuated on Monday.

The problem is that the event lacked the wow factor of the central bank's briefing on 24 September that ignited an epic stock rally. The PBoC conveyed something potent: cuts in interest rates, an easing of reserve requirements for lenders, and proposals to boost equities. The bank also enjoyed the benefit of going first when expectations were low—and exceeded them. The finance ministry began talking in an environment where hopes were elevated. Governor Pan Gongsheng knew his audience and delivered his lines with panache while markets were open. His performance was not too far removed from the televised question-and-answer sessions by Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell after policy decisions.

The episode is a useful reminder that fiscal policy isn't as neat and tidy as its monetary sibling. It tends to be more nuanced, relies on local authorities, is subject to a certain amount of horse trading, and its effectiveness is measured by what's actually spent rather than unveiled. That's not to say the whole show was a non-event. On Sunday, Goldman Sachs increased its forecast for China's economic growth this year to 4.9% from 4.7%. (The government has targeted an expansion of around 5%.) The last few weeks do show a commitment by officials to shore up the economy, the firm said. China's ruling Communist Party has made clear that it recognizes there is a



China's government has seemed tentative in contrast with its central bank. **BLOOMBERG**

problem. The argument is about how forcefully to stoke demand and how measures are rolled out.

That the economy can use a lift should not be open to debate. The day after Lan's appearance, figures showed consumer prices inched up 0.4% in September from a year earlier, less than economists projected. Without a jump in food, inflation would have been weaker still. If the PBoC were an independent central bank with a formal 2% inflation target, like many of its peers, the cries for aggressive action would be deafening.

One of the trickiest aspects of setting policy is managing expectations. The optics can be as important as substance. If anticipations have been built, then whatever is announced risks being branded a failure. In retrospect, analyst notes caution-raising the briefing were a sign that Lan was bound to fall short. It's important to remember, though, that this isn't the end of the stimulus road. More will come. Circumstances demand it and top cadres show they're attentive to these needs, if only to lock in the growth target set by President Xi Jinping.

Watching the lead-up to Saturday and then seeing headlines and commentary roll, I recalled Tim Geithner's first major speech as US Treasury secretary in early 2009. He had planned to address broad principles and outline the administration's philosophical attitude toward struggling banks. Would the approach reflect continuity with former president George W. Bush, or would bigger agenda items, like nationalization, be on the table?

The problem is that in the days before the remarks, the White House had talked up expectations of a comprehensive plan to be unveiled. Geithner wrote in his book *Streets Taken*. That wasn't what the Treasury intended—or desired. The result was a speech that came across as vague and was underwhelming: stocks sold off as he spoke. Would it have received quite the panning had not the audience been primed to hear something monumental?

Geithner recovered from that setback. So, in time, did banks and the broader US economy. Saturday was never going to be a great day for China bulls. The country faces a long road to recovery. There will be leaps, but also lulls. Beijing needs to start controlling the narrative. **BLOOMBERG**

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Election time

The elections in the two states, along with by-elections, will provide a clear snapshot of the public sentiment

It is election time once again. The last round of elections in 2024 would be held in November. The Election Commission has announced that Assembly elections in Maharashtra and Jharkhand will begin on November 13. Jharkhand will go to the polls in two phases, on November 13 and 20, while Maharashtra will hold a single-phase election on November 20. The votes for both states will be counted on November 23. Additionally, dates for several Lok Sabha by-elections, including in Wayanad, Kerala, where a bypoll is needed after Rahul Gandhi vacated the seat, have been announced. The Assembly elections in Maharashtra and Jharkhand are critical for both the ruling and the Opposition parties, as they serve as key battlegrounds to gauge their standing. In Maharashtra, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) faces a formidable challenge from the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) coalition, comprising the Shiv Sena (UBT), the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and the Congress.

The MVA aims to capitalise on public dissatisfaction over issues like economic distress and governance failures while projecting a united front despite internal tensions.

In Jharkhand, the contest is equally poised, with the incumbent Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM)-Congress alliance seeking to fend off the BJP's challenge. The ruling coalition is banking on Chief Minister Hemant Soren's popularity and social welfare schemes to retain power. However, the BJP is expected to emphasise issues like law and order and tribal rights to swing the vote in its favour. Apart from the Assembly polls, by-elections will be conducted on November 13 for four Assembly seats in Punjab—Dera Baba Nanak, Chabbewal (SC), Gidderbaha, and Barnala. These bypolls are seen as indicators of the prevailing political sentiment in the regions, potentially setting the tone for broader electoral battles. In addition, the by-election for the Wayanad Lok Sabha seat in Kerala presents another crucial contest. Speculation is rife that Priyanka Gandhi Vadra may make her electoral debut from this constituency, adding a significant dimension to the Congress's campaign strategy. Elections in India are not only a period of heightened activity for political parties but also a monumental task for the Election Commission and government machinery. Conducting elections in the country is no small feat, as ensuring a peaceful, free and fair process presents significant challenges. The upcoming assembly elections in Maharashtra and Jharkhand, along with the bypolls, will serve as critical indicators of India's evolving political dynamics. As the states prepare for high-stakes battles, various political scenarios could unfold, influenced by factors like coalition strategies, regional issues and leadership challenges. But ultimately it would be the unpredictable and elusive voters who would decide the fate of the political parties.

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A vendor arranges earthen lamps (Diya) for sale, in Bikaner

PTI

Why Indian women deserve support, not judgement

We must start questioning the unrealistic expectations placed on women and inculcate a culture that promotes shared responsibilities and duties

Indian women are increasingly taking on obligations that exceed 55 hours per week. They manage to pursue their professional careers while also managing a household—what one may refer to as the "second job." It reveals an unsettling fact about the intimidating pressure on women to perform above their capabilities. Although this problem between job and private life affects women all over the world, it is especially difficult for Indian women due to cultural expectations, societal standards and the long-held conviction that they "must do it all."

The question arises: why is there so much pressure on Indian women to push themselves beyond their breaking point? The answer lies in deeply ingrained gender roles and societal expectations. While strides have been made in women's empowerment, the onus of managing the household and caring for children continues to largely fall on their shoulders, even as they excel in their careers. As more women enter the workforce and pursue professional goals, the expectation



to continue fulfilling traditional roles has not diminished. Instead, it has expanded, creating an unsustainable juggling act.

Are women taken for granted? In many ways, yes. The concept that women are born to balance this act manifests itself in the belief that they can easily handle a high-demanding profession while also serving as primary carers, homemakers, and support for the rest of the extended family. However, such an assumption ignores the impact on their physical and mental well-being. Each woman's drive is influenced by the societally imposed "superwoman" image, which puts undue pressure on them. And when

they falter, they are unfairly judged. But why should society judge women for trying to manage the impossible? The expectations placed on women often come with little recognition or appreciation for the sacrifices they make. Instead, when women struggle or choose to prioritise one aspect of their life over another, they are met with criticism rather than compassion. This is especially true for those who lack a strong support system. If a woman does not have family members willing to share the load of child-rearing or household management, she is left to carry an even heavier burden. Should she be judged for

this? Absolutely not. Let us not forget that many Indian women are also teachers, a profession that requires nurturing, patience and a relentless dedication to the betterment of future generations.

These women are shaping young minds in the classroom while simultaneously caring for their own families at home. The least society can do is give them the space and freedom they deserve, without the weight of judgement. It's time we, as a society, recognise that women's worth is not measured by their ability to "do it all." We must start questioning the unrealistic expectations placed on them and, instead, advocate for a culture that promotes shared responsibilities. Supporting women in their endeavors—whether in their careers or at home—by giving them the freedom to make choices without judgement is essential. Only then can we begin to alleviate the unnecessary pressures that have, for too long, weighed on the shoulders of Indian women.

(The author is a motivational speaker and a freelance writer; views are personal)



RACHNA LAKHPATI

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(The author is a motivational speaker and a freelance writer; views are personal)

Haryana setback exposes cracks in INDIA Bloc

The Congress defeat has not only dampened the party's resurgence narrative but also underscored the need for a recalibrated approach to coalition politics

The Grand Old Congress Party faces criticism from its INDIA coalition partners for mishandling the recent Haryana Assembly polls, allowing the BJP to win for a third time despite ten years of anti-incumbency. Most exit polls had predicted a clear win for the Congress, but the BJP secured 48 out of 90 seats, a victory even the BJP itself was surprised by. A win in Haryana would have boosted the Congress resurgence story. However, Congress lost its fifth Assembly election recently due to internal conflicts, adding to its previous losses in Punjab, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. It is uncertain whether the partners will be united in fighting against the BJP. Questions like whether an alliance with AAP would have favoured Congress to win in the Haryana polls are being debated. Secondly, the defeat would impact the upcoming elections in Maharashtra and Jharkhand. The immediate impact of the Haryana result is likely in seat sharing in the forthcoming Assembly elections in Delhi, Maharashtra and Jharkhand. Thirdly, it is uncertain whether the Congress and AAP will have an alliance. The AAP has already said it will go solo. The INDIA bloc performed well in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls due to its adaptability and compromise. The main aim of the Coalition was to give a one-to-one fight with the BJP and not split the anti-BJP votes. The Coalition put irritable issues on the back burner and managed to work well. They functioned with the sole aim of defeating the BJP and, to a certain extent, succeeded. The BJP majority was reduced, and the government had to be formed with the help of JD (U) and TDP. The Haryana defeat has altered the situation within the Coalition, with the INDIA bloc getting an edge over the Congress. The partners would probably deal with a slightly more restrained and sobered Congress. No one has said so far that the INDIA bloc is finished.



On the contrary, Samajwadi Party leader Akhilesh Yadav's statement a day after the defeat indicated that the alliance with Congress would continue. Akhilesh said, "I want to say that the INDIA bloc will be there. The UP and Congress alliance will remain intact..." The Aam Admi Party has said it will go solo in the Delhi Assembly poll, while it allied with the Congress in the Lok Sabha polls three months ago. Congress won no seat. The other allies criticise Congress for its overconfidence and rigid attitude toward seat sharing. The resurgent Congress, which had doubled its tally in the Lok Sabha polls, weakened after its Haryana shocker. Most exit polls suggested an astounding win for Congress in Haryana because the BJP faced a 10-year anti-incumbency and dealt with a section of disgruntled people. However, the BJP sprung a surprise and registered its most impressive victory in Haryana. No party has ever won a third term in the rural state. Discussions occur between the Congress, the Shiv Sena

THE MAIN AIM OF THE COALITION WAS TO GIVE A ONE-TO-ONE FIGHT WITH THE BJP AND NOT SPLIT THE ANTI-BJP VOTES. THE COALITION PUT IRRITABLE ISSUES ON THE BACK BURNER AND MANAGED TO WORK WELL

(Uddhav) and the Nationalist Congress Party in Maharashtra. Congress needs to be more responsive to the seat-sharing formula and Sena's demand for Thackeray to be projected as the CM's face even before the polls. The AAP won no seat in the Haryana election but got roughly 1.78 per cent of the votes. It would have undoubtedly added to the INDIA bloc's kitty if Congress had allied with AAP. According to Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut, the Congress ignored the smaller parties and their offers for collaboration. Leaders from the Trinamool Congress, AAP, Shiv Sena (Uddhav), National Conference, RJD, Nationalist Congress Party, and others were critical of the Congress for messing up the Haryana polls. Shiv Sena mouthpiece Saamna said, "No one thought the BJP government would be elected in Haryana again. It seems Congress's overconfidence and arrogance of local Congress leaders led to the party's defeat," the Marathi paper said in its editorial on Wednesday. Repeating the formula adopted during the



KALYANI SHANKAR

Lok Sabha polls for seat sharing is crucial, at least in the Maharashtra and Jharkhand polls. The subdued Congress will not have the upper hand in seat sharing with most of its allies. The present mood in the INDIA coalition must impact Congress's relations with its partners. The Opposition may not be able to withstand any more shocks. Congress must focus on the 286 seats in a direct fight with the BJP. The 2024 polls proved the Congress strike rate against the BJP rose to 29 per cent from 8 per cent in 2019. Significantly, the number of seats in which the Congress fought with the BJP was 286, down from 370 in 2014. Congress came to power in 2004 and 2009 because of its cordial relationships with the partners. The onus for keeping the alliance is broadly on the Congress. It must realise for every partner, small or big, is essential. Congress has had introspection sessions, and Panchmadi and Shimla are good examples. It is time for one more such session. (The writer is a popular columnist; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

INDIA-CANADA DIPLOMATIC CRISIS

Madam — Apropos to the article 'Souring relations', on October 16, India is withdrawing its High Commissioner from Canada after Canadian PM Justin Trudeau again accused India of masterminding the June 18, 2023, killing of Khalistani terrorist Hardeep Singh Nijjar outside the Gurnanank Gurdwara in Surrey, British Columbia. Trudeau's accusation and mischaracterisation of India is based on the American intelligence's raw data supplied to Canada. But, Sikh militants in both Canada and California are deeply involved in organised crime and gang violence. Perhaps, Trudeau believed the volume and frequency of the accusation could trump the truth. He also may believe that doubling down on Sikh militants might win him votes in key districts. On both points, he is wrong. After Khalistani terrorists blew up Air India Flight 182, ignorance can be no excuse about the movement's lethality. Left unchecked, the Khalistani extremists Trudeau's government shelters can be as lethal as Al Qaeda. The movement would be impotent without funding, however. Here, Canadian banks are complicit as the Arab and Somali hawala agents who ultimately helped move money around prior to Al Qaeda's 1998 East Africa embassy bombings and the September 11, 2001, terror attacks in New York and Washington. Hence, Canada is guilty of abetting terrorism.

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Washington

END COMMUNAL VIOLENCE

Madam — It is indeed a matter of concern that communal clashes are again showing their ugly faces. No religion can recommend violent reactions for any reason. But every religion suggests being patient even under utter provocation. Therefore, clash in the name of God and religion is only an organised attempt to disturb peace and take undue advantage of it. But the history is clear with its messages that such chauvinists can

Firecracker ban insufficient



his refers to the news, 'Delhi government imposes ban on firecrackers to combat air pollution' (October 15). Besides the increasing population density, the air in Delhi remains polluted and it is being inhaled by the majority of the populace and people commuting there. Recently, the AQI level is showing

alarmingly high. Apparently the decision of the Delhi government to ban the production, storage, sale and use of firecrackers till January 25 seems to help in reducing the worsening pollution condition, but it will irritate the majority of Hindus in view of the upcoming Chhath puja and Diwali festivals. The State BJP President Virendra Sachdeva has raised a valid question to the Delhi government that the main reasons for pollution are the burning of stubble in the neighbouring state of Punjab and dust is flying on many broken roads. Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee President Devendra Yadav has argued the bitter truth that the arrangements made to control pollution have been inadequate. It would be better to discourage the use of firecrackers in social and religious events.

Yugal Kishore Sharma | Faridabad

People often find themselves endlessly scrolling through content without any specific purpose. We must try to acknowledge that this scrolling addiction can lead to a decrease in cognitive ability leading to various psychological disorders, or sometimes it may also hamper the mental well-being of an individual, resulting in a reduction and a lack of focus and attention while doing any job or specific task. Scrolling might give us temporary pleasure, but at what cost?

