

## Editorial



## Complicit

India must come clean on its stance on transnational killings

**T**he U.S. Department of Justice's second indictment against an Indian intelligence and paramilitary officer, in the alleged plot to kill American-Khalistani activist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, indicates another serious turn in the case that has cast a long shadow over India-U.S. ties. The indictment against Vikash Yadav was released publicly along with an arrest warrant and his listing on the FBI's database of "most wanted" — the first time that an Indian official has been so marked out. The developments come just after a high-level Indian security delegation investigating the matter travelled to the U.S., and the U.S. State Department expressed "satisfaction" with India's cooperation. There is cause for concern now: the second indictment that supersedes the one against jailed businessman Nikhil Gupta, repeats linkages to the Canadian case of the 2023 killing of Canadian-Khalistani activist Hardeep Nijjar. It seems no coincidence that the indictment is timed with the Canadian expulsion of Indian diplomats, sparking a diplomatic storm and also statements by the "Five Eyes" urging India to cooperate in the investigation with Canada. That these statements reek of a double standard, given that these countries have a record on transnational killings, must not stop India from upholding the law. But this surely raises questions about whether these allies are reliable as India's closest strategic partners.

New Delhi must not delude itself and must proceed on the assumption that the cases in the U.S. and Canada are being linked by their investigating agencies. The stark difference in the Modi government's outraged denial of the Canadian charges while providing a sympathetic ear for the American charges may prove untenable as the trial in the U.S. progresses. It is in India's interest to clarify whether it believes Mr. Yadav was a "rogue" agent or was carrying out orders from senior officials, when he allegedly promised "23" contract killings a month against targeted members of the diaspora. While the External Affairs Ministry has since confirmed that he "no longer works for the government", the indictment claims that he was employed by India's Cabinet Secretariat, under which the R&AW is run. Whether the truth lies in incompetence or complicity, the image of the government's intelligence and national security operations is dimmed. If the government proceeds to prosecute him or turn him over to U.S. agencies, it must also consider the impact on the morale of other operatives essaying future operations. Above all, the government must be more transparent about its policy on transnational killings. If it does not allow such operations, and it should not, then it is time for a more detailed investigation into its internal processes as well as a more realistic evaluation of its diplomatic relations.

## Governor vs Govt.

Mr. Ravi must be withdrawn from needlessly wading into controversies

**A**fter a fleeting moment of camaraderie, political hostilities between Tamil Nadu Governor R.N. Ravi and Chief Minister M.K. Stalin are on the rise again, this time triggered by a distorted rendition of the State anthem at a Prasar Bharati event. The *Tamil Thai Vazhthu*, rendered as an invocation song at official functions since 1970, was declared the State anthem in December 2021. This followed a judge holding that there was no statutory or executive order requiring attendees to stand when the song is played, after a seer remained seated during its rendition. At the event that was attended by the Governor, a verse in this 55-second anthem omitted. Though it was described as inadvertent, no attempt was made to rectify it on stage. Most political parties were disapproving of the omission. Mr. Stalin asked whether if Mr. Ravi was being a "Governor" or an "Aryan" and sought to know whether the Governor, "who suffers from Dravidian allergy", would propose the deletion of the term "Dravida" from the national anthem.

The Governor took umbrage at this and described the "Aryan" reference as "racist". Such interpretation actually goes against the Governor's theory that the concept of Aryans and Dravidians was mainly a geographical, "rather than racial", division; he had expressed his belief that the British had made it "racial" to suit their needs. Mr. Ravi argued that the imputations against him lowered the dignity of the high constitutional office of the Chief Minister. True, it was far-fetched to link him directly to the singers' omission of a verse. However, Mr. Ravi has consistently linked the "Dravidian" concept to an "expired ideology" that has created an ecosystem that fosters "separatist sentiment", and does not "relish the idea of 'One India'". He has also maintained that the State's two-language policy resulted in linguistic apartheid. At the Prasar Bharati event, he had charged that a lot of toxicity has been infused in the minds of the people of Tamil Nadu in the last 50 years. Such views engender the impression that he was against references to anything Dravidian. Even so, it was improper for Mr. Stalin to have waded into the controversy by directly blaming Mr. Ravi. But the larger issue is that governance becomes the casualty in tussles between the Governor and the Government. Given his penchant for political activism and his antagonism to the government's policies, it is time Mr. Ravi is replaced. Equations between him and the Chief Minister are beyond redemption. The situation is unhealthy for the State and imperils democratic institutions.

**L**ast month, when India's National Security Adviser Ajit Doval met the Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on the sidelines of the BRICS National Security Advisers' meeting in St. Petersburg, Russia, a possibility was born anew. Is our diplomatic engagement with China, strained since the horrific June 2020 Chinese incursion into Galwan Valley that claimed the lives of 20 Indian soldiers, about to improve? India faces this question at a time when its relations with the United States have been thriving, with the U.S. regarding India as a useful partner to counter Chinese aggression in the Indo-Pacific. So, must India again face a crucial choice in a bipolar world?

## Two nations at odds but still connected

My answer would be a qualified yes. Yes, because two major powers, the U.S. and China, are again vying for global hegemony; but qualified, because this is not the bipolarity we knew during the Cold War. After all, the U.S. and China have multiple connections with each other that the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. did not: the U.S. is the largest investor in China's economy, China owns more U.S. Treasury Bonds than any other country, the U.S. sends more tourists to China than to any other Asian country, and there are more Chinese students in the U.S. than those of any other nationality. These are two powers at odds, but with multiple avenues of diplomatic dialogue and economic co-operation that simply did not exist during the Cold War.

That was an era when the U.S. and the Soviet Union marshalled their satellite states into their respective camps, sundried by the "iron curtain", and competed to enlarge their nuclear arsenals. The end of this bipolarity coincided with the advent of globalisation, heralding "the unipolar moment", which lasted a couple of decades and in which Washington enjoyed untrammelled global dominance in spheres political, military, economic, and technological.

But the U.S. did not remain uncontested in any of these spheres for long. Around the 2008-09 financial crisis, the spectre of Beijing began to rise. China's "peaceful rise" over the last quarter of a century, fuelled by American investment in its industries and a booming export trade in manufactured goods, has reheated the global order.

China has supplanted the U.S. as the world's leading manufacturing and industrial giant, rivaling it in economic size and exceeding its surplus, alongside challenging it in such new technologies as 5G. So, after decades of unchallenged American hegemony, another aspiring hegemon has emerged, with the resources to challenge American dominance across the board and deploying a new assertiveness under Xi Jinping. The U.S. is evolving a strategy to counteract China, much as the U.S. deployed "containment" during the Cold War to stem the spread of communism. Yet, just as today's Sino-American rivalry is starkly



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different from the Cold War's bipolarity, so must the contours of such a strategy — and India's reaction to it — differ from the past.

The U.S. and China are intertwined economies, unlike the total economic separation between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. during the Cold War. Moreover, China's economic might makes its claim to global hegemony greater than the Soviet Union's ever was. China's indispensability to global supply chains and, therefore, to the world economy is precisely why some observers choose not to use the label "cold war" to describe the Sino-American bipolarity, preferring instead such terms as "competitive coexistence", "cold coexistence", or "conflictual coexistence". It was in recognition of this that American rhetoric shifted from "decoupling" from China suggesting severance of ties — "to de-risking", which implies curbing risks while avoiding a hostile estrangement.

What is more, as superpowers rising from the ashes of the Second World War, the U.S. and U.S.S.R. were nearly equal militarily. But China is nearing parity with, and now, in some areas, threatens to outstrip the U.S. According to the Pentagon, the Chinese navy has surpassed America's in the number of battle-force ships over the past decade, owing to China's status as the world's top ship-producing nation by tonnage. Senior U.S. Air Force officials have also acknowledged the potential of the People's Liberation Army Air Force to become the world's largest air force. Yet, military commentators believe that at least till the PLA's centenary in 2027, there will remain a significant gap between China and the U.S. Unlike in the Cold War, proxy wars between the two rivals do not litter our world today. Nor is there much appetite for any in either Beijing or Washington. Positing a Cold War-level bipolarity then, overstates both the status quo and the threat China poses to the global order.

## Not about ideology

In tussling with the U.S.S.R., America also aimed to establish the primacy of capitalism over communism and liberal democracy over single-party authoritarianism. The Sino-American competition, however, is not about ideology, much though Americans like to portray it otherwise. An ideological zeal to convert the world to communism does not galvanise China, which is really only interested in securing global hegemony for itself. Since 2021, Washington has futilely experimented with the Summit for Democracy, hoping to conflate its desire for subduing its foremost political and economic rival with championing democracy. But even Europeans are not buying into U.S. President Joe Biden's "democracy versus autocracy" binary. America's instinct to package all its vested interests as a crusade for democratising the globe has proven unsuccessful. So, instead of playing this game, China is glibly choosing to deride it as "Western-style democracy," which, Beijing argues, serves not ordinary citizens but the forces

of capitalism.

What also makes the Sino-American rivalry distinctive is that Russia, the successor state to the U.S.S.R., is never far from the action. Russia can play a menacing role in today's brewing bipolarity; given its size, abundant natural resources, and immense stockpile of nuclear weapons, it outranks most middle powers. Many, therefore, argue that America's bipolarity is not with China but the axis of China and Russia. Professor Josef Joffe, for instance, defines our world as a "Two-and-a-Half Power World", where Russia "is held back from full parity with the US and China by its lack of 'usable power.'" Moscow, with an economy smaller than Italy's and a military budget that is only one-quarter of China's, is far from a third pole; but it is Beijing's junior partner, a fact manifest in China's support of Russia's Ukrainian misadventure, which demonstrates President Xi Jinping's resolve not to be intimidated by the West. Though China has no allies, only clients, its emerging nexus with Russia, North Korea and Iran could yet pose challenges from Taiwan to the South China Sea.

## The new canvas of the Indo-Pacific

The greatest consequence of this geopolitical churn has been the creation of an entirely new canvas: the Indo-Pacific, a term encompassing three overlapping developments. These are China's goal of creating a blue water navy — a formidable naval force capable of operating and projecting power on the high seas — and becoming a transcontinental economic giant, India's emergence as a possible counterbalance to China, and the role that the U.S. will play in shaping the contours of the seemingly inevitable shift in power from the west to the east: from the Atlantic to the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

The vaunted Quad, comprising the U.S., India, Japan, and Australia, is driven by the vision of a "free and open Indo-Pacific", and has, more recently, been augmented by the "Squad" of the U.S., Japan, Australia, and the Philippines. Added to this is AUKUS, the trilateral security partnership for the Indo-Pacific between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the U.S., through which the U.S. and the U.K. assist Australia in acquiring nuclear-powered submarines. The Indo-Pacific area symbolises the realignment of traditional alliances and geopolitical theatres.

With the Indo-Pacific emerging as a crucible of clashing Chinese and American ambitions, India's deepening ties with the U.S. and the Quad bristle with both challenges and opportunities. We cannot forget that only we, and not the other members of Quad, face a land threat from China. So, we must not be deterred from safeguarding our sovereignty by restoring the status quo ante along the China-India border, engaging with the Chinese economically where we must, bolstering our military deterrence, and promoting our geopolitical and economic interests on our own terms. India cannot allow itself to be reduced to a pawn in this renewed bipolar contest.

## Essential business priorities in a changing world

**F**ollowing the multiple exigencies of the recent past, the global economy appears to have stabilised this year, albeit with geopolitical risks remaining on the horizon. The G-20 economies displayed different growth rates in the first quarter of the year, with some growing more rapidly than expected, while others experienced setbacks. Within this scenario, businesses of the world have the potential to leverage new opportunities for growth and benefit from wider dispersal of developmental gains.

The B-20 process has been led by emerging economies over the last three years, and with the handover to South Africa later this year, an unprecedented agenda for the Global South has been catalysed. Businesses of both advanced and emerging economies have come together and identified key priorities and policy actions that will facilitate inclusive growth and development. At the same time, as lead players in the growth endeavour, businesses also must prioritise certain actions to align with emerging challenges faced by the world.

## Focus on inclusive development

Equitable growth remains a top imperative as the world seeks to promote inclusive development. The tools for enabling this include skill development and education which will work towards empowering workers and building their capacity to adapt to changing industrial scenarios. Businesses must play a proactive role in offering tailored programmes for skilling and upskilling workers — particularly women — including through on-the-job training, working with academic institutions and developing curricula suited to evolving industry needs.

Financial access and tailored credit solutions along with diversity and inclusion policies have been highlighted by B-20 Brazil. In India, the convergence of Unified Payments Interface and digital payments has transformed financial transactions, with over 530 million accounts opened under the landmark Jan Dhan Yojana. Such success at scale has many lessons for the



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world. Similarly, Africa's inclusion in the G-20 during the India presidency opens up a wealth of new opportunities on the continent. It is important for global businesses to leverage their footprint in Africa to not only leverage its rapid growth and young demographics but also to support the continent's inclusion in global value chains.

## Ensuring better food security

Sustainable food systems and boosting food and nutrition security are another critical pillar of focus for encouraging sustainability efforts. Myriad factors including the impact of extreme weather events have exacerbated the global food crisis. The use of technology and other digital tools in promoting sustainable agricultural practices, reducing waste, and ensuring equitable access to nutritious food for all would be imperative. Businesses can play a pivotal role in addressing food security by advocating sustainable practices, investing in infrastructure and agricultural technologies such as precision farming and fostering collaborations with governments and international organisations for amplifying efforts on food security.

Second, accelerating resilient global trade flows is intrinsic to global growth, yet national security concerns and unfair trade practices are leading to rising tariffs and other hurdles that constrain the efficacy of trade. Organisations such as the World Trade Organization should be strengthened to identify and counter unfair trade practices while agreed interoperable taxonomies for environmental measures can bring in more clarity for businesses in industrial and trade policies aimed at sustainability.

The third priority that businesses must lead is digital transformation and innovation including Artificial Intelligence (AI) for the common good. Businesses must harness AI for responsible use in health care, climate change and resource management. It is also important for businesses to engage youth in developing innovative solutions to pressing contemporary issues and drive positive societal impact. Investments and

mentoring for social tech startups, digital platforms for research and development collaborations and development of STEM technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) talent should be taken up by corporates in mission mode.

The sustainability mission is the fourth priority for businesses. As the world accelerates towards net-zero transition, fair and just climate policies can enable businesses to work towards carbon mitigation. Availability of finance is required for all enterprises, and particularly for small and medium enterprises, to align with net zero targets. Building renewable energy capacity and greater use of biofuels and green hydrogen can be promoted by businesses. Industry should also be conscious about circular economy options and strive to inculcate sustainable business practices in their usual operations across the board.

## Aiming for the highest standards

Above all, corporate governance of the highest standards must be prioritised by businesses, and this includes large global corporates and small and medium enterprises. It is the responsibility of the private industry to go beyond established best practices in compliances and regulatory systems to continually drive ethical operations. This will facilitate building trust between different stakeholders including the community, governments and businesses. Trust is today viewed as intrinsic to the growth process and ease of doing business across the world.

These are some of the issues that we would be working on through the B20 Global Institute that was envisaged during India's B20 leadership and is now taking off. With the participation of successive G-20 presidency countries, the institute will maintain alignment in policy suggestions, undertake action agendas to facilitate business competitiveness in the above areas and monitor outcomes. As the B20 recommendations are presented to the G-20 group, businesses of the world must take a key role in ensuring that our common global aspirations are catalysed to fruition.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Statehood resolution

Now that the J&K Cabinet has passed a resolution for the restoration of Statehood, which the Lt. Governor has cleared, it is

for the Union Government to seize the opportunity for 'reclaiming the constitutional rights and protecting the identity of the people' of the region.

Even if the use of 'statehood in its original form' means 'J&K and Ladakh', there is no reason for hesitation. If the Centre feels there are issues of security and strong

geographical compulsions in the case of Ladakh, it should be conveyed to the new State government.  
P.R.V. Raja,  
Pandalam, Kerala

## Fading hopes for peace

The elimination of Hamas's Yahya Sinwar will lead to the West Asia situation worsening. Hamas will want revenge and not back

down. There seems to be no hope for peace with Israel wanting to turn Gaza and Lebanon to dust.  
Rohith Varon S.S.,  
Chennai



# On climate finance to developing nations

Why are developing countries more vulnerable to climate change? How does the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change define climate finance? Why have the figures mentioned in the OECD report been called into question? Does India need climate financing?

## EXPLAINER

Arjun Dutt  
Gagan Sidhu

**The story so far:** The 29th Conference of the Parties (COP29) of the UNFCCC is to be held in Baku, Azerbaijan, from November 10 to 22. It is expected to be a "finance COP" as key climate finance issues feature at the top of its agenda.

**Are developing states more at risk?** Economically developing countries are among the most vulnerable to climate change's effects. This is because of geographical factors and, because their economies rely more on sectors like agriculture, which are particularly sensitive to climate change.

Despite being among the most vulnerable, developing countries have contributed relatively little to the cumulative emissions that cause climate change. According to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, developed countries account for 57% of cumulative global emissions since 1850 despite hosting smaller populations than the developing world. Developing countries also face competing development needs, vexing their ability to take climate action by themselves. The 2009 Copenhagen Accord had developed countries commit to providing \$100 billion a year in climate finance to developing countries by 2020, later also made applicable through 2025. A new mobilisation target for the post-2025 period is on the agenda at COP29.

## What is climate finance?

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) defines climate finance as "local, national, or transnational financing – drawn from public, private, and alternative sources – that seeks to support mitigation and



**Heat waves:** A sunrise over the polluted waters of Yamuna laden with foam on October 17, 2019.

adaptation actions addressing climate change." This specifies two aspects of climate finance: sources (public or private, and flowing either domestically or across borders) and end-uses (climate mitigation or adaptation). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) publishes reports on climate finance flows from developed to developing countries. They cover flows from all sources including international public finance and the private finance mobilised by it. International public climate finance is composed of commercial and concessional loans, grants, equity and other instruments. Loans typically constitute the largest share (69.4% in 2022), followed by grants (29%). However, developing countries and observers such as Oxfam have noted several shortcomings with the OECD's reports. They have argued they should represent

actual disbursements and not simply commitments to provide climate finance; that a flow should be new and additional and not simply a reclassification of existing aid; and that only grants, or grant-equivalents of concessional finance, should be counted, not finance provided on a commercial basis.

## Who needs climate finance?

Developing countries require external financing for climate action. According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), 675 million people in the developing world didn't have access to electric power in 2021. Developing countries need to universalise access and increase electricity consumption.

Developing countries also have smaller domestic financial systems relative to their GDPs and face higher costs of capital. For instance, the cost of capital for solar photovoltaic and storage

technologies is about twice as high in developing economies than in developed ones, according to the IEA. Therefore, if developing countries are to balance development and climate action, external finance should be made available.

## How much does India need?

India has both short-term and long-term climate targets. By 2030, India aims to install 500 GW of generating capacity from non-fossil fuel sources; five million metric tonnes per annum of green hydrogen (GH2) production capacity; and differentiated levels of penetration for various Electric Vehicle (EV) categories. The authors have estimated (as part of a co-authored report) that achieving 450 GW of renewable energy by 2030 will require an additional \$16.8 lakh crore investment. Per the National Green Hydrogen Mission, India's GH2 target will need \$5 lakh crore. Consumers will also need to spend around \$16 lakh crore to purchase EVs to achieve this vision. A long-term perspective reveals a greater requirement: \$50 lakh crore in investments between 2020 and 2070 to achieve net-zero emissions.

## What should the NCGQ quantum be?

Determining a new annual climate finance mobilisation target – related to the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) – is a top priority. The NCQG should include flows that are (i) actual disbursements, not just commitments; (ii) new and additional (ii) public capital in the form of direct grants; and (iv) private capital that is mobilised by public capital. However, organically flowing private finance to developing countries should not be counted. An independent high-level expert group constituted by the presidencies of COP26 and COP27 has already determined that developing countries (excluding China) will require around \$1 trillion in external finance by 2030.

Arjun Dutt and Gagan Sidhu are, respectively, senior programme lead and director of the CEEN Centre for Energy Finance.

## THE GIST

➤ Economically developing countries are among the most vulnerable to climate change's effects because of geographical factors that expose them to more climate risk.

➤ The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) defines climate finance as "local, national, or transnational financing – drawn from public, private, and alternative sources – that seeks to support mitigation and adaptation actions addressing climate change."

➤ The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) publishes reports on climate finance flows from developed to developing countries.

# What does the new 'lady justice' statue signify?

What is the symbolism behind the change? How many cases are pending before courts in India?

Rangarajan R

## The story so far:

Last week, the Chief Justice of India unveiled the 'new lady justice' statue in the Supreme Court premises that replaced the 'original lady justice'. The new statue is fully employed in 10 States, and the Indian Constitution on the other.

## What is the background?

It is believed that the origin of the modern-day 'lady justice' is Justitia, the goddess of justice in Roman mythology. 'Lady justice' is depicted with a blindfold, scales, and a sword. The blindfold was added during the Renaissance period (15th century) probably as a satire on the corrupt state of legal systems with judicial institutions turning a blind eye. It was only during the enlightenment period (17th-18th century) that it was reinterpreted as representing impartiality. It signifies that justice should be

administered without bias regardless of wealth, power and social status. The scales represent balance. It emphasises that courts must weigh both sides of an argument before delivering a judgment. Finally, the sword symbolises the power and authority of the law, signifying that the law can both protect and punish.

## Why the change?

When the British established their control over India, they introduced their legal system. The hierarchy of courts from lower courts to the Supreme Court is a relic of the British system. It was during British rule that the 'lady justice' became a prominent symbol in India and was placed outside courtrooms.

The new statue is an attempt at decoloniality, with an aim to shed colonial symbols. The saree replacing the western attire brings the statue closer to Indian tradition. The removal of the blindfold and having eyes open is significant in the Indian context. It conveys that the law is not blind and it 'sees' everyone equally.

More importantly our social diversity, the discrimination faced by underprivileged sections, constitutional provisions and laws made for their upliftment require a nuanced approach of 'viewing' every case appropriately and delivering justice. The sword being replaced with the Constitution symbolises the supremacy of the Constitution and its value in the jurisprudence. The preserving of the scales goes on to show that the courts will continue weighing evidence impartially and hearing both sides before delivering its final judgment.

## What urgent actions are needed?

The Supreme Court last week dismissed a Public Interest Litigation which sought a time frame of three years for disposal of over five crore cases pending in all courts of the country. The Supreme Court held that while the demand was desirable, it is practically impossible considering the flood of litigation faced by the justice delivery system. However, 'justice delayed is justice denied' and there are some

urgent actions needed in this regard with respect to the institution that delivers justice.

Firstly, the revised Memorandum of Procedure that deals with appointment of judges by the collegium has not been finalised for the past eight years. This needs to be finalised by the government and judiciary without any further delay to bring transparency and accountability to the process of appointment.

Secondly, the representation of backward classes, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and religious minorities is less than 25% in the higher judiciary and women constitute less than 15%. The appointments to higher judiciary should reflect the social diversity of our country. Third, the High Courts invariably operate at only 60-70% strength thereby contributing to the huge pendency of over 60 lakh cases at present. The government needs to appoint collegium recommendations for High Courts without dragging its feet. The vacancies in lower courts, where 4-4 crore cases are pending, should also be filled by the States without backlog. Finally, cases dealing with the constitutional validity of amendments/laws and individual liberty should be heard on a priority basis by the higher judiciary. These measures would ensure that the new symbol is not just symbolic but reflects the actions taken for the delivery of fair and prompt justice.