We are just making ourselves more vulnerable and slowly becoming a puppet of social media and mobile phones. Setting a limit on scrolling, planning a digital free period, and bringing offline leisure activities into our daily routine can help an individual to alleviate this dangerous addiction. So, don't lose yourself for some momentary pleasure because ultimately health is wealth.

Neha Tomar | Ujjain

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

REVIVING FAMILY BONDS

A family can transform a person into an achiever by right encouragement and support



RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJI

Small family, Happy family (Chhota Parivar-Sukhi Pariwar) & 'Hum Do Hamare', these two jingles coined by the administration had changed the family planning scenario in India over the years. But it's so ironic that despite becoming the first country to adopt a national policy for limiting a great Indian proclivity, India is expected to overtake China in 2034. At the time of independence, there were 345 million Indians. The world took 454 years to go from 345 million in 1310 AD to a billion, but India took just 52 years. Looking at the above facts and figures one wonders as to what would be the societal structure in a country that takes the burden of a population of a billion people. Sadly, the situation is quite grim, because today we see fewer families and more individuals living their lives on their terms with an 'I care a damn attitude' which is quite common in the metropolises.

Our forefathers were brought up with strong family values, but with passing time and ever-changing scenarios, today those core values have been left behind to adopt new so-called modern values. It's so unfortunate that today very few of us know the importance of living or growing up in a family. One must understand the fact that a family is the first school where the literate and the illiterate have got their first lessons in the art of living and values, traditions, customs and conventions. Also in a family, everyone feels secure and protected. Everyone feels strong because of the strength of the family. Everyone feels that others welcome him or her. Everyone feels a kind of support, sustenance and encourage-



ment. It is, therefore, essential to help and facilitate the growth of good supportive families for foundation as a family tradition rather than promoting an individualistic lifestyle for the sake of the next Gen & future to come.

There is some kind of magnetic force that holds the members of a family together. In other words, it is a feeling of closeness and belongingness in the mind of every person and the feeling of acceptance on the part of the whole group that gives it the nomenclature of a family. This feeling of acceptance is always based on the feeling of mutual love, loyalty and trust and also understanding and accommodation. Today we see that families are splitting up.

Certain values like mutual affection, love & genuine caring that make a family work are vanishing because everyone wants to live an independent life without any kind of family interference. However, if the younger ones continue to give regard to the elders and the elders continue to give love to the younger ones, then the family life will continue to be undisturbed and everyone will act responsibly. But, if each one gives up their responsibility and the feeling of concern for others, then cracks would appear and get deeper. Hence to preserve the family structure & tradition, one needs to have tolerance, sobriety & humility because family is very essential to civilised life, be it a spiritual family or the society as a family or of nations. Hence we should consider family as a place where we can work for physical, mental, moral and spiritual growth and can create an environment where others also can grow. A family can change a person into a great leader, disciplinarian, soldier, criminal or scholar by encouraging or discouraging, supporting or condemning certain positive or negative traits in him.

We must, therefore, pay attention to the transformation of families because families are the breeding grounds for good or bad human beings. So, let us awaken people to observe family values such as mutual love, trust, acceptance, accommodation, consideration and care for the wellbeing of others, the spirit of adjustment, tolerance, responsibility and cooperation because if these family values flourish, the nation and the whole humankind will flourish too.

(Writer is a spiritual educator and popular columnist; views are personal)

Stubble burning crisis needs practical solutions

Without swift and sustained efforts, northern India would face yet another year of deteriorating air quality, leaving millions to grapple with bad air quality



BISWAJEET BANARJEE



The Supreme Court has taken a strong stance against the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) for its failure to control stubble burning, a major contributor to air pollution in Delhi-NCR. The court's rebuke, delivered during a hearing on October 3, emphasised the need for effective ground-level interventions and questioned why the Commission had not implemented any provisions of the relevant Act to curb pollution from crop residue burning. Stubble burning, especially in the northern states of Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, has been a major environmental challenge for years. Farmers often resort to burning crop residue after harvesting paddy and wheat due to the increasing mechanisation of farming, the use of combined harvesters, a shortage of labour, and rising labour costs. This practice, prevalent in October and November following the paddy harvest, results in the release of large amounts of particulate matter into the atmosphere, contributing to the hazardous air quality in Delhi-NCR. The Supreme Court's criticism of the CAQM reflects a broader frustration over the Commission's inability to effectively tackle this issue. Despite being set up three years ago to address pollution in the National Capital Region and surrounding areas, the CAQM has been criticised for its slow pace and lack of tangible outcomes. The court particularly highlighted that the Commission meets only once every three months, a frequency deemed inadequate for addressing a recurring crisis like stubble burning.

Moreover, the Commission has issued only 82 directives since its inception, a number that the court described as insufficient to deal with the scale of the problem. A significant concern raised by the Supreme Court is the lack of adequate staffing within the pollution control boards of Delhi-NCR and other affected states, including Uttar Pradesh. The

FARMERS OFTEN RESORT TO BURNING CROP RESIDUE AFTER HARVESTING PADDY AND WHEAT DUE TO THE INCREASING MECHANISATION OF FARMING, THE USE OF COMBINED HARVESTERS, A SHORTAGE OF LABOUR, AND RISING LABOUR COSTS

court ordered that these vacant posts be filled by April 30, 2025, to improve monitoring and enforcement capabilities. Effective staffing is critical for implementing measures on the ground, particularly when dealing with farmers who rely on burning crop residue as a quick and cost-effective way to clear their fields.

Despite repeated interventions from both the National Green Tribunal (NGT) and the Supreme Court, stubble burning incidents continue to surge. Last year alone, more than 33,000 incidents of stubble burning were recorded in Punjab, even after explicit instructions to engage with farmers to explore alternatives. The lack of a coordinated effort between the state governments and the CAQM has only exacerbated the pollution crisis during the winter months. Turning Stubble into a Resource: While the focus remains on the failures of the CAQM and the continued challenges in states like Punjab, Uttar Pradesh has emerged as a notable example of how stubble can be managed more sustainably. The state has successfully implemented initiatives that transform stubble into an energy resource and natural fertiliser, benefiting both the environment and the agricultural community.

The key to this transformation has been the establishment of Compressed Biogas (CBG) plants that convert crop residue into energy and high-quality compost. This approach has not only addressed environmental concerns but has also created an additional income stream for farmers, who sell stubble as raw

material for the CBG process. In this way, stubble has shifted from being a burden to becoming a valuable asset in Uttar Pradesh's rural economy. As of last year, Uttar Pradesh led the country in CBG production, with ten operational plants. Currently, 24 CBG units are active, and another 93 are under construction. The state aims to have more than 100 CBG plants operational soon, a goal endorsed by Union Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister Hardeep Singh Puri. During a March 2024 announcement, he highlighted the state's plan to double its bio-coal and biodiesel production by 2025. The success of CBG production in Uttar Pradesh has been bolstered by the Uttar Pradesh State Bio-Energy Policy 2022, which offers various incentives for establishing bio-CNG and CBG units using agricultural waste.

The policy aims to set up CBG plants in every district, providing local solutions for managing stubble while promoting energy self-sufficiency. A significant milestone in this journey was the inauguration of a CBG plant in Dhuriyapur, Gorakhpur, on March 8, 2023, by Union Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. The plant, built for Rs 165 crore, processes 200 metric tonnes of straw, 20 metric tonnes of press mud, and 10 metric tonnes of cattle dung daily. It produces 2.6 metric tonnes of biogas and 125 metric tonnes of organic manure, contributing to higher agricultural yields while reducing dependency on chemical fertilisers. This initiative allows farmers to diversify their income sources and play

a crucial role in the energy sector. By reducing the practice of stubble burning, the state is making strides in environmental protection. The Yogi Adityanath government has expressed confidence that the enhanced production of bio-coal and biodiesel will help reduce air pollution in the region over the next five years. The Supreme Court's critique of the CAQM underscores the urgency of finding a balanced approach to stubble burning that respects both environmental concerns and the practical challenges faced by farmers. Uttar Pradesh's model of converting stubble into a resource could serve as a blueprint for other states grappling with similar issues. However, the broader challenge remains: implementing such solutions at scale requires consistent policy support, adequate resources, and a willingness to engage with farmers directly. The court's directive for the CAQM to improve its approach and for state governments to fill vacant posts by 2025 is a step towards accountability. Yet, the real test will lie in translating these directives into action before another winter brings the familiar, suffocating haze back to the skies of Delhi-NCR. The question remains whether the CAQM, in partnership with state governments, can adapt and adopt innovative solutions like those seen in UP. Without swift and sustained efforts, the region risks facing another year of deteriorating air quality, leaving millions to grapple with the health consequences of inaction.

(The writer is Associate Editor, The Pioneer; views expressed are personal)

Urbanisation and youth: Building a healthier future amid rapid growth

By 2050, with 70 per cent of the global population expected to live in cities, engaging youth in shaping sustainable urban future is more crucial than ever

Urbanisation, an engine for economic prosperity and growth, sits at the centre of modernity and impacts health outcomes. With rapid urbanisation, the UN projects that by 2050, 7 of 10 people will live in cities, and the youth will likely be the most dominant population. The future will be forged by the ever-increasing global youth, who are integral to playing a dynamic and revolutionary role in creating and building strong, prosperous, sustainable, and vibrant societies. In recent years, international organisations have emphasised the meaningful involvement of youth as vital to accelerating progress towards the SDGs while development continues to grow globally. The approach also coincides



ASHWAJIT SINGH

with this year's message of World Habitat Day, which focuses on "engaging youth to create a better urban future." However, while we work towards engaging the new generation in planning the urban present and future through participatory processes and local leadership opportunities, ensuring their healthy livelihood is imperative. Urbanisation's positive attributes also mask the inequalities

that exist within it. Not all city residents experience or can access these benefits equally. For instance, 40 per cent of India's population will reside in the urban setup by 2030, with 24 per cent being the youth (15-29), making it a relatively young country. Although rapid urbanisation will continue to improve India's average household socio-economic condition and child health status, it is expected to disproportionately affect the health of urban youth, who are likely to become more vulnerable to health challenges.

Urbanisation without accounting for the primary healthcare amenities results in significant health disparities. As gentrification grows with urbanisation, a large chunk of the youth is likely to reside in

urban slums and low-income areas. These areas carry distinct health challenges that are influenced by broader socio-economic determinants such as poverty, education and employment.

Youth from low-income families and areas are more likely to face barriers to accessing education, which in turn limits job opportunities and perpetuates a cycle of poor health outcomes. These informal settlements may sit adjacent to an affluent neighbourhood. Still, the people living there lack access to safe water and sanitation infrastructure, becoming hotspots for waterborne and vector-borne diseases due to flooding, open sewers, and overcrowding. With such poor hygiene, increased rates of malnutrition



among children and young adults worsen the burden of diseases. In addition to infectious diseases, urban youth in lower-income areas are increasingly exposed to non-communicable diseases such as diabetes and hypertension, which are often exacerbated by poor diet, stress, and lack of access to early diagnosis or regular health checkups. These substantial regional disparities affecting urban youths

living and health conditions are also caused by the inequitable distribution of clinics and healthcare centres, which limits care options. According to NFHS-3, only 39.9 per cent of urban poor children get full immunisation compared to 65.4 per cent of urban non-poor children. Lower vaccination rates and a lack of awareness of ongoing health issues negatively impact school attendance and cognitive development.

The National Urban Health Mission (NUHM), launched in 2013, has been instrumental in meeting the regulatory, reformatory, and developmental public health priorities for urban settings. Over the years, NUHM has improved access to healthcare, allowing the urban poor

to choose public over costly private services. Among the other initiatives to focus on urban youth health, the National Youth Policy (NYP) 2021 outlines a 10-year vision for youth development by 2030, aligning with the United Nations' SDGs. The NYP prioritises youth health as essential for India's holistic growth and progress by addressing critical health components of urban youth and acknowledging mental health. Further, India's pioneering step towards building inclusive health that benefits all and focuses on the youth also found prominence in the recent G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration in 2023.

The report encompasses ways to eliminate hunger and malnutrition and advance with

more health collaborations, especially when facing challenging mental health. While policies like NUHM and NYP have made strides in addressing urban youth health, more needs to be done and implemented to improve primary healthcare.

Many urban healthcare centres still struggle with understaffing, lack of resources, and accessibility issues for slum-dwelling youth. To ensure that India's urban youth thrive, it is crucial to increase investments in health services, prioritise mental health care, and continue engaging youth in the decision-making process for urban development.

(The writer is the Founder and Managing Director of IPE Global; views expressed are personal)

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Priyanka's debut

Wayanad marks a new chapter for Congress

PRIYANKA Gandhi Vadra's candidacy from Wayanad marks a significant development for the Congress party. Entering the electoral fray five years after her active political engagement began, Priyanka's nomination to contest the bypoll on November 13 is a step toward consolidating the Gandhi family's influence within Parliament.

Priyanka's journey in the Congress has evolved from behind-the-scenes support to frontline leadership, showcasing her strategic acumen and ability to connect with the masses. She initially focused on strengthening the party's organisational base, especially in regions where it had weakened, such as Uttar Pradesh. Her successful campaigns in Himachal Pradesh and role in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, where the Congress improved its seat tally, have cemented her reputation as a key figure. Her Wayanad campaign leverages this approach, focusing on regional issues while presenting her as a familiar Gandhi figure. Posters declaring her as "Wayanadite Priyankari" (Wayanad's beloved) reflect growing local support. She has promised to continue Rahul's work in the constituency. Though the Congress adopted a "one-family-one-ticket" rule at its Udaipur Chintan Shivir in 2022, Priyanka's candidacy underscores the rule's flexibility for seasoned family members who meet the five-year party commitment criterion. This exception, also applied to Rahul, reflects the Congress's continued reliance on the Gandhis' influence.

The bypoll is significant beyond Wayanad as it tests the Congress's new direction with Priyanka at the helm. If she wins, her role could shift from family figure to influential political leader, strengthening the Congress's position to contest BJP policies. Her opponents in Wayanad include the BJP, which is aiming to expand its base in Kerala, and the CPI(M), which has a deep-rooted base in the Left-leaning state. Priyanka is poised to navigate these ideological challenges in her bid to redefine her role in politics and come out of the constraints of Rahul and Sonia.

Omar takes charge

A lot riding on new J&K CM

THE first Chief Minister of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, Omar Abdullah, brings with him a wealth of experience, having served as the Chief Minister of the erstwhile state from 2009 to 2014. Even before the National Conference leader took oath, the inhouse disorder was out in the open. The Congress party, the NC's pre-poll alliance partner, has decided to stay out of the government. The numbers are on Omar's side and there is little reason to expect any instability. Whatever the Congress compulsions, it has set off a buzz of uneasiness within the camp. There are occasions that demand a mature stance. The presence of the Gandhi siblings, the Congress chief and other INDIA bloc members at the swearing-in ceremony fell short in conveying a message of unity and hope. Optics matter and an urgent course-correction is called for.

Ironically, an affirmation of orderliness has come from unexpected quarters. The Lieutenant Governor has assured the UT's first elected government that there will be no cause for confrontation from his side. The road ahead is uncharted territory, but right words said at the right moment signify a welcome positive start. There's been a paradigm shift in J&K's polity in the last 10 years. Despite the roadblocks, the restoration of democratic processes presents immense possibilities. It is now up to the public representatives to live up to their promises.