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

## THE GIST

➤ The new statue is clothed in a saree, has shed the blindfold and holds scales on one hand and the Indian Constitution on the other.

➤ The new statue is an attempt at decoloniality, with an aim to shed colonial symbols.

➤ When the British established their control over India, they introduced their legal system. It was during the British rule that the original 'lady justice' became a prominent symbol in India and was placed outside courtrooms.

ay, October 20, 2024

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## Text & Context

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## \*-SG-LOKINTI-CSDS SURVEY

# Maharashtra elections: do welfare schemes and leadership play a role?

Welfare schemes may have been a contributing part of the BJP-led Mahayuti alliance's strategy, their impact on voting behaviour has been mixed. Similarly, while leadership may hold some influence among voters, the key seems to lie in the finer nuances of alliance politics

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led Mahayuti (Grand Alliance) in Maharashtra appears to be banking on re-driven policies to consolidate support, a strategy BJP has usually employed in 10 States. However, in Maharashtra, the reliance of State-level welfare schemes has been uneven, with only a few schemes achieving significant reach. The MIT-SOG and Lokniti-CSDS survey aims to analyse the penetration of these schemes and their impact on vote choice.

**versus Central schemes** State government schemes, the Aajeevika has emerged as the popular one. Designed to empower farmers by providing ₹1,500 to each farmer via direct bank transfer, it has earned a considerable segment of support. Eight in 10 voters are aware of it and seven in 10 have benefited. This scheme is a success story, in terms of awareness and impact. However, the popularity of other State schemes has been fairly limited. For instance, Balasahab Thackeray Aapla Khana, aimed at improving primary health care, was known to only one-third voters, and among them, only 30% benefited. The Kisan Mitra Urja Yojana, aimed to reduce farmers' dependence on diesel and increase agricultural income, also saw low penetration. Nearly half have heard of the scheme and are aware of it. Similarly, the Samruddhi Mahila Sahakari Karmacha, focused on empowering rural women through official credit co-operations, saw limited awareness, with one-quarter of voters aware of it and benefiting.

## Election fervour in Maharashtra

These tables elucidate how various welfare schemes of the Centre and the State might affect voter choices in Maharashtra. It also looks at whether the leadership factor plays a prominent role in selecting a party to vote for



**Same hue:** A man arranges scarves of political parties at a shop, ahead of the Maharashtra Assembly elections, in Mumbai, on October 17, 2024.

**Table 1:** Welfare schemes and their popularity

Welfare Schemes	Heard	Beneficiaries benefited	Voted for Mahayuti alliance
<b>Central government schemes</b>			
Aajeevika Bharat	73	Beneficiaries (35)	42
		Non-beneficiaries (62)	44
Ujjwala Scheme	69	Beneficiaries (45)	45
		Non-beneficiaries (52)	45
<b>State government schemes</b>			
Ladki Bahin	80	Beneficiaries (71)	45

**Table 2:** Preferred candidate for Chief Minister

Top five CM candidates	Per cent
Uddhav Thackeray	28
Devenendra Fadnis	16
Shard Pawar	8
Ajit Pawar	3
Others	11

Note: The rest did not respond.

**Table 3:** Candidates supported by different castes and religious groups

Top three CM candidates	Eluvathi Shinde	Devenendra Fadnis	Uddhav Thackeray
Marathi	27	15	20
Other upper castes	20	40	15
Kumbi	34	9	30
Other OBC	32	20	25
SC	22	14	30
ST	15	4	31
Muslims	7	1	52
Buddhist	7	10	25

Note: All figures in per cent. The rest either named other leaders or did not respond.

**Table 4:** The urban-rural divide

Top three CM candidates	Eluvathi Shinde	Devenendra Fadnis	Uddhav Thackeray
Rural	23	13	28
Urban	17	21	28

Note: All figures in per cent. The rest either named other leaders or did not respond.



## KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

# The anecdote he told us was a knee-slapper!

My old television is on its last legs but I still don't want to give it away and buy a new one

S. Upendran

"Heard you visited your uncle yesterday. How is he doing? Much more important, how's that famous scooter of his?" "Uncle is doing fine. The scooter, however, is on its last legs."

"A scooter doesn't have legs, my friend. It has tyres." "You think I don't know that, genius? When you say that something is on its last legs, what you're suggesting is that it's in bad shape. It's likely..." "In other words, it's going to break down soon and stop working." "Exactly! My cell phone is rather old. It's on its last legs." "Our radio has been on its last legs for several years now. Every time, it stops working, my father manages to fix it." "I guess that's the big difference between our generation and our parents'. They don't want to buy anything new unless it's absolutely essential." "That's true! But on 'one's last legs' be used with people!" "Yes, it can. When you say that someone's on his last legs, what you're suggesting he's near his end." "In other words, the person is close to dying." "That's right! It was obvious that the old man was on his last legs." "Our dog is on its last legs." "Good example. By the way, this



# Text & Context

THE HINDU

## NEWS IN NUMBERS

**Number of voter applications rejected in Chandrapur**

**6,853** A sub-divisional officer has lodged a police complaint after 6,853 applications were filed wrongly during online voter registration. **PH**

**The increase in India's automobile exports from April-September**

**14** In per cent. The overall exports in the April-September period stood at 25,28,248 units compared with 22,11,457 units in the year-ago period. Automobile exports declined 5.5% in FY24. **PH**

**Rice production damaged due to floods in Bangladesh**

**1.1** In million tonnes. The country's agriculture ministry said this year's flooding has resulted in a loss of rice production. The government has been struggling to stabilise food prices that have surged nearly 20%. **REUTERS**

**Number of bomb hoax threats to Indian airlines last week**

**70** More than 70 fake bomb threats have been made against flights operated by multiple Indian airlines this week sparking fear among passengers. At least 30 hoax threats were made on Saturday alone. **AFP**

**Number of Ukrainian drones shot down by Russia on Saturday**

**110** The ministry said air defences had intercepted 43 drones over the Kursk region. Another 27 drones were downed over the Lipetsk region. **AFP**

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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# On climate finance to developing nations

Why are developing countries more vulnerable to climate change? How does the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change define climate finance? Why have the figures mentioned in the OECD report been called into question? Does India need climate financing?

## EXPLAINER

Arjun Dutt  
Gagan Sidhu

### The story so far:

The 29th Conference of the Parties (COP29) of the UNFCCC to be held in Baku, Azerbaijan, from November 11 to 22 is expected to be a "finance COP" as key climate finance issues feature at the top of its agenda.

**Are developing states more at risk?** Economically developing countries are among the most vulnerable to climate change's effects. This is because of geographical factors and, because their economies rely more on sectors like agriculture, which are particularly sensitive to climate change.

Despite being among the most vulnerable, developing countries have contributed relatively little to the cumulative emissions that cause climate change. According to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, developed countries account for 57% of cumulative global emissions since 1850 despite hosting smaller populations than the developing world. Developing countries also face competing developmental needs, vexing their ability to take climate action by themselves. The 2009 Copenhagen Accord had developed countries commit to providing \$100 billion a year in climate finance to developing countries by 2020, later also made applicable through 2025. A new mobilisation target for the post-2025 period is on the agenda at COP29.

### What is climate finance?

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) defines climate finance as "local, national, or transnational financing — drawn from public, private, and alternative sources — that seeks to support mitigation and



**Bleak waters:** A sunrise over the polluted waters of Yamuna laden with foam on October 17. **AFP**

adaptation actions addressing climate change." This specifies two aspects of climate finance: sources (public or private, and flowing either domestically or across borders) and end-uses (climate mitigation or adaptation). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) publishes reports on climate finance flows from developed to developing countries. They cover flows from four sources, including international public finance and the private finance mobilised by it. International public climate finance is composed of commercial and concessional loans, grants, equity and other instruments. Loans typically constitute the largest share (69.4% in 2022), followed by grants (28%). However, developing countries and observers such as Oxfam have noted several shortcomings with the OECD's reports. They have argued they should represent

adaptation actions addressing climate change." This specifies two aspects of climate finance: sources (public or private, and flowing either domestically or across borders) and end-uses (climate mitigation or adaptation). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) publishes reports on climate finance flows from developed to developing countries. They cover flows from four sources, including international public finance and the private finance mobilised by it. International public climate finance is composed of commercial and concessional loans, grants, equity and other instruments. Loans typically constitute the largest share (69.4% in 2022), followed by grants (28%). However, developing countries and observers such as Oxfam have noted several shortcomings with the OECD's reports. They have argued they should represent

### Who needs climate finance?

Developing countries require external financing for climate action. According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), 675 million people in the developing world didn't have access to electric power in 2021. Developing countries need to universalise access and increase electricity consumption.

Developing countries also have smaller domestic financial systems relative to their GDPs and face higher costs of capital. For instance, the cost of capital for solar photovoltaic and storage

technologies is about twice as high in developing economies than in developed ones, according to the IEA. Therefore, if developing countries are to balance development and climate action, external finance should be made available.

### How much does India need?

India has both short-term and long-term climate targets. By 2030, India aims to install 500 GW of generating capacity from non-fossil-fuel sources; five million metric tonnes per annum of green hydrogen (GH2) production capacity; and differentiated levels of penetration for various Electric Vehicle (EV) categories. The authors have estimated (as part of a co-authored report) that achieving 450 GW of renewable energy by 2030 will require an additional ₹16.8 lakh crore investment. Per the National Green Hydrogen Mission, India's GH2 target will need ₹8 lakh crore. Consumers will also need to spend around ₹16 lakh crore to purchase EVs to achieve this vision. A long-term perspective reveals a greater requirement: ₹850 lakh crore in investments between 2020 and 2070 to achieve net-zero emissions.

### What should the NQCG quantum be?

Determining a new annual climate finance mobilisation target — called the New Collective Quantified Goal (NQCG) — is a top priority. The NQCG should include flows that are (i) actual disbursements, not just commitments; (ii) new and additional (iii) public capital in the form of direct grants; and (iv) private capital that is mobilised by public capital. However, organically flowing private finance to developing countries should not be counted. An independent high-level expert group constituted by the presidencies of COP26 and COP27 has already determined that developing countries (excluding China) will require around \$1 trillion in external finance by 2030.

Arjun Dutt and Gagan Sidhu are, respectively, senior programme lead and director of the CEEW Centre for Energy Finance.

## THE GIST

➤ Economically developing countries are among the most vulnerable to climate change's effects because of geographical factors that expose them to more climate risk.

➤ The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) defines climate finance as "local, national, or transnational financing — drawn from public, private, and alternative sources — that seeks to support mitigation and adaptation actions addressing climate change."

➤ The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) publishes reports on climate finance flows from developed to developing countries.

# What does the new 'lady justice' statue signify?

What is the symbolism behind the change? How many cases are pending before courts in India?

Rangarajan R

### The story so far:

Last week, the Chief Justice of India unveiled the 'new lady justice' statue in the Supreme Court premises that replaced the 'original lady justice'. The new statue is clothed in a saree, has shed the blindfold and holds scales on one hand and the Indian Constitution on the other.

### What is the background?

It is believed that the origin of the modern-day 'lady justice' is Justitia, the goddess of Justice in Roman mythology. 'Lady Justice' is depicted with a blindfold, scales, and a sword. The blindfold was added during the Renaissance period (14th century) probably as a satire on the corrupt state of legal systems with judicial institutions turning a blind eye. It was only during the enlightenment period (17th-18th century) that it was reinterpreted as representing impartiality. It signifies that justice should be

administered without bias regardless of wealth, power and social status. The scales represent balance. It emphasises that courts must weigh both sides of an argument before delivering a judgment. Finally, the sword symbolises the power and authority of the law, signifying that the law can both protect and punish.