Statehood is the new all-consuming political goalpost. On the ground, the demands are simpler, yet far more difficult to fulfil. The people of the violence-hit region are yearning for a change that directly impacts their lives—less of politics, more of developmental activity and redress of local grievances. That's where Omar Abdullah needs to invest his energy in. A lot is riding on him.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune

LAHORE, FRIDAY, OCTOBER 17, 1924

Kohat

WE are bound to repeat that the position as regards the Kohat "investigation" as disclosed in the recent Simla communique is far from satisfactory. "Investigations," says the communique "have been somewhat delayed by the failure of the Kohat Hindus, now in Rawalpindi, to appear before the Chief Commissioner as requested, but satisfactory progress with the inquiry has nevertheless been made." It is not at all clear how satisfactory progress with the enquiry could have been made at all if, as it stated in the communique, the Kohat Hindus new in Rawalpindi have failed to appear before the Chief Commissioner. It is meant that the enquiry has so far been ex parte and that it is the ex parte enquiry which the authorities consider satisfactory in view of the circumstances of the case? Or is it meant that although the Kohat Hindus, now at Rawalpindi, have failed to appear before the Chief Commissioner as requested, they have nevertheless helped the investigation in some other and undefined way? Or, finally, does the communique seek to convey the impression that although the Kohat Hindus have rendered no help in the investigation, the authorities have nevertheless had sufficient impartial evidence of what actually took place from other sources to make it possible for them to regard the progress of the enquiry as satisfactory? If ever there was a matter to which the famous dictum of the Court of Directors, that it is not enough that justice should be done, but that the parties must be convinced that justice has been done, was strictly applicable, that matter is the present.

OPINION

The Tribune JALANDHAR | THURSDAY | 17 OCTOBER 2024

AI & other lessons from the Nobels

They once more demonstrate that fundamental research is vital for knowledge creation

DINESH C SHARMA
SCIENCE COMMENTATOR

ONE technology that is linked to both the physics and chemistry Nobel prizes this year is artificial intelligence (AI). The physics laureates — John Hopfield and Geoffrey Hinton — applied principles and tools of physics to develop methods that have facilitated machine learning. Hopfield used the principle of atomic spin to create a structure that can store and reconstruct information, while Hinton invented a method that can independently discover properties in data forming the basis for the large artificial neural networks now in use. These discoveries, over the decades, have helped powerful computers mimic human functions like memory and learning.

The chemistry Nobel has gone to David Baker of the University of Washington; Demis Hassabis and John M. Jumper of Google DeepMind. Baker has been awarded for his work on computational protein design and the DeepMind researchers get the other half of the prize for developments in protein structure prediction. Proteins are essential for cellular functions involving bodies. They are intricate folded, depending on their atomic structure and water molecules surrounding them. In a single protein, there could be trillions of potential interactions, creating countless possible shapes. Baker designed computational tools for designing new proteins, which, in turn, has opened the door for new therapies and treatments. The Google DeepMind researchers have developed an AI system called AlphaFold that predicts the three-dimensional structure of proteins from their amino acid



LONG-TERM GAME: Sustained investments are needed in fundamental research for breakthroughs, writes

sequences.

The physics, chemistry and medicine Nobel prizes again demonstrate that fundamental research is vital for knowledge creation and there is no substitute for basic research. This point has to be re-emphasised in the Indian context because every time, we bemoan that no Indian has got a Nobel for scientific research done in India after CV Raman. Hangobind Khanna, S Chandrasekhar and Venki Ramakrishnan won their Nobels for research conducted in foreign universities. Along with applied research and technology development, sustained investments are needed in fundamental research for breakthroughs.

The Nobel is usually given for pathbreaking work that leads to transformative tools and technologies. Hopfield, who is 91, began working on what came to be known as the Hopfield network and associative memory in the 1980s. So did Hinton, with his Boltzmann machine method. Their methods enabled the machine learning revolution decades later, in 2010. And finally, we have consumer products like ChatGPT. Similarly, chemistry laureate Baker has been working on protein structures for decades. He came up with the first tool for protein structure prediction,

There is no substitute for basic research. This point has to be re-emphasised in the Indian context because we bemoan that no Indian has got a Nobel for scientific research done in India after CV Raman.

Rosetta, in 1998.

The edifice of AI is based on many building blocks created over the decades. Not many know that Indian scientists have also contributed to this process. At a time when AI was just emerging as a possibility and engaging the attention of scientists along with the development of digital computers in the 1950s, physicist-turned-statistician Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis developed a concept which came to be known as the Mahalanobis Distance. It helps detect

outliers in data and measure dissimilarities in data points. Subsequently, Mahalanobis Distance found wide applications in computer science and AI. At the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI) founded by him, Mahalanobis recognised the importance of cybernetics and invited its pioneer Norbert Wiener to spend time in the institute as a visiting professor in 1955. Wiener initiated ISI researchers like Dattajyoti Datta Majumdar to work in pattern recognition, fuzzy logic and neural networks.

In 1966, Raj Reddy, a young Indian doctoral student in America, pioneered the development of systems for recognising continuous speech. He developed a new system called Hearsay I for continuous speech recognition. Along with giving computers the capability to memorise and learn like humans, making them capable of recognising human speech was a critical step towards achieving AI. Reddy later developed Hearsay II, Harpy and Dragon systems, which are the basis of commercial speech recognition technology used in computers as well as robots.

Reddy's fundamental discovery was the blackboard model for coordinating multiple knowledge sources and it has found wide applications in AI, like voice control of robots and speaker-independent speech recognition. For

his contributions, Reddy was given the Turing Award — considered the Nobel of computer science — in 1994. His contribution to the building blocks of AI is as seminal as that of 2024 Nobel winners.

The Nobel for AI-related discoveries comes with warnings about the potential danger of the technology from the two pioneers. Hinton has called AI chatbots "quite scary" after he quit the position he held in Google's AI division. He also fears that the widespread use of AI could widen economic disparities in society as the increased productivity and wealth due to AI would only help the rich. AI could gobble up a lot of mundane jobs.

To redress such impacts of AI on inequality, Hinton has said that the governments should consider a system of universal basic income for those impacted. Similarly, Hopfield has signed petitions calling for strong controls of technology and risk and benefit analysis of AI. He fears new applications of AI could lead to a dystopian society imagined by George Orwell.

Coming back to India's Nobel drought, we need to introspect. The Central government has finally operationalised a new mechanism to fund research, the Anusandhan National Research Foundation, but the funding pathways are still unclear. If India aspires to make a mark in the world of science, basic research in universities and labs should get adequate and continuous support. This is a long-term game. The focus on applied research, incremental innovation and technology development helps meet immediate societal and industrial needs.

So, we will have to strike a balance between basic research and technology while allocating resources. The private sector, too, should draw lessons from this year's Nobel. The chemistry Nobel has been shared by researchers from Google, reflecting the deep investments the company has made in basic research. Whichever way one looks, there is no magic wand or recipe for getting a Nobel other than sustained investments in basic research.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

In fact, the world needs more nerds. — Ben Bernanke

My tryst with acting in Ram Lila

ATUL JOSHI

I WAS studying in class three or four at that time. The enactment of Ram Lila by the neighbourhood children was the highlight of pre-Dussehra days. It was a unifying occasion for the colony, with people from all religious hues participating in it with gusto. The enthusiastic planning and preparation, along with the collection of funds for this eagerly awaited event, would start many days in advance.

The probable actors for the performance would be sounded at the daily meetings, the teenage director would suddenly assume a larger-than-life persona, the script was taken out and dusted while parents threw appreciative glances at the activity. All children would contribute one rupee each to meet the expenses.

These were my initial forays into the realm of acting and I happily chose to play the role of Sita. Those days, hardly any girls would participate in the show. Sita's make-up took the longest time and was the most elaborate. I was awed by the alternate red and white dots the makeup did; placed around the eyebrows. Since I had curly, small hair, a nylon wig was fixed over my little head. Despite the suppressed smiles of my co-actors, I felt ecstatic.

In that scene, the vile Ravana was at Sita's doorstep, in disguise, with the intention of abducting her and his dialogues were lengthy. A bit tired and sleepy, the little Sita waited with the ceremonial *bhiksha* in a platter, which also had a lighted earthen lamp. While Ravana went on with his dialogues, sometimes cajoling and sometimes threatening Sita to come out, I dozed off, taking the support of the pillar.

The act went on uninterrupted till it was noticed that my nylon wig had caught fire from the lamp. With a sharp reflex, I took it off and threw it away, much to the amusement of the audience. Their glee stemmed from seeing a curly, short-haired and embarrassed Sita. I was safely whisked away backstage.

On another occasion, the scene was at the Ashok Vatika where Sita was kept in captivity. Lord Hanuman's visit was due. As per the script, Hanuman would, on arrival, partake of some fruit from the trees. Therefore, some guavas and bananas were hung from the props.

Since the performance had stretched into late evening, I was hungry. So, the starving Sita plucked a guava and started enjoying it, till there was a reprimand from the director backstage that the fruit was meant strictly for Hanuman. I felt slighted and, in full hearing range of the packed audience, retorted that I too had contributed one rupee, so was entitled to the fruit. The loud roar of laughter from the viewers was a shot in my arm; the fault finder was lulled into a silence.

My attempt at acting was, understandably, snubbed the following year.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Shed non-cooperative attitude

Refer to "Farmers refuse to meet Supreme Court panel", the farmers' decision is unfortunate as it is not in their larger interest. At the same time, the government and the farmers cannot afford to be at loggerheads for an uncertain period. A sustainable resolution of the farmers' basic grievances has to be worked out. But it may not be possible if they maintain an adamant and non-cooperative attitude. Their argument that they have not asked the SC to intervene is not tenable.

JAGDISH CHANDER, JALANDHAR

Erase economic inequalities

Apropos of "Power of institutions", effective and inclusive institutions are an important key for fulfilling the aspirations of India and various units of its federal polity. As per the study of the winners of the 2024 Nobel for Economics, the policymakers and people of the states struggling to ameliorate the ever-worsening conditions, particularly those impacting their economies, must ensure that their systems are inclusive. This vision will go a long way in erasing the inequalities.

JAGVINDER SINGH BRAR, PATIALA

Stakeholders need to act in tandem

Refer to "Central panel allows DMs to punish lax staff on farm fires", stubble management is possible for big landholders, but the small/marginal farmers cannot afford the costly machines required. So, they are left with two alternatives: one is to burn it in the fields and the second is to plough the residue back into the fields, which is rather beneficial for the next crop of wheat, experts say. However, to combat this menace, joint efforts of the Central and state governments, along with the public, are required. The law enforcement agencies concerned also need to work in tandem.

RAJ KUMAR KAPOOR, ROPAR

Diaspora in Canada will be hit

Diplomatic relations between India and Canada have taken a significant hit. India has accused Canada of harbouring Khalistani separatists and overlooking anti-India activities on its soil, allegations that Canada has denied. The diplomatic friction is also impacting the large Indian diaspora in Canada as well as bilateral

trade and educational exchanges. Although both countries have historically maintained friendly relations, the current situation has raised concerns about the future of the ties.

MAYAN RANAUT, JALANDHAR

Tampering undermines credibility

The reported clashes and allegations of vote-tampering during the Punjab panchayat elections raise serious concerns about the safety and integrity of our electoral process. While the voter turnout reflects the citizens' commitment to democracy, incidents such as ballot box destruction and booth-capturing undermine the credibility of these elections. The authorities must take steps to investigate and prevent such misconduct.

GANGA ARORA, RAJPURA

India-Canada trade at stake

Apropos the article "The larger message from Ottawa", India has recalled its High Commissioner to Canada Sanjay Verma, along with other diplomats. Pandering to Khalistani sympathisers by Trudeau's Liberal Party has become its political imperative. Canada is the 18th largest foreign investor in India and the Canadian pension fund has invested \$75 billion in India. It will require careful diplomatic balancing on the part of both sides to prevent jeopardising their mutual stakes.

VINAY SAROHA, KURUKSHETRA

Don't undermine role of EVMs

Refer to "EVMs can't be hacked, will respond to all complaints: CEC", it is commendable that the Chief Election Commissioner has assured the public that all complaints raised by the Congress will be addressed. The critical role of EVMs, which are designed to be highly secure and resistant to tampering, in ensuring fair elections should not be undermined. However, if necessary, improvements to EVMs should be made to address any trust deficit. Some international studies have also raised concerns about EVM security, suggesting that experts had tampered with the machines by swapping the display board with a duplicate. Given these concerns, returning to the tried-and-tested paper ballot may be a viable alternative to restore voter confidence in India.

LJ SINGH, AMRITSAR

Letters to the Editor, typed in double space, should not exceed the 200-word limit. These should be cogently written and can be sent by e-mail to: Letters@tribuneindia.com

Trouble at home, Trudeau hitting out at India



TARA KARTHA
DISTINGUISHED FELLOW,
INSTITUTE OF PEACE AND
CONFLICT STUDIES

JUST when one thought that the spat with Canada's Prime Minister Trudeau couldn't get any dirtier, it did. Not only did his officials threaten sanctions on India, but also went waiting to the 'Five Eyes' partners — an intelligence grouping that includes Australia, the UK, the US and New Zealand — about the alleged actions of the Indian government and its diplomatic corps.

Trudeau, battling the insecurities of a minority government and facing predictions from state intelligence about a public revolt over a dire economic situation, seems to be hitting out in all directions. India has now become a target, after he had dodged accusations about China's meddling in the 2022 elections. A recent report by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police on 'Foreign Interference' in Canada, while noting 'increased' Indian activity, also mentions China 33 times. But while Trudeau's Foreign Minister Melanie

Joly has threatened sanctions on India, no such threat has been heard against China. That's unsurprising. Exports to China were about \$30 billion while imports were \$89 billion on a rising curve. With India, it's just about \$8.4 billion. Money talks.

Incidentally, the heavily redacted report also accuses another five or more states. Clearly countries vitally important to Canada. After a year of sitting quiet on the matter, even as calls for his resignations increase.

He is now calling out the 'Five Eyes' allies in a bid to gain support. The 'Five Eyes' is an 'Anglo-Saxon only' club. Oddly, all of these countries experienced a sudden surge of 'Khalistan' rampages last year, which coincided with the Anurag Singh episode in Punjab. The media ran with the story and a 2021 report of a 'nest of spies' by India in Australia was regurgitated. The head of Australia's intelligence agency very properly refused to comment on it.

In the present crisis, Australia has issued a guidance statement, calling upon India to respect diplomatic immunity. Meanwhile, an Australian delegation is in Delhi for the '2+2' dialogue. That's the real world. Trouble dealt with, and then go on with the matter in hand, which is a rising China, now heavily



INSECURE: Trudeau is battling the insecurities of a minority government. REUTERS

involved in cyber espionage into Australian business and government circles.

The UK Government, while backing the Canadian judicial system, has also been circumspect. It is worth noting that Canada has issued a travel advisory to the UK, as it was rocked by far right riots against Muslims. This is a tricky time to get into religious spats for London even as its Khalistan elements react to the new 'threat'.