### Why the change?

When the British established their control over India, they introduced their legal system. The hierarchy of courts from lower courts to the Supreme Court is a relic of the British system. It was during British rule that the 'lady justice' became a prominent symbol in India and was placed outside courtrooms.

The new statue is an attempt at decoloniality, with an aim to shed colonial symbols. The saree replacing the western attire brings the statue closer to Indian tradition. The removal of the blindfold and having eyes open is significant in the Indian context. It conveys that the law is not blind and it 'sees' everyone equally.

More importantly our social diversity, the discrimination faced by underprivileged sections, constitutional provisions and laws made for their upliftment require a nuanced approach of 'viewing' every case appropriately and delivering justice. The sword being replaced with the Constitution symbolises the supremacy of the Constitution and its value in our jurisprudence. The preserving of the scales goes on to show that the courts will continue weighing evidence impartially and hearing both sides before delivering its final judgment.

### What urgent actions are needed?

The Supreme Court last week dismissed a Public Interest Litigation which sought a time frame of three years for disposal of over five crore cases pending in all courts of the country. The Supreme Court held that while the demand was desirable, it is practically impossible considering the flood of litigation faced by the justice delivery system. However, 'justice delayed is justice denied' and there are some

urgent actions needed in this regard with respect to the institution that delivers justice.

Firstly, the revised Memorandum of Procedure that deals with appointment of judges by the collegium has not been finalised for the past eight years. This needs to be finalised by the government and judiciary without any further delay to bring transparency and accountability to the process of appointment.

Secondly, the representation of backward classes, scheduled castes, schedule tribes, and religious minorities is less than 25% in the higher judiciary and women constitute less than 15%. The appointments to higher judiciary should reflect the social diversity of our country. Third, the High Courts invariably operate at only 60-70% strength thereby contributing to the huge pendency of over 60 lakh cases at present. The government needs to appoint collegium recommendations for High Courts without dragging its feet. The vacancies in lower courts, where 4.4 crore cases are pending, should also be filled by the States without backlog. Finally, cases dealing with the constitutional validity of amendments/laws and individual liberty should be heard on a priority basis by the higher judiciary. These measures would ensure that the new symbol is not just symbolic but reflects the actions taken for the delivery of fair and prompt justice.

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

## THE GIST

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# What do the Atlantic Ocean hurricane forecasts foretell for India?

Countries along the rim of the Indian Ocean are vulnerable to both the chronic and acute stressors of climate change. Warming, rising seas, and the increasing incidence of extreme rainfall are chronic stressors; they happen in the background. Acute stressors ride on top of the chronic stressors and exacerbate their effects

Raghu Murtugudde

**M**eteorologists had previously forecast a historic hurricane season for 2024 based on the expectation that a strong La Niña would emerge this winter. But while the hurricanes Helene and Milton may seem consistent with this forecast, 2024 has evolved to be a year with a summer with no major hurricanes.

One important reason is that the strong La Niña has played truant thus far. In fact, weather agencies are currently downgrading their La Niña forecasts.

The 2023 hurricane season was history's fourth-most active despite the strong El Niño that year. Meteorologists expect a subdued hurricane season during an El Niño and an earnest one during a La Niña. Now, are they to assume that the record warming during 2023-2024 has flipped the hurricane season on us or that the link between hurricanes and El Niño/La Niña has flipped? They'll need to wait and watch.

Forecasting seasonal cyclone activity is a challenging task, but hurricane forecasts have overall become more accurate, especially in terms of narrowing the cone of uncertainty of the storms' landfall. Some major challenges remain vis-à-vis forecasting the intensities, however.

The more worrisome fact is that the forecasting community has acquired hardly any skill in terms of the aftermath of a hurricane, i.e., after it makes landfall. Post-landfall rain and winds wreak considerable damage to property and lead to the loss of lives.

## The challenge of forecasting cyclones

A shortcoming in any forecast automatically raises the stakes for how well people and governments can plan for hurricanes and, in India's part of the world, cyclones. The climate models used to develop projections don't explicitly resolve cyclones. Any projections for the future are based on other resolved metrics that indirectly indicate cyclonic activity and its potential intensity.

Historical analyses of global cyclones suggest there hasn't been a detectable increase in the total number of cyclones. However, the number of strong cyclones has increased. Cyclones draw the energy they need from the upper ocean, and the upper oceans are warming in all cyclone-producing regions of the planet. This has led to many instances of rapid intensification: when the maximum cyclone wind speed increases by 55 km/hr or more within a 24-hour period. Rapid intensification has proven hard to predict.

The North Indian Ocean is also



Tropical Storm John along Mexico's Pacific coast and Hurricane Helene over the Gulf of Mexico on September 25, NASA

reported to be experiencing an increasing number of cyclones, especially in the Arabian Sea. The fact that the last few years have been unusually quiet only underscores the challenge of predicting seasonal cyclone numbers, cyclones as individual events, how they react to global warming, and of course their post-landfall effects.

## Good, bad, and ugly

India has made impressive progress in forecasting cyclones together with a disaster management plan that has been equally effective at reducing the loss of lives. More good news for the North Indian Ocean is that the typical stretch of ocean where cyclones intensify is relatively small, over both the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal, thus limiting the size and strength of the cyclones. Most cyclones over the Arabian Sea also tend to be steered northwestward, away from India.

The bad news is that the Indian subcontinent and other countries along the rim of the Indian Ocean are highly vulnerable not only to the chronic stressors of climate change but also to the acute stressors. The chronic stressors refer to the warming, rising sea levels, and the increasing incidence of rainfall extremes and dry spells, all of which happen in the background. The acute stressors ride on top of the chronic stressors and exacerbate their effects. These include heavy rainfall events, flash droughts, and cyclones. For example, inundation from a cyclone will get worse as sea levels rise. Or a heatwave that

**The worrisome fact is that the forecasting community has acquired hardly any skill in terms of the aftermath of a hurricane. Post-landfall rain and winds wreak considerable damage to property and lead to the loss of lives**

co-occurs with a drought will make water scarce, wilt crops, and disrupt power supply (because power plants need water, too).

A few days ago, parts of Tamil Nadu suffered heavy rain and flooding. This has become an annual event because warming in the Indian Ocean, especially the Bay of Bengal, has been extending the southwest monsoon into the northeast monsoon and delivering both excess and extreme rainfall. Forecasting woes are also on full display: a low-pressure system predicted to cause flooding in Chennai veered north and completely missed the city.

Now, imagine a city has to evacuate thousands of people when a cyclone is predicted. Forecasts will continue to get better, but our expectations will also continue to rise.

## From nation to region

Our region needs critical advances in the quality of the predictions of rapid intensification and landfall and of the cyclones post-landfall. Additional efforts are also required to project the cyclone

risk in the coming years at hyperlocal scales.

India remains an economically developing country, and any increments in its ability to manage its financial and human resources will be critical for the foreseeable future. This is essential context for why hyperlocal risk maps can make a big difference: it will be too expensive for us to cover all regions for cyclone risk. India has also started to bring mitigation and adaptation actions into its mainstream fiscal policies and budgetary processes by investing in renewable energy, electric vehicles, weather and climate forecasting, early warning systems, and disaster management.

The ugly news is that India's dreams of sustained economic development can never materialise unless the entire subcontinent is resilient.

India's (and the Indian subcontinent's) vulnerabilities to chronic and acute climate stressors aren't only India's socio-economic vulnerabilities; they are also India's national security issues. The country's strategies for building cooperation, trade, and stability in the region have to now include the constituent countries' climate risks as well.

This can start by establishing subcontinent-wide weather and climate networks and improving forecasts and projections for all parts of India's wider neighbourhood.

(Raghu Murtugudde is professor, IIT Bombay, and emeritus professor, University of Maryland. mahatma@umd.edu)

## THE GIST

▼ The 2023 hurricane season was history's fourth-most active despite a strong El Niño. Meteorologists now have to consider if the record warming of 2023-2024 flipped the season or if the link between hurricanes and El Niño/La Niña has flipped

▼ There has been no increase in the total number of cyclones. However, the intensity and strength have increased. The warming of upper oceans has led to instances of rapid intensification, which has proven hard to predict

▼ India's vulnerabilities to climate are also national security issues. The country's strategies for building cooperation, trade, and stability in the region have to now include the constituent countries' climate risks as well

## BIG SHOT



A pair of Atlantic spotted dolphins leap out of the water off Ponta Delgada, Sao Miguel Island in the Azores archipelago, Portugal, on July 3. The regional assembly of the Azores Islands approved the creation of the largest protected marine area in the North Atlantic to reach international conservation goals well ahead of time. The area encompasses almost 300,000 sq. km, and preserves underwater mountain ranges and vulnerable marine ecosystems. REUTERS

## WHAT IS IT?

## Pollution balls: ick in the blue

Reuters

Beaches in Sydney reopened on Saturday for swimmers after authorities cleared thousands of black pollution balls washed ashore, which testing found to be formed from chemicals similar to those in cosmetics and cleaning products. Around 2,000 of the mystery black balls, some golf ball-sized, had washed onto beaches across Sydney since October 15, forcing the closure of eight beaches, including the iconic Bondi Beach, and leading to a massive clean-up operation amid fears they were highly toxic.

"Based on advice from the Environment Protection Authority, we can now confirm the balls are made up of fatty acids, chemicals consistent with those found in cleaning and cosmetic products, mixed with some fuel oil," said New South Wales Maritime Executive Director Mark Hutchings in a statement. He added the balls, which continued to appear on October 18 in fewer numbers, are not harmful to health when left on the sand but should not be touched.



Workers clear "tar balls" washed ashore on Coogee Beach in Sydney on October 17, AFP

The New South Wales Environment Protection Authority said laboratory testing was continuing to try to determine where the balls came from. "It is still somewhat of a mystery and may take a few more days to determine origin," said EPA Executive Director Stephen Beaman. Sydney's ocean beaches, famed for golden sand and clear water, draw tourists from around the globe.

For feedback and suggestions for 'Science', please write to [science@thehindu.co.in](mailto:science@thehindu.co.in) with the subject 'Daily page'



The  
**Hindu Times**  
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[ OUR TAKE ]

## The politics of SC sub-quotas

It will change Dalit mobilisation in the country, reduce influence of dominant SC communities

**H**aryana's decision last week to implement Scheduled Caste (SC) sub-quotas marks an important turn for Indian politics. On Friday, newly appointed chief minister Nayab Singh Saini announced that his cabinet decided to implement the recommendations of the Haryana Scheduled Caste Commission's proposal to internally divide the SC quota — 20% of government jobs in the state are set aside for Dalits — into two groups: Deprived Scheduled Castes (DSCs) comprising 36 groups such as Balmikis, Dhanaks, Mazhabi Sikhs and Khatiks, and Other Scheduled Castes (OSCs) comprising castes such as Chamar, Jatia Chamar, Rehgar, Raigar, Ramdasi, Ravidasi and Jatav. Each segment will get half of the 20% quota, the panel decided.

This is significant for several reasons. One, Haryana is the first state to implement sub-quotas within the SC umbrella since the Supreme Court allowed it in August. The sub-quotas, expected to address inequalities within the broader group, are a polarising issue, with a section of the Dalit community, mainly the better empowered among them, opposing it.

Two, it is a piece with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s tactic of exploiting the differences within umbrella community categories that have historically sought affirmative action and have mostly formed the core of non-BJP political formations, and win over sections of this large vote. Dalit sub-quotas are an untested political instrument so far; but with Dalits becoming an influential political category, this is bound to change the mobilisation pattern within that section. Parties such as the Bahujan Samaj Party tend to be dominated by the numerically dominant Dalit group — this is true for the Viduthala Chiruthaigal Katchi in Tamil Nadu, Republican Party of India factions in Maharashtra, and the Congress in Punjab.