New Zealand has only referred to support on the 'alleged' criminal activities by India.

The main issue for India

Trudeau's main grouse seems to be that India is cooperating with Washington but not with Ottawa. That is unreasonable since Canada has shared no details for a year.

is the US reaction. The Washington Post, after running a routine report, later carried a damaging story which not only quoted Canadian officials naming Home Minister Amit Shah as party to the assassination, but also directly quoted from what was supposed to be a quiet meeting with NSA Ajit Doval.

It claimed that he had first denied all knowledge of criminal Lawrence Bishnoi, accused by Canada of masterminding Hardeep Singh Nijjar's killing, but later 'rattled off' details on Bishnoi as being a person capable of doing anything.

This is as mischievous as it gets. First, officials never quote sensitive meetings. Second, the spin on what the NSA said. It is all very unbelievable and would not have been cleared for publication without some checking with US sources in the government.

But the State Department seems to have other ideas. While its spokesperson Matthew Miller reiterated the 'serious allegations', he underlined that the arrival of an Indian team, led reportedly by the Deputy National Security Adviser from India on the case on Gurpatwant Singh Panun, was entirely 'coincidental' and had nothing to do with the Canadian charges.

In another move, the tweet that had announced the arrival of an Indian team was quickly deleted. It also appears that the R&AW officer, who initiated a reckless and mysteriously unprofessional operation to let Panun, has been arrested.

Trudeau's main grouse seems to be that India is cooperating with Washington but not with Ottawa. That is unreasonable since Canada has shared no details for a year. And given its dealings with sensitive intelligence meetings, no one is going to.

Besides, consider the holes in the story. Anyone with a basic knowledge of the bureaucratic system would know that a home minister does not order around the

ambassadors. It is simply not his department. And if anyone says Jaishankar ordered the killing, Canada would be the laughing stock of much of the world. The accusation that Bishnoi carried out the killing of Nijjar at the behest of Indian agencies is even stranger. Apparently, Canadian intel doesn't read the news that Bishnoi bumped off a politician whose party was in coalition with the Bharatiya Janata Party.

It also accuses Indian intelligence of killing a known criminal, Sukhdool Singh Gill, an alleged ally of the Bamba group. That murder was claimed by Bishnoi, and his group's feud with the Bamba group had been going on for years, with killings in both countries. Canada's inter-gang rivalry includes not just Sikh groups but also Mexico-based cartels, among others. Strangely, Gill's killing occurred a day after India's National Investigation Agency marked him as a wanted terrorist.

Now, the Panun lot has announced a \$50,000 bounty for 'tracking' Indian High Commissioner to Canada Sanjay Kumar Verma. Six Air India flights have received bomb threats.

It seems that it's time for the 'Five Eyes' to take a good look at those whom they have chosen to shelter. At least a warning, perhaps, is called for.

Diplomacy, restraint and respect, Israel's need of the hour



BARHAT H DESAI
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LAW & DIPLOMACY

A SIMPLE, matter-of-fact statement issued by United Nations Secretary-General (UNSG) Antonio Guterres on October 1, caused an unprecedented diplomatic storm. "I condemn the broadening of the Middle East conflict, with escalation after escalation. This must stop. We absolutely need a ceasefire," the Secretary-General said in his statement.

Another statement, issued on the same day on Lebanon by the Secretary-General's spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric, reflected a similar concern. The statement read, "The Secretary-General is extremely concerned with the escalation of the conflict in Lebanon. He appeals for an immediate ceasefire. An all-out war must be avoided in Lebanon at all costs."

Though Guterres' statement did not mention any country per se, use of the jargon "escalation after escalation" and "broadening of the Middle East conflict" touched a raw nerve causing alarm in

Israel, and drew a swift reaction from its combative Foreign Minister Israel Katz. The Foreign Minister overstepped the limits of his office to declare the UN Secretary-General as persona non grata. The term is normally used to expel a diplomat whenever his/her presence in the country of his/her posting becomes 'undesirable'. To equate such the Secretary-General of the United Nations, of which Israel has been a 'difficult' member since the beginning, is beyond all canons of law of international organisation and the corpus of immunities and privileges of the diplomatic personnel. More importantly, the 'declaration' by Katz, about the UN Secretary-General does not apply to international organisations.

The UN and its staff are governed by a special Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations. Called the 'General Convention', it was negotiated and adopted immediately after establishment of the UN. As provided for in Article 105 of the UN Charter, the Convention was adopted by the UN General Assembly (UNGA) at its first session on February 13, 1946. (Resoluted 22 A (I), and it entered into force on September 17, 1946. The General Convention specifies the notion of "functional" personality and immunity of the UN. It contains detailed provisions on the privileges and immunities enjoyed by UN officials.



VISIONARY: UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres brings along his lifetime experience as a statesman, including as the Prime Minister of Portugal, with him. AP/PT

The overboard Israeli reaction was unwarranted. It is a classic example of 'shooting the messenger' who has often been troubled by the habitual and wilful defiance of international law in the Middle East by various state actors (Israel, Iran, etc.) and non-state actors (Hamas, Hezbollah, Houthis, etc.). The UN Secretary-General has sought to act within the remit of mandate of his office.

However, the tone, tenor and phrasing of the Israeli minister's declaration was not unexpected, especially in the aftermath of Prime Minister Netanyahu's defiant address to the UN General Assembly on September 27. In diplomatic parlance, any such statement prohibiting entry of the UN Secretary-General is tantamount to coercive action

The Foreign Minister of Israel overstepped the limits of his office when he declared the UN Secretary-General as persona non grata.

against the Chief Administrative Officer (Article 97) of the 193-member political organisation of sovereign states.

This kind of outburst, however, is not new in the UN history. Several other member countries, some overtly and others covertly, have sought to dissuade the Secretary-General from visiting their country. Yet, the sheer weight of the office of the UN Secretary-General is beyond insults. All Secretary-Generals, who take their task seriously, had to face this professional hazard from ill-tempered heads of government or their representatives. The UN history is replete with such stories.

To control the damage, after a discussion on the Middle East situation on October 3, the 15-member UN Security

Council issued a joint statement that indirectly chided Israel. Expressing its full support to the Secretary-General, the Council said, "Any decision not to engage with the UN Secretary-General or the United Nations is counterproductive, especially in the context of escalating tensions in the Middle East."

The founders of the UN Charter envisaged the role of the 'secretariat' (Chapter XV, Articles 97-101) as a fulcrum around which the entire edifice of the organisation would revolve. During his seven years as the head of the Secretariat, Guterres has been a trailblazer and sought to walk-the-talk as liaison officer for all principal organs of the UN. Invoking a series of instrumentalities of annual reports, special reports, periodic updates, briefings, statements and as the most visible face of the UN, the Secretary-General (along with his team) has been fine-tuning all the time on literally any issue 'under the sun'.

The regular updates provided personally by the Secretary-General to the Council have become a stuff of legends. When Antonio Guterres walks into the hallowed chamber of the Security Council (or for that matter, the General Assembly), he brings along his lifetime experience as a statesman, including as the Prime Minister of Portugal, with him. The crisp statements, laden

with facts, figures and relevant data as well as authentic updates from the ground speak for themselves. We have not seen in recent decades a Secretary-General speaking with such authenticity, sincerity and candour.

Guterres, especially during his second term, has shown that where there is a will there is a way. He has drawn power, whenever required, as mentioned in the Charter. Invoking his 'implied powers', Guterres took an unprecedented step on December 6, 2023, by sending a letter to the President of the UN Security Council. This letter invoked Article 99 (Chapter XV) of the Charter. This rarely used provision can be construed as a repository of an extraordinary power conferred upon the Secretary-General since he can "bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security". The Secretary-General's 2023 letter was propelled by the "appalling human suffering, physical destruction and collective trauma across Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory".

All UN member countries need to exercise restraint and sobriety in consonance with highest standards of diplomatic etiquettes so as not to shoot the messenger but to pay heed to his words of wisdom and empathy that underscore that there is no substitute for peace.

QUICK CROSSWORD

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8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23

ACROSS
1 An advantageous expedient (5,4)
8 Fruit of the oak (5)
9 Insult openly (7)
10 Smart in appearance (6)
11 Intelligent (6)
12 Way of dealing with (8)
15 What appeals to one (3,2,3)
18 Polish-born British novelist (6)
20 Dead (6)
21 Season's yield of grapes (7)
22 A temptress (5)
23 Dismantle (4,5)

DOWN
1 An advantage (5)
3 An optical illusion (6)
4 Unvarying (8)
5 A deadening influence (6)
6 Humorous (7)
7 Sly (9)
11 Record of persons in disfavour (9)
13 A professional business (8)
14 Parvenu (7)
16 Display ostentatiously (6)
17 Conforming with others (2,4)
19 Bode (5)

Yesterday's solution
Across: 1 Surplus, 4 Lotus, 7 Also, 8 Bookworm, 10 Figurehead, 12 Uncasy, 13 Brandy, 15 Easy way out, 18 Nautical, 19 Smug, 20 Wince, 21 Defunct.
Down: 1 Staff, 2 Resigned, 3 Soothe, 4 Like a dream, 5 Trot, 6 Summary, 9 Brush aside, 11 In common, 12 Up to now, 14 By hand, 16 Tight, 17 Turn.

SU DO KU

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

CALENDAR
OCTOBER 17, 2024, THURSDAY
Shaka Samvat 1946
Aashwin Shaka 25
Kartik Purnimashi 1
Hijri 1446
Shukla Paksha Tithi 15, up to 4.46 pm
Harshana Yoga up to 1.42 am
Revti Nakshatra up to 4.20 pm
Moon enters Aries sign 4.20 pm
Aashwin Purnima
Maharshi Valmiki Jyanti
Panchak ended 4.20 pm

HARD

FORECAST

CONSIDER: THURSDAY 12:49 HRS
SUNSHINE: 04:26 HRS

CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	33	19
New Delhi	34	18
Amritsar	32	19
Bathinda	35	18
Jalandhar	32	19
Ludhiana	33	19
Bhawan	34	20
Hisar	34	16
Sirsa	36	20
Dharamsala	27	15
Manali	22	09
Shimla	22	12
Srinagar	24	08
Jammu	31	20
Kargil	26	08
Leh	13	01
Dehradun	31	18
Mussoorie	22	12

100% PROBABILITY

Satellite communication

Trai must clear the way

Union Communications Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia's recent statement that satellite spectrum will be administratively allocated has brought clarity that auction is ruled out, reaffirming the global norm of shared satellite spectrum. The ball is now in the court of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai) to settle the pricing matter. With auction out of the way, Trai has to create a formula on how to allocate spectrum and at what price. The telecom regulator will also have to address a contentious issue on whether the rules guiding the rural and urban satellite service providers will be the same.

At a time when 5G and 6G telecom services are a critical discussion point for their use cases or lack of them, satellite communication has divided industry players. While Mukesh Ambani-promoted Reliance Jio is backing the auction route for satellite spectrum, citing the need for a level-playing field with terrestrial players, the Bharti group, led by Sunil Mittal, has been pushing for the global practice of administrative allocation of airwaves for satellite communication. However, Mr Mittal surprised industry watchers on Tuesday at a telecom summit in New Delhi, in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Mr Scindia, and business bigwigs, when he said from the podium that satellite companies that had the ambition to come into urban areas and serve elite retail customers needed to take the telecom licence just like everybody else did. He added they must be bound by the same legal conditions, pay licence fees, and buy spectrum just like the telecom companies. Even as Mr Mittal did not name any company while talking about urban and elite services, it seemed like a veiled reference to foreign players seeking to provide satellite communication service in India.

Besides Reliance Jio and OneWeb (where the Bharti group is the leading investor), foreign companies, including Elon Musk's Starlink and Amazon's Project Kuiper, are among the key aspirants in India's satellite communication space. Even as Starlink and Kuiper are yet to get the government nod to operate in India, Trai should move fast in setting norms and guidelines for the satellite industry — norms and guidelines that can co-exist with those of the terrestrial networks, as is the case globally. On its part, Trai has maintained it would take on board all comments and inputs on the subject before making its recommendation on satellite communication spectrum allocation.

However, Trai Chairman Anil Kumar Lahoti has made it clear that the content of the consultation paper issued on the subject last month will not be retracted even as some telcos are pushing for a change. In its consultation paper, Trai had suggested linking the satellite spectrum charges to the adjusted gross revenue (AGR) of a company. According to the regulator, such a formula will provide for a flexible financial burden that aligns with an operator's capacity to pay. Framing satcom rules, already delayed, will set the ground for a vibrant telecom and broadband ecosystem for rural India. According to an annual indicator report of Trai released in August, India's rural tele-density was lower than 60 per cent against over 133 per cent in urban parts of the country. Against that backdrop, satellite communication will help connect the nooks and corners of rural India, which will help open up opportunities in these areas.

Green power

New plan will aid the transition

It is well recognised that harnessing renewable energy (RE) can accelerate India's energy transition and support power management during peak load hours in both monsoon and non-monsoon months. In this context, the Union government's recent decision to launch the National Electricity Plan (Transmission) must be welcomed. The plan not only seeks to increase the installed RE capacity but also augment storage systems, including 47 gigawatts (Gw) of storage systems running on battery energy, and 30 Gw of pumped storage plants. Further, transmission systems have been planned for delivering power to hubs manufacturing green hydrogen and green ammonia at coastal locations like Mundra, Kandla, Gopalpur, Paradeep, Tuticorin, Vizag, and Mangalore. For the 10-year period from 2023-23 to 2031-32, over 19,000 circuit kilometres of transmission lines are planned to be added, covering both regions within the country and interconnections with neighbours like Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. Interconnections with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are also probable in the future. The push to increase RE capacity aligns with India's commitment to combat climate change and reduce global warming, aiming to achieve 500 Gw of RE capacity by 2030 and 600 Gw capacity by 2032. An investment of ₹30 trillion will be needed to meet the ambitious target.

During 2017-22, capacity addition achieved from conventional sources stood at 30.6 Gw while that from RE sources, including hydropower, was much larger at 54.7 Gw during the same period. Clearly, India is making progress on its climate agenda. Results from the 20th Electric Power Survey, however, suggest the compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of electrical energy requirement from 2021-22 to 2026-27 and from 2026-27 to 2031-32 is expected to be 6.67 per cent and 5.33 per cent, respectively. The CAGR of electrical energy requirement in the country from 2016-17 to 2020-21 was only 3.78 per cent. Thus, the requirement will be higher in the years to come. India, however, will remain coal-dependent for the foreseeable future. In fact, the country saw the share of coal-fired power generation rise to 75 per cent in 2023-24, from 71 per cent in 2019-20. This comes despite an increased focus on green energy and increasing capacity in this area.

This again underscores the need to invest heavily in capacity addition, change the capacity mix in favour of RE, and deploy the next phase of energy-storage systems. The Union Cabinet recently did well to approve viability-gap funding for implementing offshore wind-energy projects. The country is also making rapid strides towards electrifying its transport system. According to the National Electricity Plan document, the installed capacity of RE is expected to reach 336 Gw by 2026-27 and 596 Gw by 2031-32, contributing around 44 per cent in the energy mix. In this regard, India's aim to achieve a 45 per cent reduction in emission intensity by 2030 and cut emission to net zero by 2070 hinges, to a large extent, on its ability to embrace green electricity. The new transmission plan will aid the transition.

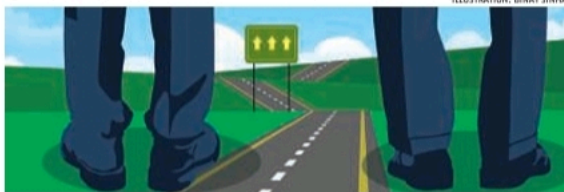


ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA

Two great architects

The aesthetics of Ratan Tata and Christopher Benninger made India a nicer physical place

Two great Indians, Ratan Tata and Christopher Benninger, passed away earlier this month. Christopher Benninger qualified as an architect from Harvard and was one of India's great professional architects. His many buildings, designed over decades, have set a standard for empathy and beauty that few can match. Ratan Tata qualified as an architect from Cornell and, apart from two years working as an architect in Los Angeles, spent his life ensuring the Tatas remained India's preeminent industrial house, leading in scale, innovation, ethics and philanthropy. Many have lauded his nation-changing achievements. I will limit myself to how they both made India physically more beautiful, Christopher through his buildings, Ratan through his personal emphasis on aesthetics.

I first met Ratan Tata around 30 years ago at meetings that Ashok Desai set up for the finance minister with industrialists before each budget. On a visit to his office, the reception area was all boarded up with work under way. His assistant told me that his office (which he inherited from JRD) had been redone. As part of the renovation, a wall was painted, to his specification, in a bright red. It did not turn out as he wanted, so the painting had to be redone, to get the shade exactly right. On subsequent visits, I was always impressed by how beautifully the office worked, everything exactly right, including the shade of red. Excellence is in the detail.

Tata Motors' first car, the Indica, was developed at a time when the company did not have a full-time CEO. Ratan Tata, as chairman, would visit Pune each month and spend an entire day reviewing progress. On a typical visit, over half his time was dedicated to R&D, reviewing product design in detail. Apart from how motivating this was for the designers, it also sent a clear message to the rest of the company that design was essential to its success.

Great current designs — the Harrier and the Nexon — reflect the emphasis on design that his vision provided 25 years ago. My most recent meetings were at his home, which I had not visited before. His house reflected his aesthetics: Simple, clean lines, with an emphasis on beauty and form. Lamps and sofas from great designers were carefully placed, not as things to look at, but to provide light and sit on. Two Nanos were part of the exterior "sculpture". It is amongst the most beautiful homes I've seen, and seems to me to be quintessentially Ratan. I will not say more about Ratan Tata; many have written with great eloquence about his many fine attributes, of how he combined courage and vision with humility and values. Let me now turn to Christopher, where I have more to contribute.

I first met Christopher Benninger around 15 years ago when Forbes Marshall had bought land at Chakan to build our main manufacturing site. We met factory architects who pitched various designs to us. They were just fine, fully functional and neat, but I would not describe any as beautiful.

In search of something different, a colleague and I visited Christopher at his office (and home), India House. Christopher had never done a factory before; the closest his firm had come was a workshop for a marine engineering college. Just visiting India House addressed any concerns we had, seeing how it had been designed, as work space flowed into home space, with features that drew your gaze in without hitting you in the face. The atmosphere was relaxed and people seemed genuinely happy working there. We asked Christopher's firm, CBNA Design, to quote, and did not look at any other architect.

Our factory in Chakan involved several phases of construction. As we planned the first project, we had hours of conversation with Christopher, as he sought to understand not just the space we needed but what



INDIA'S WORLD?

NAUSHAD FORBES

Further, demolishing these structures imposes an additional fiscal burden and causes significant environmental harm. Moreover, these properties often lack proper housing, leading to substantial financial losses for their owners. The land on which these properties are built also loses its economic value, particularly in the event of legal disputes or actions. Additionally, it hampers movement in cities. As these constructions encroach upon roads and pavements, streets become narrower for vehicles, thereby increasing congestion. On a larger scale, as more unauthorised colonies emerge, road connectivity and traffic are adversely affected.

Given the scale of urbanisation in India and the sheer volume of people now living in cities, effective management of space, land use, and public urban resources becomes essential. Constant regulation and monitoring through routine land surveys, updating records by municipal boards, and mainstreaming innovative techniques such as satellite imaging are necessary. In fact, many cities in India, such as Mumbai, Noida, and Bhubaneswar, are already using satellite imagery and geographic information systems to monitor unauthorised land uses, constructions, and encroachments. Similarly, cities globally, like São Paulo (Brazil) and Istanbul (Turkey), have employed drone technology to monitor inaccessible areas and identify illegal or unapproved constructions.

Recently, European cities like London and Barcelona have been experimenting with machine learning algorithms and artificial intelligence (AI) to analyse historical construction data and images to identify patterns of illegal constructions. Interestingly, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has also launched an app that allows users to report illegal constructions, along with



CONURBATION

AMIT KAPOOR

Information systems to monitor unauthorised land uses, constructions, and encroachments. Similarly, cities globally, like São Paulo (Brazil) and Istanbul (Turkey), have employed drone technology to monitor inaccessible areas and identify illegal or unapproved constructions.

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kind of work people would do in it and what we wanted the buildings to convey. Excellence, again, is in the detail. Jail over glass provides light and shade for the shop floor, without artificial lighting. The utility block (often ugly things with even uglier objects sticking out) near the entrance is a most beautiful building, with its mix of spiral shape and concentric steps. For our boiler manufacturing, safety reasons require that we keep a bank of welding cylinders outside the factory; instead of an unsightly rack, we have an intriguing oval out-house connected to one of the bays. The office space runs alongside the factory, in curved glass buildings that break up what would otherwise be long flat spaces. The final outcome, which photographs convey much better than words, is best judged by it winning the Indian Institute of Architects Award for Excellence for Architecture.

CBNA then worked with us to build a new expansion adjoining our existing Kothne Marshall factory. The way the two buildings connect and flow into each other, with a circular light well that brings daylight into the office and a ramp that welcomes you to follow it into the old building, are details that speak to all those who work there. CBNA is currently doing a further Kothne Marshall expansion, another expansion at Chakan, and a major revamp and expansion of our corporate office in Kasarwad. The Kasarwad offices, a mix of factory space converted to office, decades-old buildings in need of a big renovation, and a new building, have been a particular challenge. CBNA has used a white colour scheme throughout, retaining old trusses, with natural light available in abundance. An inner courtyard and garden, currently being constructed, is to provide outdoor meeting space and ensure mingling of members who do not normally interact with one another.

Christopher's designs aren't necessarily grand to look at. He never subscribed to what is best described as the "look right" school of architecture. What impresses those who experience them as tourists viewing them from a distance, but they are cold and inhuman. His designs are beautiful spaces for those who work in them, who experience them close at hand and see them every day.

The English philosopher Roger Scruton wrote eloquently on beauty. Those conscious of beauty want things to look right, "and looking right matters in the way that beauty generally matters — not by pleasing the eye only, but by conveying meanings and values which have weight for you and which you are consciously putting on display... Ravishing beauties are less important in the aesthetics of architecture than things that fit appropriately together, creating a soothing and harmonious context, a continuous narrative... where nothing stands out in particular, and good manners prevail."

We will greatly miss Christopher Benninger and Ratan Tata. We can pay them no greater tribute than by building a more beautiful India and world that inspires us as we go about our daily lives. Let their good manners prevail.

ndforbes@forbesmarshall.com. The author is co-chairman, Forbes Marshall, past president, CII, chairman of Centre for Technology Innovation and Economic Research and Ananta Aspen Centre. His book, The Struggle and the Promise has been published by HarperCollins.

The woes of illegal construction

We often spot one corner or part of a city that seems untouched by infrastructure development. These areas are often dotted with numerous cramped buildings, shops occupying pavements and roads, which cause traffic congestion. Loose wires hang precariously from poles, and multiple basements pose fire hazards.

These areas acquire notorious reputations due to a host of illegal constructions that hamper the everyday lives of the residents. The problems that unregulated and illegal constructions introduce in an urban space are not only specific to the management of urban resources and governance but also negatively impact the ease of living and social harmony among urban dwellers.

This year alone saw multiple unfortunate accidents that occurred solely due to illegal and unauthorised buildings — in July, three people died as an unauthorised four-storey building collapsed in Mumbai; in March, 12 lives were lost as an illegal building collapsed in Kolkata. In the National Capital, three young students drowned as an illegal basement flooded due to heavy rains. These constructions have grave environmental impacts, decrease the general quality of life, and, in extreme cases, result in irreversible tragedies. The magnitude of the crisis is not small and cannot be ignored for long. It is crucial that governance of these constructions is made stricter.

These types of constructions have significant economic and environmental implications. First, the loss of tax revenue becomes a major issue, as these properties are not registered. Second, illegal constructions lead to unplanned expansion, which places additional pressure on existing infrastructure and resources such as roads, electricity, and water. This situation incurs extra costs when extending these services.

Further, demolishing these structures imposes an additional fiscal burden and causes significant environmental harm. Moreover, these properties often lack proper housing, leading to substantial financial losses for their owners. The land on which these properties are built also loses its economic value, particularly in the event of legal disputes or actions. Additionally, it hampers movement in cities. As these constructions encroach upon roads and pavements, streets become narrower for vehicles, thereby increasing congestion. On a larger scale, as more unauthorised colonies emerge, road connectivity and traffic are adversely affected.

Given the scale of urbanisation in India and the sheer volume of people now living in cities, effective management of space, land use, and public urban resources becomes essential. Constant regulation and monitoring through routine land surveys, updating records by municipal boards, and mainstreaming innovative techniques such as satellite imaging are necessary. In fact, many cities in India, such as Mumbai, Noida, and Bhubaneswar, are already using satellite imagery and geographic information systems to monitor unauthorised land uses, constructions, and encroachments. Similarly, cities globally, like São Paulo (Brazil) and Istanbul (Turkey), have employed drone technology to monitor inaccessible areas and identify illegal or unapproved constructions.

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Information systems to monitor unauthorised land uses, constructions, and encroachments. Similarly, cities globally, like São Paulo (Brazil) and Istanbul (Turkey), have employed drone technology to monitor inaccessible areas and identify illegal or unapproved constructions.

other issues, directly to the municipal corporation. The environmental cost of illegal construction cannot be ignored. These structures are erected without regard for zoning laws, often encroaching on protected areas, green spaces, or floodplains. This leads to environmental degradation and exacerbates the risks posed by natural disasters. For instance, buildings constructed on unstable land or in flood-prone areas increase the vulnerability of entire communities. To curb this, authorities must firmly enforce zoning laws and use technology such as satellite imagery and AI to monitor and detect unauthorised developments in real time.

Equally important is the need to educate communities about the long-term environmental risks of illegal construction and to create incentives for sustainable urban planning. Green building codes should not just apply to elite high-rises but should be enforced across all construction sectors, ensuring that every new structure built is environmentally responsible.

As we brace for unprecedented rates of urbanisation, it is crucial to ensure that illegal constructions and unauthorised land use are curbed. Our strategies need to rest on a three-pronged pillar of economic, environmental, and social sustainability. The role of local governments is pivotal in enforcing laws, cracking down on corruption, and ensuring that illegal constructions are swiftly dealt with. Urban local bodies must update the zoning and building by-laws, making them more transparent. By incorporating online systems for approvals, inspections, and grievance redress, we can create a governance framework that is both accountable and accessible.

A culture of civic responsibility must also be cultivated, where citizens understand that the rule of law benefits everyone. Civic society can play an active role in reporting unauthorised constructions, but this requires trust in the system and assurance that these reports will lead to real action.

The author is chair, Institute for Competitiveness. Jessica Duggal contributed to the piece.

1965: A soldier's perspective



BOOK REVIEW

VEENU SANDHU

It is not commonly known that when the 1965 Indo-Pak war broke out, one particular combat had spectators: The students and professors of the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Kharagpur.

It was mid-morning and a class was on when sounds of explosions disrupted an otherwise ordinary day, sending students and their teachers rushing out. What they witnessed that day was one of the greatest air battles in the subcontinent. Indian and Pakistani fighter planes — the Sabres and the Hunters — screamed in the air, criss-crossing, chasing and shooting at

each other. On the ground, the students cheered and applauded, with no clue to which aircraft belonged to which side. Later, they would happily collect parts of the fallen Pakistani jet as souvenirs, and the military police would have to raid their hostel rooms to recover the wreckage.

This spectacle played out in West Bengal — far away from the western front where the 1965 war was largely fought to foil Pakistan's attempts to sever Jammu & Kashmir from India. From Ladakh up in the north to Bikaner in Rajasthan, the war covered the states of J&K, Punjab, Rajasthan and, courtesy this aerial combat, also West Bengal. Its scale exceeded the wars of 1947-48, 1962, 1971 and the Kargil conflict of 1999.

It was a war of many battles, each with many stories.

Ian Cardozo's book, 1965: *Courage Unleashed*, is a collection of some of these stories, most of which aren't well known. The aerial combat near the IIT

campus is one such account, parts of which read very similar to the manner in which it is narrated in The India-Pakistan Air War of 1965, a book by PVS Jagjan Mohan and Samir Chopra on the Indian Air Force's role in the 1965 war. Messrs Mohan and Chopra's book, however, does not find a mention in the bibliography of this book.

A few of the accounts are well known, and were at one point even taught in school, such as that of Havildar Abdul Hamid who destroyed several of Pakistan's US-supplied Patton tanks during the Battle of Asal Uttar in Khemkar, Punjab, before he was killed in action.

What Major General Cardozo, a decorated officer, brings to even these better-known accounts are the details only a soldier can offer. Now retired and with the experience of three wars (the Sino-India war of 1962, and the Indo-Pak wars of 1965 and 1971), he offers an insider's view.

The book, another one written for non-military readers, is more than a series of stories of what the army did, or the role the air force played, or where the navy was in the midst of all this. It's a soldier's voice, welcomingly low on jingoism, that assesses the decisions taken back then, sometimes questioning them, at other times recognising the contexts in which they were taken.

One of the more interesting chapters is on the experience, where a brigade commander asks him to draw up a plan to capture a Pakistani supply post within a week. This chapter gives a sense of the rare friction that can sometimes exist between a higher-up and soldiers on the ground, of how young officers can sometimes give in to foolhardy machismo out of josh, and how, for a soldier, the battalion is above all else.

It is nearly 60 years since the war of 1965, but the question is sometimes still

raised on whether India won or lost, considering that after the Tashkent Agreement, Indian troops were ordered to pull back and the territory gained was handed back to Pakistan. Major General Cardozo attempts to put this question to rest, like many others have done so before him.

He also explains why it is relevant to revisit a war fought six decades ago. A war is a learning for future wars. It is a war that is to be learned and prepared for all potential possibilities an adversary may come up with.

As he winds up his book, he offers a cautionary note. The next war, he writes, and India would find itself alone in it. It is not a doomsday prediction. His warning comes from logic, an understanding of emerging geopolitical situations and the experience of past wars.