And three, Saini's decision — along with a similar move by poll-bound Maharashtra, which set up a panel to look into sub-quotas hours before the polls were announced — indicated that internally dividing the SC quota will be part of the BJP's strategy going ahead, and its counter to the Opposition's caste census pitch. In Haryana, for example, the sub-classification pitch helped the BJP pick up a substantial chunk of the SC vote during the recently concluded assembly polls on its way to a historic third consecutive term. The party won eight of the 17 reserved seats, up from five in 2019. After having successfully cleaved the Other Backward Classes (OBC) category into dominant and non-dominant sections, the BJP is now focused on the SC vote. Expect more churn in Dalit politics.

## Sinwar death a pivot for ending the war

**W**ith Yahya Sinwar's killing, Israel has likely wiped out the top line of Hamas that planned and executed the October 7, 2023, attack. The attack, of course, sparked off the war that has now engulfed large swathes of West Asia and has left well over 42,000 Palestinians dead. Tel Aviv has also been successful in eliminating the Hezbollah leadership and a significant chunk of its ranks, weakening the Iranian proxies in the region. Both Sinwar and Hezbollah's Hassan Nasrallah were charismatic personalities within their constituencies and could push forward with the terror agenda of their respective organisations. The outfits are sure to feel their absence, especially with conflict demanding smooth and able leadership transitions.

That said, Hamas and Hezbollah are more than just their leaders. They represent a certain political vision that has umbilical connections with identity, territorial anxieties, and the geopolitical compass of the populations in whose names they operate. They were born in the vacuum left by the decline of the relatively secular bodies that fought for the Palestinian cause and agency of the West Asian peoples. Unless these grievances are addressed, Hamas and Hezbollah will keep growing new heads every time one is severed, and a durable peace in the region will prove elusive.

This is why Sinwar's death should be a moment for Israel to pivot away from the war and begin the ceasefire talks. The West, especially the United States that has kept providing Israel the needed diplomatic and arms cover despite anti-war posturing now and then, and the rest of the global community must prevail on Tel Aviv to pull back. Else, Israel will only have itself to blame as the region radicalises further.

[ GRAND STRATEGY ]

Happymon Jacob

## The new template for dialogue with Pakistan

A clinical minimalism focussed on conflict management appears to define New Delhi's engagement with Islamabad

**E**xternal affairs minister S Jaishankar's recent visit to Islamabad for the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) meeting was not only free of the usual acrimony between India and Pakistan. This warmth, singularly generated by the absence of acrimony, has raised hopes for a new dialogue process. However, this optimism, in my opinion, may be misplaced — the liberalised Janata Party (BJP) government appears to have little appetite to initiate a comprehensive dialogue process with Pakistan. The age of unlimited optimism in India-Pakistan relations is long over — a new template of clinical minimalism has emerged, which might characterise the relationship going forward.

Between 2004 and 2008, the relationship between India and Pakistan was marked by a comprehensive dialogue process. Both sides displayed strong political will to address core issues, particularly the Kashmir conflict and terrorism, through open diplomacy as well as dedicated backchannels that reported directly to then

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf who, in turn, were passionate about building peace. This period also witnessed enthusiastic people-to-people exchanges, bilateral media engagement and attention, and the implementation of several confidence-building measures. Unfortunately, this came to a grinding halt after the terror strike on the Indian embassy in Kabul and the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks. That ended the golden age of Indo-Paks.

Today, we have a new template. This template for dialogue between India and Pakistan emerged in February 2021, characterised by discreet, clinical, businesslike communication between India's national security adviser and the Pakistani army chief, or their trusted interlocutors, which reportedly bypassed the civilian government in Islamabad. Unlike the earlier form's objective of conflict resolution, the new form is focused on conflict management, partly because the process came into being in the violent period following the terrorist attack of India's 2019 decision to abrogate the Constitution's Article 370 that defined the relationship between the Union and Jammu and Kashmir (J&K).

The February 2021 ceasefire agreement between the two militaries, which resulted from discreet back-channel talks, has successfully maintained calm along the Line of Control (LoC) for over three years. The bilateral relationship has since been marked by

periodic, clinical, low-profile operational exchanges between security officials, with no visible political engagement or appetite thereof.

For the BJP-led government in India, this new template offers several significant advantages. Considering the uncertainty about the outcomes of the India-Pakistan peace processes, New Delhi today sees little value in ensuring politically sensitive negotiations with Pakistan. While the comprehensive dialogue from 2004 to 2008 ultimately failed to make progress on the Kashmir issue or other outstanding issues such as Siachen or Sir Creek, the discreet engagement since 2021 has delivered tangible results. Consider for instance the fact that violence in J&K has decreased, and intermittent conversations between the two security establishments have ensured that tensions along the LoC in J&K remain under control. New Delhi, therefore, appears satisfied with the outcomes of this clinical approach.

There is also no overweighingly supportive public sentiment in India for a peace process with Pakistan, unlike between 2004 and 2007, when such efforts had immense popular support. Even if public sentiment could be altered by the political class, the current government appears to lack the political appetite to initiate talks with Pakistan. Moreover, New Delhi is busy with more pressing strategic priorities, such as managing the Indo-Pacific region, addressing the structural



India believes that a non-stop dialogue with Pakistan is unnecessary and that it can live with a less-than-perfect relationship with the country

changes posed by China, dealing with a restive South Asia, and maintaining its relationships with the West in the context of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war. Relations with Pakistan, in this scheme of things, occupy low priority.

For New Delhi, the success of this new template means that a formal political dialogue with Pakistan is unnecessary, at least for now. In this context, in a statement on August 30, 2024, Jaishankar made three arguments pertaining to India's relations with Pakistan: One, he said, "I think the era of uninterrupted dialogue with Pakistan is over. Actions have consequences." Two, "In so far as Jammu and Kashmir is concerned, Article 370 is done. So, the issue today is what kind of relationship can we possibly contemplate with Pakistan." Three, "We are not passive. Whether events take a positive or a negative direction, either way we will react". Jaishankar added,

Put differently, from New Delhi's perspective, the conflict in Kashmir has been fundamentally transformed, and there is little reason to engage Pakistan in dialogue over this as it is an internal issue for India. India further believes that a non-stop dialogue with Pakistan is unnecessary and that it can live with a less-than-perfect relationship with Pakistan. Moreover, the government reserves the right to respond firmly if

Pakistan fails to curb terrorism or attempts to disrupt peace in J&K; and it will also respond positively to positive overtures from Pakistan.

Indian strategic analysts also believe that the new template has enabled India to focus on its larger strategic goals in the region and beyond. Going back to the old format, by that logic, would divert India's attention from more pressing issues. For now, therefore, conflict management rather than conflict resolution remains the guiding principle of India's Pakistan policy.

Finally, going back to the old template, Delhi also appears to believe, would require it to give up some of the unexpected gains from the new template. For instance, over the past five years or so, India has unilaterally changed the terms of engagement on J&K in which it is unwilling to discuss issues internal to the state such as Article 370 and local politics with Pakistan limiting the conversation to measures for reducing violence. Going back to a comprehensive dialogue, Delhi worries, would reopen some of these realises Delhi is uncomfortable with.

Happymon Jacob teaches India's foreign policy at JNU and is the founder of the Council for Strategic and Defence Research. The views expressed are personal

## Strong institution or hand? Lessons from Seshan case

**I**n India's democracy, tension between individual leadership and institutional integrity surfaces from time to time. While strong leaders can propel institutions forward, weak ones risk undermining their credibility. This relationship is particularly tested in institutions like the Election Commission of India (ECI), which are prone to receiving political pressure.

In recent years, the ECI has faced criticism for its unwillingness to act against political parties, notably the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), for infractions and violations of the Model Code of Conduct. Such instances have ignited debates about the institution's capacity and the fortitude of its leaders to withstand political pressures. But, a strong leader with unchecked power can be just as problematic. Such concentration of authority often leads to authoritarianism, eroding the very principles of accountability and transparency that the ECI is meant to uphold. How can a balance between strong leadership and institutional accountability be struck?

In the ECI's long history, these questions first came to a boil in 1995, in *TN Seshan Vs. Union of India*. Tirunellai Narayanar Seshan, India's 10th chief election commissioner (CEC), went head-to-head with the Centre, and the Supreme Court adjudicated.

When Seshan assumed the role of CEC, he inherited a sleepy institution from passive predecessors. Uncompromising and incorruptible, he began institutionalising sweeping reforms and insisted on strict compliance with the Model Code of Conduct, quickly becoming a thorn in the side of political parties who had become used to the bare minimum oversight from the ECI.

He, however, was not a popular man. Rude and refusing to accommodate or negotiate, the CEC made reckless allegations attacking various individuals and institutions.

Seshan knew that politicians across parties wanted him gone, but he was not worried. He knew that removing a CEC was as cumbersome as removing a judge. The composition of the ECI as a single-member body meant that he had unbridled powers—the ECI was Seshan, and Seshan was the ECI.

In 1993, the Centre, under PV Narasimha Rao, sought to make the ECI a multi-member body through an ordinance. A furious Seshan took the matter to the Supreme Court, arguing that the government's intention was to clip his wings. There were two main questions before the court: Was it constitutionally sound to add more election

commissioners (ECs) to the ECI? And, were the new ordinance and the orders that would come with it constitutionally valid? Seshan was sure he would come out on top.

But, presiding over the five-judge bench hearing the case was Chief Justice of India (CJI) AM Ahmadi — whose aversion to placing absolute power in the hands of individuals was well known. Just two years earlier, this had been tested in the courtroom. In the *Second Judges Case*, Ahmadi dissented against the majority of the bench on expanding the powers of the CJI with regards to appointing judges, despite knowing that he was slated to become the CJI in a few months. He cautioned against misinterpreting the Constitution and the perils of placing vast discretionary powers in the hands of an individual.

And so, in the *TN Seshan* matter, the bench comprising Justices Ahmadi, JS Verma, NP Singh, SP Bhurucha, and MK Mukherjee observed: "... (it) would be wrong to project the individual and subjective Election Commission ... To project the individual as mightier than the institution would be a grave mistake. Therefore, even if the Election Commission is a single-member body, the CEC is merely a functionary of that body; to put it differently, the alter ego of the Commission, and no more."

The judgment authored by Ahmadi explained that Article 324, Clause 2 of the Constitution allows for the CJI to include the CEC and any other commissioners appointed by the President, with the CEC acting as chairman. The court dismissed the argument that a multi-member Commission would be against the Constitution. Further, the court denied the CEC veto power over other ECs, ruling that decisions should be made by majority vote.

And thus, the ECI was forever changed. But what are its lessons for today?

Weak institutional checks can lead to unchecked individual power, but weak leadership can also lead to the erosion of constitutional institutions — both disastrous possibilities.

Yet, if we must choose between the two, then we should remember that individuals will come and go, but institutions endure. The mechanisms that govern these institutions must be robust enough to withstand personal ambitions and political pressures. It is perhaps to this end that the Supreme Court had mandated that the CEC and ECs be selected by a panel consisting of the Prime Minister, the Leader of Opposition, and the CJI — to ensure that the power of selection for these positions is not held exclusively by any one organ of the State.

The first President, Rajendra Prasad, said in his Constituent Assembly speech, "A Constitution, like a machine, is a lifeless thing. It acquires life because of the men who control it and operate it, and India needs today nothing more than a set of honest men who will have the interest of the country before them." We can apply the very foundation of constitutional institutions to better understand the needs of our democracy.

Insiyah Vahanvaty is the author of *The Fearless Judge: The Life and Times of Justice AM Ahmadi*. The views expressed are personal

[ JP NADDA | UNION HEALTH MINISTER ]

Earlier, the emphasis (of the National Health Policy) was just on the curative. Now, it is on the preventive

[ STRAIGHT FORWARD ]

Shashi Shekhar

## The State and society need to fight road rage crimes

**P**lease read the following paragraphs very carefully. They reflect the tragedy of our times. And if this emerging trend of violence perpetrated by people with short fuses persists, we are headed for a bleak future.