He foresees a collusion between

Pakistan and China against India, which is a rising power that everyone, including the US and Europe, envies. While the US may view India as a counter to China, Pakistan remains its favourite proxy. In the event of a war, he writes, it will side with Pakistan, the way it did in earlier conflicts. Britain too, he reminds, had sent destroyers into the Arabian Sea in 1971 to intimidate India. As for Russia, while it has backed India in the past and would now be "grateful for India's naval support", at a time when it is facing isolation over its invasion of Ukraine, its deepening ties with China cannot be ignored. In any conflict between India and China, Russia would probably maintain a neutral stance.

The lesson, then, is that India needs to be self-reliant in defence. It needs to stop dragging its feet on strategic issues, to "forge jointmanship (sic)" among the defence services, theatreisation, better synergy between the armed forces and the government, and ensuring that the "army morale is not eroded by ill-conceived policies like 'Agnipath'".

Opinion

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2024

● CONTRIBUTING TO PROSPERITY

Vice-president Jagdeep Dhankhar

“The North-East is significant contributor to unity, economic progress, and cultural essence of the nation”



The more things change...

Jio and Bharti's advocacy of satellite spectrum auction makes little sense

THE MORE THINGS change, the more they remain the same. Just when one thought that the legacy issues dividing the telecom industry over policy and regulatory concerns were a thing of the past, squabbling over satellite spectrum allocation started. Way back in 2006, Ratan Tata was the first to demand auctioning of spectrum for mobile services. He faced strong opposition from Bharti Airtel's Sunil Mittal who said if Tata had so much money, he should think of donating it to the Prime Minister's relief fund. Tata's advocacy for auction was not out of love for maximising government revenues. Tata TeleServices was way behind competitors in terms of user base, which was the basis for allocating additional spectrum, so he feared that the scarce raw material would be gobbled up by others before his turn came.

Cut to 2024, there's no shortage of spectrum and the number of players are also limited, but regulatory battles amongst operators have moved on to another arena — satellite communication services. Satcom services are very different from mobile operations. It uses satellites for reaching far-flung, remote areas and hilly regions where terrestrial networks can't reach. Naturally, the services are prohibitively expensive and operators need to partner with mobile operators for last-mile connectivity. Bharti Enterprises' OneWeb, Reliance Jio, Elon Musk's Starlink, and Amazon's Project Kuiper are some of the players who have evinced interest to operate the services in India. Naturally, the issue of how spectrum should be allocated became the central issue. Bharti, Starlink, and Amazon have always held that unlike mobile spectrum, satellite spectrum is a shared commodity which is not given exclusively to any operator, therefore it does not meet the fundamental prerequisite for being auctionable. They have rightly backed this position by highlighting that nowhere in the world is this spectrum auctioned.

However, Jio has been a dissenter and has consistently held the position that same service, same rules should apply and all spectrum should be allocated through auctions. It pointed out that the government is bound by the Supreme Court's 2012 order to allocate all natural resources via auctions. Convinced about the technical constraints of auctioning this spectrum, the government, in the new Telecom Act passed last year, identified areas where spectrum can be allocated administratively. Any form of government services, like defence, public interest, and areas where there's technical infeasibility, like satcom services, thus formed part of Schedule 1 of the Act. Accordingly, the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai) has been tasked with exploring the pricing mechanism for allocating spectrum administratively. The aim is to cover administrative costs. However, Jio has objected to this approach. Surprisingly, on Tuesday, even Mittal threw in his lot with Jio's position, arguing for auction as far as retail services in urban areas is concerned. The fact, however, is such segregation of services is not possible and would enmesh the industry in legal complications of the CDMA-GSM days.

Communications minister Jyotiraditya Scindia has done well by standing his ground and maintaining that satcom spectrum can be allocated administratively, and India would do the same once Trai recommends an administrative pricing mechanism. It's bizarre for Jio or Bharti to advocate auction on the grounds of same service, same rules. It would amount to asking for the same traffic rules for a bullock cart, a car, and a plane on the grounds that they are used for the same purpose — transportation.

Indo-Canadian ties hit rock bottom

INDO-CANADIAN DIPLOMATIC relations deteriorated after Justin Trudeau, Canada's Prime Minister, stated on the floor of Parliament last September that his country's security agencies were investigating "credible allegations of a potential link" between Indian government agencies and the killing of a Khalistani Sikh leader, Hardeep Singh Nijjar. Relations nosedived with fresh allegations from Ottawa that this assassination of a Canadian citizen on Canadian soil was part of a broader campaign of state-sponsored coercive behaviour against Indian dissidents living there and it identified six Indian diplomats serving there, including the high commissioner, as "persons of interest" for being involved in "clandestine activities" over Nijjar's killing. This was followed by ill-fortunat diplomatic expulsions by both Canada and India, reminiscent of our strained relations with Pakistan. India has strongly rejected Canadian charges as "preposterous" — as it has not shared a shred of evidence — and ascribes them to the political agenda of the Trudeau-led government that crucially depends on the support of individuals who have openly associated with an extremist and separatist agenda regarding India. The escalation ladder of these allegations has also been attributed to Trudeau's deposition before the Foreign Interference Commission on Wednesday to explain the charge that his government had been derelict in preventing Chinese interference in domestic politics. For Trudeau it is India that is interfering.

The question naturally is, where do matters go from here? Canada's foreign minister has not ruled out imposing sanctions against India. India, for its part, reserves the right to take further steps in response to the Canadian government's allegations against Indian diplomats. The way forward is for India to respond like it is doing with a criminal case in the US brought against its suspects in a failed murder plot against Sikh separatist Gurbaj Singh Panwar. Last year, the Biden administration confronted the Modi government with intelligence that an officer of the Research and Analysis Wing was behind the assassination attempt. US prosecutors last November indicted an alleged drug trafficker, an Indian national, of seeking to hire a hitman to carry out the killing. Before Prime Minister Modi's recent visit to the US, summons was even issued to the national security advisor who subsequently chose not to be a part of the official entourage.

India has denied these allegations — like it has with Canada — but it has sent an investigation team to the US tasked with probing these charges. That government-linked people were involved. The US State Department spokesman has issued a statement that India is not cooperating with Canada on its investigations on Nijjar's killing: "When it comes to the Canadian matter, we have made clear that the allegations are extremely serious and they need to be taken seriously. We want to see the government of India cooperate with Canada in its investigation. Obviously, they have not chosen that path." India would do well to heed the advice of the US and similarly send an investigation team to Canada to probe its allegations, which are no doubt based on inputs from the Five Eyes, an alliance of agencies of the US, UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

That said, both nations must draw back from the precipice and resume diplomatic relations as both are interdependent. Canada's two-way trade in goods and services with India hit \$19 billion. Canada has invested \$3.9 billion in India from April 2000 to June 2024, much of it from portfolio investors. Pension funds have cumulatively invested \$54 billion. India's outbound investments to Canada were relatively more modest at \$2.1 billion. Around 600 Canadian companies have a presence in India, while around 300 Indian companies have operations in Canada. However, the deepest link is the vast Indian diaspora as two million persons of Indian origin live in that country. Many of our students have gone for educational opportunities and hope to work in Canada. They stare at an uncertain future if bilateral ties that have hit rock bottom are not resolved.

Views are personal

● THE REAL MAINSTREAM

IF ISTS WAIVER IS ELIMINATED, IT WILL BE CHEAPER FOR STATES TO INSTALL AND USE RE LOCALLY

RE waiver no longer a boon

THE INTER-STATE TRANSMISSION SYSTEM (ISTS) charge and loss waivers for renewable energy (RE) between Indian states are set to be phased out by 2028. Initially introduced to support the RE sector, the waiver has been extended several times due to demands from developers and the industry. However, as the solar and wind energy markets have matured, it's crucial to reassess the merits and drawbacks of the policy, especially given renewed calls to continue the waiver beyond 2028.

The ISTS waiver, introduced in 2016 by the ministry of power, was designed to help states with relatively low solar insolation and wind potential (low-RE states) meet their renewable purchase obligations (RPO) in a cost-effective manner. By allowing these states to import from RE-rich states without incurring ISTS charges, the policy aimed to prevent them from paying high RE tariffs. The ultimate goal was to create a "level playing field" across all states, promoting the use of RE nationwide.

In its early years, the ISTS waiver played a key role in accelerating RE adoption. States with abundant solar and wind resources, such as Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Karnataka, saw a surge in RE projects. These states could export RE to other states, helping them meet their RPOs without the burden of transmission costs. However, in recent years, several unintended consequences have emerged.

One of the major impacts of the ISTS waiver has been a significant imbalance in RE growth across states. Despite the availability of good solar resources in nearly all states, 83% of RE capacity is concentrated in just seven — Rajasthan, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana. This concentration is largely due to market distortions

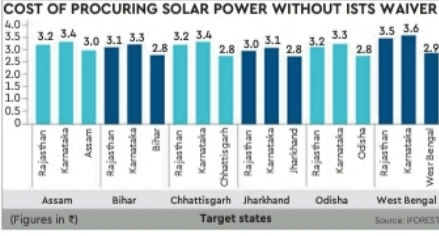
caused by the ISTS waiver in a highly price-sensitive sector. Here's why.

The cost of procuring power from solar projects located in states like Rajasthan or Gujarat by utilities in low-RE states like Odisha or Chhattisgarh includes generation costs, ISTS charges, and minor additional costs. An analysis comparing two RE-rich states (Rajasthan and Karnataka) with six low-RE states (Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, and West Bengal) shows that the difference in generation costs ranges from ₹0.02/kilowatt-hour (kWh) to ₹0.40/kWh. However, the ISTS charge waiver for transactions between RE-rich and low-RE states is estimated to range from ₹0.40/kWh to ₹0.90/kWh. In other words, the ISTS waiver is now larger than the cost differential

in generating RE across different parts of India.

If the ISTS waiver is eliminated, it will be cheaper for states to install and use RE locally, rather than importing power from thousands of kilometres away. For example, without the waiver, the cost of procuring solar power for a utility in Chhattisgarh from a local project is approximately ₹2.78/kWh, compared to ₹3.24/kWh from a project in Rajasthan and ₹3.36/kWh from a project in Karnataka.

Due to the ISTS waiver, a few states have become RE hubs, while the rest have lagged in RE growth. This imbalance undermines the policy's initial goal of fostering equitable RE development across states. Rather than developing their own resources, low-RE states have become



A Nobel Prize-winning argument



ATANU BISWAS
Professor of statistics, Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata

The work of this year's economics Nobel winners is audaciously ambitious in its simplicity of explanation for why some nations are wealthy while others aren't

FROM ADAM SMITH to the contemporary neoclassicists, economists have tried for the key driver of sustained growth. Given that this year's Nobel Prize in Economics is awarded to Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson of Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Simon Johnson of Chicago University for their research on the long-term effects of various political and economic systems — particularly those established during colonialism — on a country's prosperity, it may be worthwhile to revisit Acemoglu and Robinson's 2012 book *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty*, which drew on this trio's previous 15 years of research on the subject.

The authors contended that the causes of economic success — or lack thereof — and consequently, the current disparities in global wealth are not the oft-mentioned factors like geography, climate, culture, religion, race, or the ignorance of political leaders, but rather our man-made political and economic institutions. Their theory pits two archetypes against one another: the so-called "extractive" and "inclusive" political and economic institutions, which both serve to strengthen and support one another. They argued that the majority of citizens can, among other things, benefit from safe property rights, have access to an independent legal system, and freely develop their personal skills because pluralistic political institutions offer an even playing field. These, in turn, promote technological innovation and economic activity. Political freedom opens the door to prosperity. In contrast, extractive institutions have a disastrous effect on growth.

To create a new, very relevant theory of

political economy, they examined a number of "natural experiments" in historic cases, including the Roman Empire, the Mayan city-states, the Soviet Union, the US, Africa, and the Glorious Revolution in Great Britain. They used the example of Botswana, which has become one of the fastest-growing countries, highlighting how violent and impoverished other African countries like Zimbabwe, the Congo, and Sierra Leone are. After gaining independence in 1966, Botswana was fortunate to have leaders dedicated to creating inclusive institutions and using the nation's natural resources to fund initiatives that would enhance the welfare of the entire population.

Korea is yet another intriguing case. South Koreans are among the most affluent in the world, whereas North Koreans are among the poorest, despite the remarkable homogeneity of the two Koreas. The researchers claimed this is because of the political factors that gave rise to those two distinct institutional trajectories. They also looked at border cities, such as the divided city of Nagasaki, which straddles the US-Mexican border. Although the two halves share a relatively similar history, geography, population composition, and culture, the northern is over twice as wealthy as the southern.

These three researchers co-authored multiple highly-referenced academic papers, from which *Why Nations Fail* is mostly derived. Through their theory, however, challenged other explanations for global inequality, such as the geo-

graphical theory of Jared Diamond and Jeffrey Sachs, the theory of ignorance of the elites by Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo, the modernist theory of Seymour Martin Lipset, and the various cultural theories of different experts.

Acemoglu and Robinson's work, like Ian Morris' *Why the West Rules for Now* and Diamond's *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, addresses one of the most important issues facing humanity: why some nations are wealthy while others are impoverished? Crucially, Acemoglu and Robinson studied only the last few hundred years; thus, they had to exclude evidence from genetics, evolution, paleobiology, and archaeology. In contrast, Morris begins the development clock more than a million years ago, and Diamond starts it around 13,000 BCE.

The Nobel laureates' work has also been criticised in different ways. According to Arvind Subramanian, it's unable to account for the situations in China and India, which is democratic, has lagged behind China's economic growth, which has been impressive under its authoritarian administration. Francis Fukuyama also makes it clear that their reasoning doesn't hold true in contemporary China. But Acemoglu and Robinson retorted that since Deng Xiaoping's opening-up programme was put into effect in 1978, political institutions have also contributed to economic change in China. For India, they contended that there are differences between electoral democracy and inclu-

sive political institutions.

Robinson also noted that their treatment of Roman history is quite controversial. Also, Diamond has pointed out that they may be overlooking crucial elements such as "geography" in their explanation of economic development. The main issue with *Why Nations Fail*, according to Jeffrey Sachs, is that it concentrates too much on internal political structures while ignoring external variables like geopolitics and technological advancements (such as industrialisation and information technology). Furthermore, William Easterly argued that the transition from Mediterranean to Atlantic trade may have contributed to Venice's collapse, despite Acemoglu and Robinson's assertion that it was due to the city's institutions having progressively become less inclusive.

Overall, the work of the Nobel laureates is, all things considered, audaciously ambitious in its simplicity of explanation for why some countries are wealthy while others are not. Therein lies the fundamental issue with "outliers," which may be just as significant as China and India in this case. Actually, a country's prosperity, like many other aspects of the economy, might depend on a wide range of intricately related factors, many of which are either immeasurable or not taken into account. Thus, as one may perceive, even though the Nobel laureates this year made an amazing effort to identify a few key drivers among them, other factors may still have an impact on their own, in combination with the others, or both. In general, any simpler model excluding those factors will appear more lucrative, but they'll be more likely to have more outliers.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A new labour code

Despite being passed in both the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, the four reforms-based labour codes are long awaiting implementation since 2020. Subsuming 44 labour-related acts, the new codes have been diligently drafted to ensure flexibility, ease of doing business and compliance, social security, and occupational safety for workers. It fine-tuned the dispute

resolution mechanism. Notably, West Bengal, Meghalaya, and Nagaland — states still not ready with their drafts — are assuring that they will adopt the codes with their legislations, which means that all states and Union Territories are willing to adopt the changes. Uniformity in compliance will enhance new codes to achieve their objectives and bring a new dawn to the labour community with fair wages, safety at work, social security,

and good working conditions.