The incident happened in Delhi's Harsh Vihar with two youngsters, Himanshu and his brother Ankur, as they were walking towards a Ramleela fairground. Three persons on a motorbike brushed past the brothers weaving their two-wheeler dangerously through the milling crowds headed for the ground. The brothers, in turn, asked the riders to drive carefully, which led to an altercation. Soon the bike riders flashed out knives, attacked, and grievously wounded Himanshu and Ankur. The gruesome act unfolded in front of thousands of people. The knife-wielding miscreants could easily have been disarmed and overpowered if just a few of the onlookers had joined forces. It could have saved a family from tragedy. These were not assailants equipped with an AK-47 rifles or grenades.

No one moved even a finger. The trio attacked Ankur, causing fatal injuries to his chest, neck, stomach, and thighs. Himanshu, too, suffered serious injuries but managed to get his injured brother to the nearest hospital on a rickshaw. But it was too late. Ankur was declared dead on arrival.

You may have heard about many such incidents where people, instead of coming forward to help the wounded, were busy making reels for social media posts. How can people forget they are part of society and that a day could come when they, too, will need people's sympathy and support? Are we heading towards a dysfunctional society, which lacks concern and is driven by cold aggression?

Another incident in Bengaluru, the tech capital of India, reaffirms this. This incident involved a software engineer who was driving home with his wife and nine-month-old daughter in the car. A man on a bike suddenly blocked the car. The man then started pounding on the car bonnet with a mallet.

The shocked couple couldn't fathom what went wrong. By the time they gathered their wits, the biker had plucked the wiper off the car and smashed the windshield with it. He didn't stop there and kept pounding the windshield.

The techie's wife, seated in the front seat, started yelling for help. Her toddler daughter, who was sleeping in her lap, woke up due to the commotion.

The terror-stricken child also started crying.

As the incident happened on a busy road, spectators gathered around in a flash and started making reels and the traffic came to a halt. But the assailant kept attacking the car and though a couple of guards from the nearby showrooms came to intervene they couldn't deter the determined assailant.

Instead of saving the couple, people were busy making reels. The reels went viral and the police took cognizance of it but the incident rattled the family.

By the time the couple reached home, their baby was suffering from very high fever. She was unable to sleep and was very disturbed. Doctors diagnosed that the baby had a panic attack. She remained in that condition for a week and the parents gave up hope for her recovery.

No one knows if the incident will ever fade from the child's memory. Psychologists insist that childhood traumas leave a lasting imprint on people's psyche.

What wrong did New Delhi's Ankur and the toddler in Bengaluru do to deserve such a fate?

The list of such unfortunate is growing with nauseating regularity and the sad reality is there's no effective strategy to deal with the menace. Data corroborates the depressing trend. In 2022, the country's capital, Delhi, witnessed 76 road rage cases which went up to 84 the next year. This year, till August, 62 such incidents have been reported. Minister of Road Safety India 2019 tells us Mumbai and Kolkata lead the table in road rage cases.

Reports released by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) and the ministry of road transport suggest they are still dragging their feet on the scourge of road rage by not categorizing it as an issue that needs separate research.

How many Ankurs and toddlers will suffer or pay with their lives before the government wakes up from its slumber?

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





| GUEST VIEW

MINT CURATOR

# Digital infrastructure for open commerce can transform India

ONDC is an inclusive e-commerce platform that serves the public aim of linking the country for wide economic participation



**RAM SEWAK SHARMA**  
is chairperson of Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC).

British companies set up the first railway system in India in the early 19th century to serve their commercial interests and ambitions—later taken up and expanded by the British Raj. The various elements of the network, like coverage, access, pricing and, crucially, what was transported, were designed and implemented to meet the interests of select users aligned with the British Raj. Post-independence, the Indian government realized the importance of evolving the railway network into a public good to drive economic activity across the country, helping economic agents build on top of this. This was the case with diverse and common infrastructural enablers such as roads, ports and so on.

The key considerations of the government's support and participation were the scale of investments needed and ensuring democratic principles for access to this enabling infrastructure.

In the last few decades, we have experienced a new dimension evolving to exert influence on economic activity. This is the dimension of digitalization.

The early evolution of digitalization, enabling population-scale participation, was on foundations built as 'digital' public infrastructure. For example, HTTP and SMTP, as open protocols, enabled universal access to the web and digital communication at highly competitive charges for practically every segment of society.

Given the transformative power of digitalization, the Indian government built foundational infrastructure in the digital domain to extend access to the wider population beyond a privileged segment of society. This is now recognized globally as India's Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI).

Several initiatives are being rolled out to fast-track the journey towards this vision of Digital India. Nationwide broadband access is being established to reach distant towns and villages. Aadhaar is now available as a means for all residents of the country to establish their identity to participate in economic activity. When it came to the digitization of financial transfers, the government established a Unified Payments Interface (UPI) to ensure interoperability in payment systems and prevent fund transfers from being confined to walled gardens operated by a few entities.

In this case, UPI did not mandatorily replace other digital payment systems. It introduced a new avenue that could broad-based access at an affordable cost and also establish a network with participation from every member of the banking system in an interoperable manner.

Having demonstrated the power of DPI to bring about transformation at population scale, the government is now building on this idea in multiple sectors. Crucially, its involvement is as an enabler



ISTOCKPHOTO

and not a monopoly player edging out the private sector. Rather, through the establishment of foundational infrastructure, it is enabling wider participation by innovators and entrepreneurs in every sector to build services on top of it. For example, a faster and more cost-effective way of establishing identity using Aadhaar has enabled deeper penetration of both telecom and banking at a speed not experienced anywhere in the world.

Building on the learning from each initiative, every new DPI project is evolving with increasing collaboration between the public and private sectors. In the case of Aadhaar, the government established the foundational infrastructure, with enrolment and authentication services provided by the private sector. When it came to digital financial transactions, the government enabled the establishment of the central infrastructure through an independent non-profit company, National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), with investment purely from the banking industry.

Further, in the field of commerce, the government established the Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC), wherein it is acting as the sponsor and endorser of a Section 8 company (a kind of not-for-profit set up to promote commerce, art, science and religion, among other endeavours). It used industry participation to roll out an open protocol, with network policies that establish an unbundled and interoperable network as against the walled gardens of platforms operating with proprietary protocols that limit competition and innovation.

Crucially, it is not attempting to restrict existing players or business models. It is an inclusive

agenda that allows every platform to participate and encourages them to come up with models that will expand the footprint of digital commerce from current single-digit levels of penetration to population scale. This will make access to markets, credit, skills and logistics more democratic and broad-based, especially for small and micro enterprises and rural as well as urban consumers.

In the last couple of years, ONDC has shown that in an open network, every product or service that is 'catalogable' using an open protocol can be discovered, deals negotiated and contracted, orders fulfilled and post-order servicing managed through diverse buying interfaces with digital consumers (like banks, media and gaming companies), enabling every segment of consumers to procure products/services of their interest.

Thus, as the network matures, 1.4 billion consumers will be available as a common pool to every merchant/service provider that accesses the network using its open protocol instead of being under the control of a few platforms with walled gardens. This will enable multiple networks in commerce, logistics, mobility, health, agriculture, energy, etc. to evolve and also be interoperable to the extent it is relevant to reduce costs and provide a seamless experience to the consumer.

The beauty of this idea is in the collaboration between the public and private sectors in digital infrastructure creation to enable innovation, specialization and entrepreneurship, without the government getting into business or in the way of entrepreneurship.

*These are the author's personal views.*

# Jerome Powell will simply not be the greatest Fed chair ever

His record is smudged by a prolonged phase of ultra-easy money



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Even if he does oversee a soft landing for the US economy, Federal Reserve chair Jerome Powell will not deserve a place in the annals of history as the greatest central banker of all time. Not because bringing down inflation without causing a recession is as much a matter of luck as of skill—and economists will spend years debating how much of each Powell had—but because the mistakes the Fed made in 2021 will haunt the US economy for years to come. That alone takes Powell out of contention.

In the spring of 2020, as the world was in full pandemic panic and the US economy was in free-fall, the Federal Reserve turned to the emergency playbook from the financial crisis: It cut interest rates to zero and restarted quantitative easing (QE), buying up longer-dated Treasuries and mortgage-backed securities, known as MBS. This time, however, it went much bigger—expanding its balance sheet to \$8.9 trillion in 2022, compared to \$2 trillion in 2009.

By the summer of 2020, even as many businesses were shut down, the housing and mortgage markets appeared to be functioning. And yet the Fed kept buying MBS. It did not begin tapering its purchases until November 2021, and did not stop buying new MBS until June 2022—a full year after inflation took off, and years into a housing boom.

This, a recent economic research paper argues, is why mortgage rates were so low during the pandemic. In the early 2020s, the authors say, monetary policy juiced the housing market by lowering the spread on mortgages.

Not only did the Fed buy MBS directly—at its peak it owned about a quarter of the MBS market—but its actions also increased the amount of MBS the banks bought.

When policy rates fell to zero, banks attract more deposits, and they hedge that liability by buying assets that have similar duration and risk characteristics.

With the banks and Federal Reserve owning about half the MBS market, other investors became net sellers. The result was record-low mortgage rates and \$8 trillion worth of mortgage originations in 2020 and 2021, as people bought homes and refinanced at the historically low rates. Then, in 2022, inflation came back. In 2022, the Federal Reserve started increasing rates and stopped buying assets—known as quantitative tightening. Mortgage spreads shot back up, and so did the cost of borrowing in the American



Sustained quantitative easing distorted the US housing market. **STANIS**

economy. But because the United States has 30-year fixed rate mortgages, many Americans are still benefiting from the low rates. More than half of America's homeowners now have mortgage rates below 4%. They will not be moving anytime soon. That means less inventory, so new buyers are facing higher prices to go with higher mortgage rates.

This is likely to remain the case for years—because the odds are pandemic rates will never return to normal levels.

I am normally not one to play Monday-morning quarterback. Making monetary policy is difficult, especially in extreme circumstances, and the pandemic was an unprecedented emergency. It may have made sense for the Fed to restart quantitative easing in the spring of 2020 when the outlook was so dire, though perhaps the easing was larger than it needed to be. But why did it keep buying MBS, in such large quantities, for another two years?

It didn't make sense even then, as some critics noted at the time—it risked creating a bubble and distorted the housing market. Remember when there were bidding wars for houses in Boise, Idaho?

At this point, the best thing for the Fed to do is nothing. Eventually people will move, for all the various life reasons, and more homes will be built.

But it will take years for the housing market to get back to normal. And if home prices stay high, there will be political pressure to bring mortgage rates back down below 4%—which would require more quantitative easing, which would further distort markets. Some Fed critics would then charge the Fed with acting outside its mandate, risking its independence.

I realize this is quite a parade of horrors, but it's one Jerome Powell could have avoided had the Federal Reserve started to taper its MBS purchases at the end of 2020 or at least by early 2021.

Instead, the Fed kept buying MBS long after the mortgage market recovered, and kept rates at zero for a full year after inflation took off.

This was a major policy error—and it takes Jay Powell out of any contention about who is the greatest Federal Reserve chair ever. Paul Volcker can continue to rest in peace. **©BLOOMBERG**

| MY VIEW | GENERAL DISEQUILIBRIUM

# India must watch out for a remodelled EU taking shape

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India should be wary of a remodelled European Union (EU) coming down the turnpike. The 27-member bloc, in addition to its internal contradictions, is fraying at the edges with multiple members expressing displeasure openly. June elections to European Parliament saw far-right parties making major gains and cornering a majority. The impact of this on existing policy frameworks is still unclear, though some consensus decisions—such as tighter migration rules—seem imminent. The EU's slowing economy, with the bloc's GDP growing 0.8% during 2023, could see the community reasserting some of its historic characteristic traits to regain revenue and growth.