—NR Nagarajan, Sivakasi

Sour relations

India's diplomatic ties with Canada have turned sour. India must tread cautiously to outsmart the extreme steps taken by Canada, with wild allegations against India's home ministry and half a dozen diplomats, deeming them "persons of interest" in the Hardeep Singh Nijjar killing case.

Ottawa's resolve to engage the Five Eyes — the Anglophone intelligence alliance of Australia, the US, the UK, New Zealand, and Canada — may ultimately lead to sour relations with the other four nations as well. There will be a tug of war between Justin Trudeau and Narendra Modi, as both are heading minority governments. —PK Sharma, Barnala

● Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com

Nobel lessons for India

Greater institutional autonomy and inclusiveness

Satya Narayan Misra

The three winners of this year's Nobel in Economics have two eminently readable books to their credit: *Why Nations Fail?* (2012) and *The Narrow Corridor* (2019). The Committee has chosen to pick up the ideas encapsulated in their work of 2012, to demonstrate how those societies with poor rule of law and institutions exploit the population and do not generate growth or change for the better.

The book is an indirect polemic against theories explaining global inequality: the geographical theory of Ignatieff and Duflo, and Max Weber about the influence of protestant ethic on economic development. They distinguish institutions as being either extractive or inclusive. Inclusive societies protect property rights, do not allow unjust property alienation, and integrate workers to increase labour productivity. Inclusive political institutions allow wide sections of society to govern the country and make decisions that benefit the majority.

These institutions are the foundations of all modern liberal societies.

The extractive institutions exclude large segments of society from the distribution of income from their activities. Elections in the country do not preclude the existence of extractive institutions — if competition is dishonest and voting is done with numerous violations it will be so. Harking back to the history of colonialism, the authors bring out how European colonies had a dramatic and divergent impact across the world, depending on whether the coloniser focused on the extraction of resources or the setting up of long-term institutions for the benefit of European migrants.

This resulted in a reversal of fortune, where former colonies that were once rich became poor (as in the case of India demonstrated in Dadabhai Naoroji's Drain theory), while some poor countries with the help of institutions were able to garner some generalised level of prosperity.

Francis Fukuyama believes that *Why Do Nations Fail?* oversimplifies the issue by lumping different institutions and making flawed comparisons between societies. Jeffrey Sachs believes that the book focuses too narrowly on domestic political



NOBEL PRIZE. Spotlight on institutions

institutions and ignores other factors such as technological progress and geopolitics. Singapore and South Korea easily refute Acemoglu's argument that democratic political institutions are a prerequisite for economic growth. Hong Kong, Korea, Taiwan and Singapore are prime examples of countries that have high growth, with policies tending towards exclusiveness.

Under the best of conditions, growth does not sustain itself. The great economic depression of the 1930s or the global financial crisis in 2007-08 did not happen because of a decline in inclusiveness. The incredible economic transition in China post-1980 happened because of their embracing capitalist economy, respecting private property, and massive investment in infrastructure and education.

Acemoglu told reporters recently that data collected by Freedom House and V-Dem show that public institutions everywhere are getting weaker and support for democracy is at an all-time low. They admit that China is a bit of a challenge to analyse.

Countries like China and Russia with strong state apparatuses but inadequate checks on their power suffer from inequality, lack of innovation, and a general lack of human rights. On the other hand, in the US the power and capacity of the state is extensive and capable but restrained by guaranteed rights and democratic participation. In the context of India, Acemoglu highlights how corruption and caste-based inequality contribute to its poor economic institution. Of late, the independence of constitutional bodies is also being questioned. This year's Nobel in Economics has salience both for ushering greater inclusiveness and ensuring the independence of India's institutions.

The writer is Professor Emerita, KJ Somaiya, Bhubaneswar

Are we at peak foreign reserves? Not quite

FOREX CARD. The pluses are strong portfolio flows, BoP surplus and 10-11 month import cover. But there is still some headroom for reserve accumulation



RADHIKA RAO

A surge in India's foreign reserve stock has led to questions on what the RBI will consider as an 'adequate' level. Our reading of the tea leaves suggests there is further headroom for the stock to grow.

India's total foreign reserves surpassed and stayed above \$700 billion as of October 2024, only the fourth country in the world to do so. Foreign securities dominate the reserves mix, alongside positive returns from higher coupon deposits with global central banks also boosted the nominal reserve levels. Net dollar purchases jumped by \$29 billion between January and July 2024, before likely moderating in Aug-September 2024 due to intervention to prevent one-sided rupee depreciation.

GOLD HOLDINGS

The central bank also joined its peers in rebuilding its gold holdings, with the latter's share rising to over 9 per cent of the overall stock vs 6 per cent in late-2019. Gold prices surged last quarter, provided positive valuation tailwinds. On a comparative basis, India's reserve stock has risen by the

most amongst its regional peers since the 2013 taper tantrum.

There is some time to go before authorities pull the brake on reserve accumulation, on three counts.

Firstly, strong portfolio inflows and BoP surplus. With the balance of payments expected to post a surplus on the back of strong financial flows, and manageable current account deficit, helped by resilient remittances and strong services receipts, further net accretion is likely in the reserves position.

In 2QFY (Jul-Sep 2024), the goods trade balance may experience some challenges due to a temporary increase in gold purchases and festive import demand, potentially leading to a wider CAD of approximately -1.6 to -1.8 per cent of GDP.

However, this is expected to stabilise in the following quarter as lower oil prices are reflected in the energy import bill and a sustained services surplus continues. Geopolitics induced jump in oil prices is an unknown in this mix.

India's import cover (reserves vs months of imports) at 10-11 months is three times above the global norm, which can cushion against external shocks

A manageable CAD is likely to be accompanied by favourable funding terms. While direct investments might be steady, portfolio inflows have maintained a strong streak on FYTD basis, with cumulative flows into the debt and equity markets at over \$20 billion by end-September.

Adding non-resident deposits and external commercial borrowings, we expect FY25 BoP to register \$48-\$50 billion surplus vs \$63.7 billion in FY24, underpinning reserves.

Secondly, reserve adequacy ratios are well-buffered but below peak levels. Total reserves are well-cushioned across various adequacy ratios, including imports coverage, IMF's ARA metrics, external debt ratios particularly short-term debt and our proprietary GEFR (gross external financing ratio).

India's import cover (reserves vs months of imports) at 10-11 months is not only three times above the global norm, but also consistent with the 3-7x seen across most developing countries. This strengthens the authorities' defence against external shocks or uncertainties.

MORE HEADROOM

While metrics are at healthy levels, few of the ratios are below their past peaks. For instance, import coverage taken as a proportion of either total reserves or foreign currency assets, is below peak levels witnessed a decade back.

Similarly, the GEFR gauge is well

above the 2013 taper tantrum period, but below stronger levels witnessed in wake of the pandemic. These suggest there is further headroom for reserves accumulation.

Lastly, reserve accumulation is driven by flows. Just as foreign exchange reserves have risen, so have external liabilities.

Consequently, the overall net international investment position remained in red last year and likely in FY25, but encouragingly narrower than 2018-19. On the assets side, reserves jumped sharply, but this was counterbalanced by a jump in liabilities, primarily in the form of higher foreign portfolio investments alongside increase in offshore borrowings.

Even as authorities are focused on building buffers against external headwinds, the stock could be at risk if the global environment worsens, as the reserves composition has been a function of fluctuating portfolio flows, rather than stickier current account surpluses through trade. This reinforces our expectations that the overall tendency will be to continue building ammunition.

With the government's intention to build a strong war chest to fend against global uncertainties, we expect the stock to near \$725-\$730 billion by fiscal year end.

The writer is Senior Economist & Executive Director, DBS Bank, Singapore

US elections: Lichtman's 'Nostradamus' prophecies

Atanu Biswas

With the US presidential election in just a few weeks, several pollsters are busy conducting opinion polls and analysing them. Political polls, however, are not necessarily reliable indicators of election results, especially in a close contest.

On the other hand, Allan Lichtman, a history professor at American University in Washington, DC, has made a straightforward yet almost Nostradamus-like prediction about the US presidential elections that has, thus far, had a 90 per cent accuracy rate. Well, how many pollsters can boast of such a coveted prediction record? Using an unconventional approach he and his geophysicist friend Vladimir Keilis-Borok developed in 1981, Lichtman disregarded opinion polls and pundits in favour of examining the fundamental issues that, according to them, have shaped every presidential election since 1860.

Since 1984, his prediction system, "The Keys to the White House," has been evaluating the strength and performance of the incumbent party and predicting the outcomes of US presidential elections using 13 historical factors, or "keys" (four political, seven performance, and two

personality). He has been right in all except one of his predictions, which was George W. Bush's contested triumph against Al Gore in 2000.

Lichtman, however, contends that even that stain is unfair, pointing out that thousands of votes that were disallowed came from people who had honestly attempted to support Gore but unintentionally spoiled their ballots. Thirteen broad, true-false questions that gauge the effectiveness of the White House party are the keys.

The party mandate, White House scandal, incumbency, primary contest, third party, short and long-term economics, policy changes, incumbent and challenger charisma, foreign policy success and failure, and social unrest are the keys. Lichtman's model predicts that the incumbent party's candidate will lose if six or more keys are against them. And, in early September, Lichtman predicted Kamala Harris would win the 2024 presidential election this time around; eight of the 13 keys supported her. Lichtman argues that the Democrats gained House seats even though they lost seats, so the midterm gains key is false for Harris. The incumbent key is also false because Biden withdrew from the contest.

HARRIS'S CHANCES

According to Lichtman, Harris benefitted from the lack of a formidable third party due to the withdrawal of



POLL GAZE. At knife's edge

Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s independent campaign, favourable short- and long-term economic indicators, significant legislative accomplishments carried out by the Biden administration, and the absence of social unrest or scandal surrounding the White House.

In addition, she had the advantage of not having to fight for the party's nomination to replace Biden, as she gained the support of other contenders before the Democratic National Convention last month.

Even if two still unresolved keys on foreign policy achievements or failures fell in Trump's favour, they would not be enough for him to win the election, according to Lichtman's formula. Lichtman, however, ignores polling trends, campaign tactics, and events.

"None of these ephemeral events, not the debate, not the purported attempted assassination, not JD Vance saying he made up a story about

immigrants eating cats and dogs... None of that changes the fundamentals of the election," Lichtman said. But is America really ready to elect a woman of colour to the presidency and create history? Is it really that simple this time?

"My prediction is that Kamala Harris will win in 2024, but everyone still needs to VOTE," Lichtman stated recently. It should be mentioned that despite his success, Lichtman's methodologies have frequently been questioned by political scientists, pollsters, and other historians who claim that his model is unscientific and too simplistic.

And, to be honest, assessing some of the keys is subjective. And one wonders, amid the waves of opinion polls, if similar "keys" may be created for the Indian elections as well — possibly by sifting through historical election data?

Given the complex, heterogeneous, and multifaceted nature of our elections in a truly multi-party system where various strong regional parties and various types of pre- and post-poll alliances exist and undergo constant evolution, that may be a more daunting and subjective endeavour.

Can any political pundit, though, attempt to formulate such a model? That might add more fun to election prediction, for sure.

The writer is Professor of Statistics, Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata

thehindubusinessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

October 17, 2004

EPFO settling claims at interim rate of 8.5 pc

The Employees Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) is settling claims of subscribers who have been closing accounts since April this year, assuming the interim rate of 8.5 per cent to be the final rate. This may lead to losses to the subscribers if the rate is later increased.

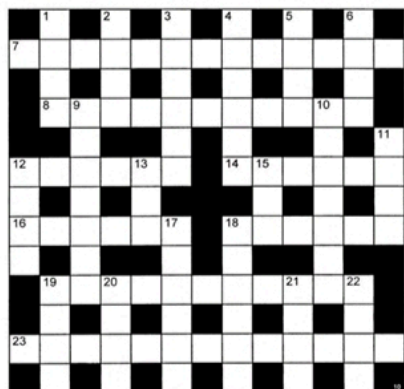
Congress-NCP combine set for another term

The ruling Congress-NCP combine seems all set to retain power in Maharashtra. The combine has clinched 139 seats in the 2004 State Assembly elections, falling short of the magic number of 145. This even as informal pre-poll alliances indicate that it has another five seats as good as sewn up in the form of three seats from CPI(M) and two independents.

After Rofecoxib ban, other drugs on watch list

Following the Government's decision to ban Rofecoxib (an anti-arthritis drug), just weeks after Merck voluntarily withdrew its branded version Vioxx, the Health Ministry plans to review the status of drugs that were previously banned or withdrawn from the international market.

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2549



EASY

ACROSS

07. Rational, calm (13)
08. Prevail over (11)
12. Learned man (6)
14. Lubricant (6)
16. Fungal plant disease (6)
18. Crept very slowly (6)
19. Fleeing the centre (11)
23. With no fixed value (13)
01. Cove, fellow (4)
02. Colour; depressed (4)
03. One accompanying for protection (6)
04. Season; bounce (6)
05. 12-point type (4)
06. Cost of travelling (4)
09. Rotate (7)
10. The windpipe (7)
11. Unwanted plant (4)
12. Receptacle engine oil drains into (4)
13. Indication of maiden name (3)
15. Move fast (3)
17. Parking official (6)
18. Disgrace, viliness (6)
19. Stick (4)
20. Require (4)
21. Medal (4)
22. Old stringed instrument (4)

DOWN

01. Cove, fellow (4)
02. Colour; depressed (4)
03. One accompanying for protection (6)
04. Season; bounce (6)
05. 12-point type (4)
06. Cost of travelling (4)
09. Rotate (7)
10. The windpipe (7)
11. Unwanted plant (4)
12. Receptacle engine oil drains into (4)
13. Indication of maiden name (3)
15. Move fast (3)
17. Parking official (6)
18. Disgrace, viliness (6)
19. Stick (4)
20. Require (4)
21. Medal (4)
22. Old stringed instrument (4)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

07. Calmly uncomplaining about oil Polish chap supplies (13)
08. Have a commanding position and drop me in tea by mistake (11)
12. A scholar was in session about the front of the army (6)
14. See rag used for fatty stuff (6)
16. Plant disease can make me wild (6)
18. Moved very slowly in church, to end without a middle (6)
19. Carried out from the middle, grunt if face gets torn (11)
23. It's uncertain in matter I need for its construction (13)

DOWN

01. Fellow got this man to be a pedlar (4)
02. How sad Peter is when leaving port (4)
03. Go along and protect company in sort of rest (6)
04. It is found to be found in a clockwork model (6)
05. Unnatural craving of a type of magpie (4)
06. What it costs to go for food and drink (4)
09. Turn a clericman to love of a sort (7)
10. It makes the car, a version of what one breathes through (7)
11. What gardener will remove a small Scotch on the day? (4)
12. Oil drains into it with some presumption (4)
13. Born with no end of 20 (3)
15. Organise how long a play will be shown (3)
17. Kind of pear church takes to be a pipe (6)
18. There's public disgrace if many are involved in it (6)
19. The stick is roughly to the Northeast (4)
20. Have to have been 13 on 1st December (4)
21. Leaving without one getting a summons to dinner (4)
22. One used to play it with a rubber sealing-ring (4)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2548

ACROSS 1. Compromised 7. Precise 9. About 11. Least 12. Cobweb 14. Requisition 18. Shaver 20. Aware 22. Loin 23. Outline 24. Independent

DOWN 2. Operate 3. Open 4. Elbow 5. Spell 6. Stubbs 8. Intruder 10. Contract 13. Ask 15. Ovation 16. Psalm 17. Fever 19. Alien 21. Bole

Sticky issue

Monetary policy can't quell stubborn food inflation

There can be no discounting the abiding concerns of the Reserve Bank of India over headline consumer price inflation, and the persistence of high food inflation as the driver of this price rise. The September print for retail inflation, at 5.5 per cent, has been driven by food inflation of 8.3 per cent, and within food the 36 per cent rise in vegetable prices.



SBI Research pegs Q3 and Q4 inflation at 4.9 per cent and 4.6 per cent, respectively, higher than the RBI's estimates of 4.8 per cent and 4.2 per cent. The October inflation reading is expected to be similar, with the rain-induced supply shocks keeping food inflation elevated. Whether it impacts the kharif standing crop and market arrivals remains to be seen. When the Monetary Policy Committee meets in the first week of December, it is likely to be faced with a paradoxical situation of elevated inflation (going by September and October data, as it would meet before the November numbers are out) and somewhat subdued growth. However, monetary policy cannot do very much to control food inflation, given that it is caused by supply bottlenecks rather than increase in demand. Nor can a case be made out that lower rates will incentivise storage or hoarding; the food price rise is more on account of fresh supplies being impacted due to exceptional rain.

The view that food inflation spills over into core inflation through 'expectations', and therefore needs to be checked by tight money policies, seems a bit overdone. It may not be far-fetched, therefore, to expect the MPC to stay the course in being more accommodative than in the past. A contraction in the factory index since May this year (the August reading being minus 0.1 per cent), and a flat trend between November 2023 and May 2024, does indicate growth stress. That said, the nature of inflation (food inflation in particular) deserves some attention. Overall, food inflation has been the key driver of headline inflation over the last 15 months, including September. Between July 2023 and September 2024, food inflation averaged 7.7 per cent and core inflation 4 per cent. In fact, it has averaged 7 per cent over the last five years, according to analysts.

A Reserve Bank of India paper (August bulletin) has conceded, after studying trends over four years ending this June, that food inflation is a "persistent" phenomenon. If vegetables prices and within these the tomato, onion potato group, have been volatile (vegetable prices have risen more than 25 per cent between March and September), cereals inflation too is significant at 7 per cent now, even if down from 13 per cent in May 2023. This is despite there being no real output constraints. The RBI paper cites climate change as the overriding factor in stubborn food inflation. This may not be the only force at work. Knee-jerk trade policy, market bottlenecks and poor yields are additional factors. While food inflation remains a conundrum, it is core inflation that is perhaps more relevant for monetary policy.

OTHER VOICES.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

The mail-ballot panic is back for 2024

With three weeks to go until Election Day, advocates of mass mail voting are again worrying about the reliability of mass mail voting. During the 2022 midterms, 23,393 mail ballots were rejected in Pennsylvania (1.9% of those returned), according to the US Election Assistance Commission. It was 24,141 (or 1.4%) in Michigan and 10,535 (or 2%) in Nevada. The nightmare scenario after November 5 is that Kamala Harris or Donald Trump might be leading by a few thousand votes or less, in which case ballot errors, and how they're resolved, could affect the outcome. The litigation could wind up at the Supreme Court, and given the tenor of today's political times, that dispute could make Bush v. Gore (2000) seem like a badminton scrimmage. (NEW YORK, OCTOBER 15)

The Guardian

Israel undermining a vital institution

The United Nations is supposed to be above the fray — a forum for and facilitator of peaceful resolutions or, at the least, the minimisation of harms. Yet for the last year, Israel has treated it as an inconvenience at best and adversary at worst. UN peacekeepers are literally in the path of its offensive in Lebanon and are refusing to leave as it has urged. The UN Defense Force forcibly entered a base and have repeatedly fired on their positions, injuring five. Nearly 230 aid workers for Unwra, which supports Palestinians, have been killed in Gaza. Earlier this month, Israel declared the UN's secretary-general, António Guterres, persona non grata. In May, its outgoing ambassador to the UN shredded a copy of the charter. (LONDON, OCTOBER 15)

Does deposit insurance deliver?

Coverage of bank deposit insurance in India has improved since 2020, but premium collection can be linked to risk

POINT BLANK.



LOKESHWARRI SK

Deposits with banks have somehow been the mainstay of Indian household's financial savings, perhaps due to their simplicity and the implicit safety. Though mutual funds, insurance and other alternative assets have been making inroads, Indian households still park 45 per cent of their financial assets in their friendly neighbourhood banks.

Deposit insurance, therefore, assumes importance in helping regulators retain the trust of the masses in the financial system. India was the second country after the US to start a Deposit Insurance Corporation, in 1962. This was in response to the banking crisis in Bengal and the closure of the Laxmi Bank and Palai Central Bank in the post-Independence period. DICGC was formed with the merger of the Credit Guarantee Corporation in 1978.

Globally too, deposit insurance has moved into the spotlight since the global financial crisis in 2008, which witnessed many large banks going under. The collapse of the Silicon Valley Bank in 2023 and the erosion of the assets of all US banks, further underlined the need to provide a safety net for depositors.

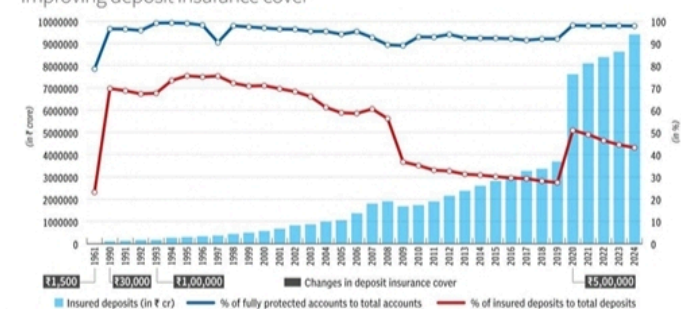
Fortunately, in India, larger commercial banks, where 93 per cent of household bank deposits are parked, have been on a relatively steady footing. The last of the commercial banks for whom deposit insurance was paid were Sikkim Bank in 2000 and Benares State Bank in 2002. Since then, RBI has been adroit in rescuing troubled banks by either merging them with other financial institutions such as Lakshmi Vilas Bank and IDBI or giving a plan to reconstruct their dues and to continue operations such as YES Bank.

The problem however persists with cooperative banks which attract deposits from large number of urban dwellers and currently account for 7 per cent of household bank deposits.

WHAT WORKS

The long-overdue increase in the deposit insurance coverage in February 2020, from ₹1 lakh to ₹5 lakh has helped improve the insurance coverage ratios in the country. Though the coverage limit has been revised six times since inception, the limit had been left unchanged since 1993. With this

Improving deposit insurance cover



Source: DICGC

revision, the percentage of fully protected accounts improved from 92 per cent to almost 98 per cent. This makes Indian deposit insurance match other countries which have similar proportion of fully insured deposits.

Similarly, the percentage of insured deposits to total assessable deposits too witnessed a large improvement from 27.4 per cent in 2019 to 50.9 per cent in 2020. This ratio is currently at 43.1 per cent, which is lower than the global average of 47 per cent, but it is far better than the 30 per cent in other lower middle-income countries.

The deposit insurance fund of the DICGC which is made of the premium collected and the return on the investments made from this fund, stood at ₹1,98,753 crore towards the end of March 2024.

The ratio of the fund to insured deposits stood at 2.11 per cent, which is in line with the global median of fund sizes of other deposit insurers of 2 per cent in the last decade.

The insurance coverage in India is, therefore, largely in line with the philosophy of IADI (International

Despite the higher risk in cooperative banks, the insurance premium charged to them is the same as other commercial banks — ₹100 on every ₹100 of assessable deposits

Association of Deposit Insurers) which states that deposit insurance coverage should be "limited, credible and cover the large majority of depositors but leave a substantial amount of deposits exposed to market discipline."

THE UCB CONUNDRUM

That said, the Indian banking landscape with large number of tiny cooperative banks which are operating with relatively lighter regulations and carry higher risk creates unique challenges in deposit insurance. Of the 1997 banks registered with the DICGC towards the end of March 2024, there were just 140 commercial banks but 1,857 cooperative banks.

And failures have been more among cooperative banks in recent years. The RBI has cancelled the licences of 78 urban cooperative banks since 2014; 10 of these licences were cancelled in 2024. Since inception, ₹295.9 crore has been paid towards insurance claims of 27 commercial banks. In contrast, around ₹16,000 crore has been paid to settle the claims of depositors of urban cooperative banks.

But despite the higher risk in cooperative banks, the insurance premium charged to them is the same as other commercial banks — ₹100 on every ₹100 of assessable deposits. There is a strong case for charging premium based on risks in the business. This will address the moral hazard in charging a flat premium. It will call for an assessment of the risks in banks' books based on granular data on their

credit book, governance practices, capital adequacy and asset quality.

According to the IADI, approximately half of deposit insurers globally levy differential premiums which consider additional risk measures and thus price risk on a more granular basis; the share was just 30 per cent in 2010.

OTHER ISSUES

The time taken by the DICGC to settle claims can also be shortened to meet global standards. The IADI recommends reimbursement of the claims of most depositors within seven working days. Around 70 per cent of European deposit insurers and 40 per cent of their Asian counterparts commence payouts within seven days.

This timeline mandated for DICGC is, however, quite generous. The Corporation must pay depositors of the banks placed under All Inclusive Direction (AID) within 90 days from the date of imposition of AID. In case any scheme of amalgamation or other scheme, this period could be extended by 90 days.

These timelines may have been set keeping in mind the lower technology adoption by cooperative banks. But depositors should not be penalised for the bank's tardiness in digital adoption. Finally, the DICGC needs to review the coverage limit per depositor at 5-year intervals to account for inflation and growing bank deposits. The share of insured deposits to total deposits has already moved down from 50.9 per cent in 2020 to 43.1 per cent now.

A case for easing CD ratio for small finance banks

This will provide SFBs more flexibility in managing capital and liquidity; they can lend more effectively

P Saravanan
A Paul Williams

Small finance banks (SFBs) in India are facing a growing challenge as their credit-deposit (CD) ratios surge past comfort levels. This has prompted them to approach the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) seeking relief from the existing regulatory framework.

Recent news reports highlight this rising concern, with some SFBs reporting CD ratios exceeding 100 per cent, significantly higher than the 75 per cent generally seen as prudent for scheduled commercial banks. This surge in lending activity, while indicative of SFBs fulfilling their mandate of extending credit to underserved segments, raises concerns about their liquidity positions and ability to manage risks effectively.

CD ratio: The credit-deposit ratio (CD) provides insight into a bank's lending practices and liquidity management. By indicating how much of the deposited funds are being used for loans, it helps assess the bank's ability to generate income through interest on loans.

A higher CDR suggests that the bank is actively lending more relative to its deposits, which can lead to greater

interest income. Conversely, a lower CDR might indicate a more cautious lending strategy, potentially leading to lower income.

This ratio is crucial for stakeholders, including regulators, investors, and the bank's management, to evaluate the bank's operational efficiency and risk management.

SFBs vs commercial banks: While both SFBs and commercial banks operate within the banking sector, they cater to distinct customer segments and have different operational focuses. Comparing them would be akin to comparing apples and oranges.

SFBs primarily focus on serving the underserved and underserved sections of society, including micro-enterprises, small farmers, and unorganised sector entities.

Commercial banks, on the other hand, cater to a wider range of customers, including individuals, large corporations, and government entities. SFBs prioritise financial inclusion and developmental activities, providing customised financial products.

Commercial banks, while also contributing to financial inclusion, have a broader mandate that includes corporate banking, investment banking, and international operations. SFBs operate under a differentiated



LENDING. Must be inclusive

regulatory framework that recognises their unique mandate and provides them with certain relaxations.

THE RATIONALE

SFBs were originally set up with an aim to promote financial inclusion by providing banking services to underserved population. They often focus in niche lending like microfinance and agriculture.

Exemption could provide them with greater flexibility to manage capital and liquidity, allowing them to lend more effectively based on demand rather than

being constrained by regulatory ratios. Without the pressure of maintaining a certain CD ratio, SFBs can focus on expanding their lending portfolios and growing their customer base.

By easing CD ratio requirements, SFBs can increase funding for small businesses and entrepreneurs in rural and semi-urban areas, contributing to job creation and growth. Exempting SFBs from strict CD ratio requirements similar to that of commercial banks could be a significant step toward enhancing their ability to promote financial inclusion.

Further, SFBs have generally maintained a healthy CD ratio. In recent years, there has been an increasing trend in the CD ratio of SFBs, indicating their growing confidence in lending to their target segments and their ability to manage liquidity effectively.

It is essential, however, to balance this flexibility with robust oversight to ensure that these institutions remain solvent and effective in their mission. The case for exemption can certainly be considered alongside a framework that emphasises responsible lending and risk management.

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Commercial disputes

With reference to "Making commercial courts effective" (October 16), commercial disputes are bound to leapfrog with the new downsized monetary limits for dispute raised through commercial courts. The enormous piling up of unnecessary litigations for petty causes, misusing the authority given under constitutional rights, puts innumerable burden on the judiciary. With contractual obligations under commercial disputes being a complex category, especially with reference to e-commerce-related litigations emanating from predominant market penetration by global

Towards inclusive growth

operators, the need for more judicial officers specialising in commercial and trade laws is crucial for speedy and amicable resolution of disputes. Sitaran Popuri Bangalore

Valuable insights

The work by the Economics Nobel laureates sheds valuable insights on how political and economic institutions play a role in explaining why some countries prosper while others do not. Europeans in the colonial past used authoritative systems to control densely populated areas; while sparsely populated ones saw more settlers

AG Rajmohan

that resulted in establishing more inclusive governments. Their studies show that long term prosperity will be ensured if a state reduces entrepreneurial risk, preserves property rights, creates independent regulators, dispenses justice swiftly and does not monopolise savings. Vijay Singh Adhikari Houston, United States

EU-China tariff war

This refers to China's EV giant BYD slams EU tariffs as rivalry heats up at Paris car show (October 16). The European Union imposed higher tariffs on electric vehicles imported from China, risking tensions with an important trading partner in an

effort to protect an industry crucial to Europe's economy. It is a signal that there's an emerging consensus in Europe that stronger pushback against China on the economic front is needed. Also, the EU's decision stems from an investigation that found government subsidies given to electric vehicles made in China, part of a broader push against what the commission describes as anti-competitive behaviour from China that has hurt European businesses. On the other hand, China has started investigations against subsidies on European goods, indicating a possible trade war. N Sudhasri Reddy Washington, US