All this could spell turbulent India-EU trade ties. The right-wing resurgence, coupled with the centre-right European People's Party gaining the most seats, is likely to see a hardening of the EU's protectionist trade measures, and a renewed attempt to unilaterally exercise extra-territorial jurisdiction over Indian capital market institu-

tions. India's trade with the EU (imports plus exports) contracted by almost 5% between March 2023 and March 2024.

The EU's protectionist measures are marked by non-tariff barriers. Indian commerce minister Piyush Goyal recently expressed disappointment over the slow progress of India-EU free trade agreement talks. Nine rounds have been concluded so far with no sign of progress. The minister's view is that the EU's insistence on including sustainability issues—what he termed "extraneous issues"—in the negotiations is creating roadblocks.

One contentious issue creating heartburn across trade platforms is the EU's imposition of a new import levy under its Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), a tax based on greenhouse gases emitted during the production of imported goods. The EU's reasoning is that since European companies are mandated to offset emissions arising from their production processes, entailing a monetary outlay, imported goods that do not invest similar amounts in offsetting emissions would gain an edge. The CBAM is likely to affect developing and poor nations the most. The 2024 *Trade Performance Report* from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development estimates that

CBAM levies on African imports is likely to reduce the continent's GDP by almost 1%.

The CBAM has also been pilloried for being unjust: European nations and companies have emitted indiscriminately over the past century but want developing nations to foot the bill. Developing and poor countries are being asked to bear the costs of climate change, despite their emissions being lower than those of most EU member countries and their lack of financial capacity to either monitor emissions or invest in decarbonization. A Brookings Institute study from July 2024 contends that measuring carbon emissions is a difficult task and invariably leads to unreliable data-sets, implying that this could be a source of future trade conflicts. The paper also says that by targeting industrial manufactured products (like steel), the EU might be giving a pass to other highly polluting industries like transport and agriculture.

The EU's intransigent behaviour is also reflected in its insistence on auditing and

gaining oversight over Indian bond clearing houses. Changes in the European Market Infrastructure Regulation has forced the European Securities and Markets Authority (ESMA), the EU's financial markets regulator and supervisor, to blacklist six Indian clearing corporations, or central counterparties,

from providing clearing and settlement services to European banks underwriting bond and derivative transactions in India. Of the six de-recognized platforms, two are regulated by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), two by securities market regulator Sebi and two by the International Financial Services Centres Authority.

ESMA's decision seems to have been prompted, in the main, by RBI refusing to grant the European regulator audit and inspection rights over one particular clearing platform, Clearing Corporation of India (CCI), which oversees the bulk of government bond trading and settlement. RBI, in turn, seems to have been emboldened by a similar agreement with the Bank of England

that is "based on mutual respect for each jurisdiction's current regulatory regime and each authority's supervisory practices."

Addressing the media in December 2023, RBI deputy governor R.abi Sanakar had observed: "These MoUs or agreements with respect to market infrastructure agencies like CCI, should be underpinned by the word that is used in their regulations—'cooperation'. They should be cooperative documents. We believe that they should follow the principle of mutual respect and the principle of mutual trust. They should also be characterized by the principle of deference to local regulations. In other words, we are not comfortable with the regulations anywhere which are characterized by extrajurisdictional jurisdiction."

Social scientists have observed that EU's attempts at cross-border partnerships seem influenced more by a historical mind-set, one that still harbours remnants of an expansionist and extraction-based economic model, rather than treating other nations as equal partners. With a near-stagnant economy, a large chunk of its population past the working age and a far-right machinery now administering policy, the last thing the world wants is the EU's political and economic model resembling a medieval fortress.



## OUR VIEW



## Lady Justice makeover: Time to reflect on ideals

The Constitution replaces a sword and the blindfold has been cast off in a judicious reform of judicial iconography. It's an apt moment to recall John Rawls and Amartya Sen on justice

Symbols hold meaning. The national emblem that India adopted after Independence, the lion capital, for example, symbolizes ideals of power and the triumph of truth. Any institutional change in iconography should make us pause for reflection. Especially if it concerns a vital institution in a world where institutions may explain the difference between the wealth and poverty of nations, as the Economics Nobel Prize for 2024 reminds us. Last week, in a remarkable move to shed colonial baggage, the Supreme Court unveiled a redesigned version of 'Lady Justice.' The old statue, whose origin can be traced to ancient civilizations around the Mediterranean Sea, had balancing scales in one hand of a blindfolded woman, with a sword in the other. The scales, which represent impartiality in the weighing of cases, have been retained. The sword of enforcement has been replaced with a copy of India's Constitution, on which the rule of law is based, marking an Age-of-Reason shift to what must be enforced from how. The blindfold is gone, with Lady Justice's eyes wide open—to affirm our equality. "The law is not blind; it sees everyone equally," said Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud at the unveiling ceremony. The rationale—to keep up with evolving ideals in India's own context of interpretations—is in consonance with our commitment to institutional sovereignty.

What we should reflect upon, above all, is the discarded blindfold. By intent, it was a symbol of fairness. But it also exposed the law's majesty to portrayal as sightless in popular culture, as seen in the 1983 Hindi blockbuster *Andhaa Kaanoon* (literally, 'blind law'). Open eyes, in contrast, have long inspired the poetry of love

and equity, as heard in cinema and beyond. Now that a Raj legacy of dissonance has been cast off in favour of coherence, the remade Lady Justice can convey equality in the eyes of justice. As semiotic resets go, this is a judicious remake. While we welcome it, however, we must also weigh what has been cast off. At its most worthy, the blindfold was a cue for the "veil of ignorance" in John Rawls' theory of justice that proposes justice as fairness. If people in an "original position" set out to institute a just system without being able to see their own social status (or endowments), he argued, then rational folks would adopt two principles: One, of liberty, equally available to all, so long as it's compatible with the same right of others; and two, of social and economic gaps needing to work in everyone's favour and be derived only from positions open to all in society. Amartya Sen, in *The Idea of Justice*, critiques Rawls' institutional emphasis and advocates a path laid by deliberations of democracy on the relative lives led by people, an echo of his Nobel Prize-winning work on social-choice theory calling for comparisons to unlock fairer outcomes.

Worthy as Rawls' and Sen's proposals are, they are too abstract to pitch in the public square for people to wrap their heads around. Perhaps an imaginary wheel of fortune could act as an aid. Suppose we are all to be randomly reborn overnight as somebody else in society, what ideals of justice would we want? With a one-in-1.4 billion chance of being the least—or most—fortunate, Rawlsian fairness would be top priority. Just thinking of how vastly our fortunes might vary would make us reckon with inequality, as Sen urges. But then, symbolic implements are all that the Judiciary has at its disposal. And it has re-crafted them well.

## Gradual or surge? Either way, we need to strengthen our defences

India's defence spending must rise sharply for preparedness against fast-evolving potential threats



**NITIN PAI**  
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Writing in 1919, in the aftermath of the First World War, the flu pandemic and the outbreak of the Irish war of independence, William Butler Yeats observed, "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold. Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world. The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere/ The ceremony of innocence is drowned/ The best lack all conviction, while the worst/ Are full of passionate intensity." He could well have been describing the world in 2024.

The niceties of international relations, the guard-rails of international norms and restraints placed by the United Nations system, have dissolved into a reality where might is right. This will not change for the better anytime soon. The kind of leadership required to steer the world away from brutality is nowhere on the horizon. Nuclear weapons have deterred major powers from fighting big direct wars, but there are numerous ongoing proxy wars and confrontations that are causing a shocking amount of destruction. Nuclear threats have been issued. There is dangerous talk of calling nuclear bluffs. The guns will continue to do the talking over the next decade.

India's current military preparedness was for a different world, a pre-Gaza, pre-Ukraine, pre-Xi Jinping world, with different fundamental assumptions about the types of conflict and the inter-

national context in which they might take place. While our armed forces have acquired new capabilities and moved forward in the modernization process, we have yet to implement some of the most significant recommendations made in the Kargil Committee Report nearly a quarter-century ago. Both the integration of the three services and the formation of theatre commands remain works-in-progress.

Circumstances have changed rapidly. India's military capability must keep pace with that of the People's Republic of China, which, for its part, seeks to keep pace with that of the United States. As the fights in Ukraine and West Asia have shown, generational superiority matters. Those who carry a knife to a gunfight find that they are defeated even before entering the battlefield. Of course, a combination of asymmetric strategies, ingenuity and alliances can foil more advanced military adversaries. But if one has a choice, it is prudent to invest in hard military superiority. There are two broad ways India can build the military power it needs to secure itself: gradual and surge.

The gradual way would be to steadily increase defence expenditure—from the current sub-2% of gross domestic product (GDP) to around 4% of GDP—over a 10-year period. This allows the government enough room to negotiate budget constraints and shift fiscal resources towards defence. It also gives India's defence leadership more time to implement structural changes like theatre commands and integrated planning. Service chiefs and theatre commanders will be able to define, induct and absorb new technologies, platforms and systems across 1.4 million active military personnel and related logistical and industrial eco-systems. India's budding domestic private defence industry will enjoy a longer developmental runway, and a decade from now, indigenous levels, even in critical combat platforms, could be significant.

The downside of the gradual approach

is that it might be too late in bearing fruit. Can we be really confident that India will not be subject to major military coercion before 2034? Does our political system have the resolve to deliver on a 10-year commitment? Will the international environment remain favourable to India over this period?

That is why I think we should also consider a second approach—a surge in defence expenditure, starting with an immediate doubling of the defence budget and holding it at the 4% of GDP level for five years, before dialling it back down. Such front-loading would take maximum advantage of India's partnership with the United States and its allies, while creating additional resources for the domestic industry. If buy-versus-build decisions are made thoughtfully, India's indigenous outcomes over a 10-year period might be comparable to that of a gradual approach. Meanwhile, a massive increase in the availability of new equipment could galvanize absorption processes across the three services. More importantly, India will have the military strength at a time when it is necessary.

The problem with the surge approach is that the fiscal adjustments required will be abrupt and painful. The defence leadership will be required to accelerate its integrated planning. Transforming the three services in a short period will not be easy. There is also a risk that indigenous defence startups will get left out as purchase orders go to foreign vendors for ready-made products.

Gradual or surge, which way should we go? I cannot say at this point, except that the government and Parliament must review whether India's military strength is sufficient to tide through the dramatically different world that we are in. What is clear is that it is safer to be stronger.

Yeats ends his poem with the following lines: "And what rough beast, its hour come round at last, Stretches towards Bethlehem to be born?"

### 10 YEARS AGO



### JUST A THOUGHT

Justice will not be served until those who are unaffected are as outraged as those who are.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

### MY VIEW | MODERN TIMES

## The spectacle of SpaceX is about how science has failed

MANU JOSEPH



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

There is a way that people in Mumbai still gape at a new metro line—with rustic wonderment at automatic doors and air-conditioned coaches. A few days ago, the world appeared to have the same look when Elon Musk's company SpaceX managed to grab a descending booster with giant grippers. I don't know why the world reacted the way it did to the event. We have seen more marvellous things.

I just don't get the greatness of the booster catch. The hype was similar to the time when Musk launched his red car into space and his fans were blown, as though they had not heard of an object called a satellite that could be put to better uses than an orbiting Tesla. I do not say that capturing a rocket booster is no scientific achievement. Just say that in 2024, it is no marvel. And that it is perceived as a marvel points to a problem.

Rocket science has always had more allure than its technological substance deserved. Even in its glory days, there were sciences that required greater human brilliance than

shooting off metal to space. The phrase that actually captures the meaning of "it's no rocket science" is probably, "it's no malaria cure." But it just does not sound as cool. Even the word 'ballistic' carries disproportionate scientific sophistication, though it merely describes gravity. (A 'ballistic missile' has an unguided descent while a 'cruise missile,' which sounds more recreational, is guided till the very end.)

The booster that SpaceX grabbed on its descent was about 70 metres long, or as large as a 20-storey building. The booster slowed itself down from its initial supersonic speeds before it was launched. Boosters usually just fall into the sea. But if they can be reused, it would significantly lower the cost of space missions. If that is the most exciting part of the booster-grab, then I am especially disappointed as an Indian because we can send a rocket up cheaper than SpaceX, even if our boosters just fall off.

My quarrel is that, as an innovation, the descent of a booster is not much superior to the ascent of a rocket, especially with a human crew on board that has to be taken to a precise location and brought back. Also, even in rocketry, a booster grab is far more modest than the performance of Israel's Iron dome, which can intercept hundreds of mis-

siles, including hypersonic ballistic missiles, the kind Iran trained on Israel a few weeks ago. Also, we landed on the Moon in 1969, and did not repeat the feat because it was not worth the expense.

The fact that in 2024 the guided descent of a rocket booster into the waiting hands of an iron structure qualifies as a great scientific spectacle of our times at once reveals and hides the fact that modern science is a big disappointment, especially to its own initial promise.

It's not that present-day science isn't impressive at all. For example, modern hacking is ingenious—you receive a phone call, and still even answer it, and still end up with a virus that takes over your phone.

Almost everything Israel uses to defend itself is impressive technology, and much of the best warfare science today is beyond public knowledge.

But the achievements of modern science have been modest in furthering our understanding of the nature of reality (considering

how much we knew, say, by 1910), and in our quality of life, especially in medical sciences, whose hype comes from their ability to prolong death instead of rejuvenating the human body.

Today, if you wish to live well, science cannot guide you in any specific way. It can only offer a broad direction, not very different from the advice of a wise old woman if you don't count her attempts to push her high-carb sweets. In 2024, you still have to go through a process of trial and error to figure out what works for you.

Science has stagnated in areas like air travel not because it does not know how to fly you faster. We have the tech to shoot you into space from Delhi and bring you down over New York just about two hours later. It is just that we have not found a way to do it cheaply enough for commercial application. Even so, the fact that our grandfathers and we travel at the same speed across the world is a failure of science.

Why has science disappointed? There is a

defence that incremental breakthroughs in a field get difficult over time. But there is an unsung reason.

Science may have mojo, but scientific research is often tedious, even boring. Across the world, smart young people now have many options for how to lead their lives. Even in India, upper-class parents no longer pressure their children to pursue lucrative unhappy careers. You don't have to do something anymore just because you are very good at it; you can follow your 'passion,' which is often something in the arts. As a result, some people who might have been great engineers may be making terrible but honest movies, or those who would have been marvellous biologists might be working on the best way to compress a video file.

You could argue that there are enough people in the world, and even if some opt out of the tedious aspects of science, there are still plenty of others eager to pursue them. However, extraordinary breakthroughs typically come not from systems, but from the ingenious insights of extraordinary individuals. I worry that the scientist capable of a breakthrough that could vastly improve my quality of life when I'm 90 might be working at SpaceX, figuring out how to catch a rocket booster instead.

Science has been a major disappointment and this may be because of a brain drain from real science





MONDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2024



HEALTHCARE FOR EVERYONE  
Union health minister JP Nadra

The government is taking steps to ensure high-quality and affordable healthcare facilities to all... (and) is committed to implementing a comprehensive health policy that provides holistic, inclusive, preventive, promotive, curative, palliative, and rehabilitative care to all

Slowdown blues

● AIDING HEALTHY COMPETITION

A decisive policy shift is needed to boost income and aid productivity gains

GIFT CITY HAS THE POTENTIAL TO REDEFINE INDIA'S ROLE IN THE GLOBAL ADR LANDSCAPE

**M**ULTIPLE ECONOMIC INDICATORS have in recent months shown a marked decline, denting the optimism that existed about the short-term economic trajectory. It looks increasingly convincing now that the underlying momentum of economic activity, given the unhelpful external world, is not sufficient to maintain the recent trend growth, let alone accelerate it. Despite the first-quarter GDP growth coming in at 6.7%, a lower rate than in the previous four quarters, and a sizeable 1.4 percentage points less than the year-ago quarter, it did not look much disconcerting. This was because itemised data on the expenditure side showed a couple of bright spots — a “rebounding” of private consumption that had witnessed a severe slowdown in the post-pandemic period, and a creditable investment rate (fixed capital formation), despite a slowing of government capex.

The tempo was largely seen to sustain itself. Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Shaktikanta Das, in his statement following the October 2024 monetary policy review, said that “prospects of private consumption, the mainstay of aggregate demand, look bright on the back of improved agricultural outlook and rural demand”. However, asserted high-frequency data now fly in the face of the assumption that consumption demand is strong, and that it is helped by a “turnaround” in rural demand, and “sustained” urban demand.

To be sure, export of merchandise declined 3.76% in Q1, on a favourable base (-3.18%), sales of commercial vehicles and tractors fell on year in H1FY25 by 0.7% and 8.8% respectively, while passenger vehicles sales were almost flat (1.1%). Non-food credit grew 13.6% in August 2024, compared with nearly 20% in the corresponding months in the previous two years. Index of industrial production (IIP) grew just 4.13% in April-August this fiscal, compared with 6.74% and 7.74% respectively in the corresponding periods of FY24 and FY23.

In fact, IIP consumer goods sub-index grew at an even slower rate of 2.3% in April-August 2024, reflecting a subdued demand scenario. Among core sectors, growth in coal off-take was in the negative zone in the three months to September, and so were fertiliser sales. Electricity generation fell in both August and September, and cement production remained flat or negative for the past few months. Even industrial capacity utilisation, a modest improvement in which in recent quarters was what optimists have betted on as sign of a new investment cycle taking shape, declined marginally to 74% in Q1FY25, falling off the 44-quarter peak of 76.8% reported in the previous quarter. That was inevitable as the inventory-sales ratio inched up.

Among the growth impulses expected are the favourable agricultural crop outlook with improving prospects of kharif and rabi output, renewed pace of public capex, especially the Centre’s budgetary spending, and a modest pickup in exports if the external situation doesn’t turn much for the worse. Even as growth worries rise, the RBI is caught in a cleft stick, as is evident from Das’s recent statement that cutting the policy rate could be “very premature” and “risky” at this point. The RBI is right in its steadfast commitment to aligning inflation with the target. In any case, that the headline inflation trajectory, as projected by the central bank, would sequentially moderate in Q4 cannot be taken for granted. The robust bottom lines of banks and large corporates can’t give impetus to the economy, when the demand side is weak. Policies must be formulated and implemented expeditiously to boost household income and purchasing capacity, and achieve wholesome productivity gains.

# The next dispute resolution hub



MS SAHOO  
Founder, Dr. Sahoo Regulatory Chambers

**W**HAT DO ADANI Power, Future Retail, Antrix Corporation, BharatPe, and Reliance Infrastructure have in common? They all turned to the Singapore International Arbitration Centre (SIAC) to resolve complex commercial disputes. This choice not only reflects SIAC’s status as a premier arbitration venue but also the inadequacy of comparable dispute resolution services in India.

This scenario is reminiscent of an era when individuals from different regions of India travelled to the US for treatment of serious medical issues. It was because such advanced medical care was not available in India then. This reflects a broader truth: while countries have geographical boundaries, markets do not. In our digital, interconnected world, the physical location of services matters far less than their quality, speed, and reliability.

Today, India is a hub for medical tourism, providing world-class healthcare at a fraction of international costs. What once cost India billions in outboard medical expenses has evolved into a multibillion-dollar industry that serves patients from across the globe. Just as India transformed its healthcare landscape, it can become a leader in alternative dispute resolution (ADR) offering world-class services at competitive prices. This would keep disputes and billions in foreign exchange within its borders, and also attract international cases.

Indian entities including government bodies, are increasingly turning to international alternative dispute resolution centres (IADRCs) like SIAC, even for disputes involving only Indian parties. Indian arbitrators actively provide services at these centres. Indian parties rank among the top foreign users at SIAC, while Indian arbitrators are frequently listed among the most appointed nationalities. With both users and service providers originating from India, the country is well-positioned to establish its own IADRC. India’s competitive edge in dispute resolution gives it a leg-up, bolstered by its favourable

cost structure, robust infrastructure, and vast pool of skilled professionals. In today’s competitive landscape where businesses fight for market share, resources, and profits, disputes over contracts, intellectual property, and regulatory compliances are inevitable. The diversity of participants with varying interests increases the likelihood of disagreements. Disputes, however, come with significant costs: they lock up scarce resources and divert time and money that could be used elsewhere. Moreover, prolonged disputes create uncertainty, deterring investment and hindering economic growth.

Given the limitations of traditional judicial systems, businesses are increasingly opting for ADR services for swift, fair, and cost-effective resolutions. As a result, the ADR market is booming, with the global market projected to reach \$15 billion by 2030, growing at a compound annual rate of 7%. The Asian market is looking more uncertain again. US employment figures for September showed a huge jump, which, together with the threat of further escalation of the horrors in West Asia, suggest that the inflation risk has not gone away; thus, the Fed may have to be more contained in its easing. Domestically, too, the September consumer price index came in at 5.49% much higher than expected and was at the highest level in nine months. Again, and particularly with a new set of outside members of the MPC on board, this suggests more status quo in India.

Thus, while the overall trend in the premiums is up, they could well stay at current levels for some time yet. This is obviously important for importers who are planning their risk management.

Another alternative is to use a structured approach which sets a risk limit to

Dubai, the proposed centre at GIFT City must provide services that meet or exceed these venues in quality, cost, and efficiency. Further, it should offer distinctive value propositions to attract global users and set it apart. At a minimum, the centre’s design should incorporate the following key elements.

**Comprehensive services:** A successful centre offers an array of dispute resolution options, including arbitration, mediation, and hybrid methods like med-arb, through online, offline, or assisted online modes. It caters to all types of disputes — commercial, financial, and beyond — whether they arise onshore, offshore, or cross-border, regardless of parties’ (private, public, government-private, and government-government). This all-in-one approach ensures the centre meets the varied needs of users.

**Party autonomy:** ADR enables parties to collaborate for mutually beneficial outcomes, emphasising the importance of party autonomy. This flexibility allows disputants complete freedom to select the governing law, the ADR seat, and the professionals overseeing the process. Both Indian and foreign parties should have the ability to designate GIFT City as the ADR seat, with the option to choose either foreign or Indian governing law.

**Case management:** Effective case management and streamlined processes are critical for resolving disputes quickly and in a cost-effective manner, making the centre attractive to businesses. The

integration of advanced technology, including online dispute resolution platforms, virtual hearings, document-only arbitration, expedited procedures, secure document management systems, and incentives for faster disposal enhances efficiency and accessibility.

**Dispute resolution professionals:** A diverse and experienced panel of internationally recognised dispute resolution professionals, across disciplines, ensures high-quality ADR services. They are attuned to cultural nuances which enhance communication, reduce misunderstandings, and foster trust among international parties. An ongoing training and accreditation programme helps maintain high standards of practice and ethics.

**Legislative support:** A robust legislative framework that promotes ADR and sets clear operational guidelines is vital. Such laws should grant the centre the autonomy to modify its rules and procedures swiftly in response to evolving user needs and trends in dispute resolution. This enhances the centre’s competitiveness and responsiveness, instilling confidence among users.

**Judicial system:** The availability of a dedicated and efficient court system to support ADR services, particularly in enforcing awards, is essential. Initially, a specialised bench within the high court could oversee ADR matters. As the centre develops, an international court with international judges could oversee all ADRs seated in GIFT City. Appellate review may initially be directed to the Supreme Court, with plans for a transnational court of appeal to enhance the centre’s credibility in resolving cross-border disputes.

GIFT City has the potential to redefine India’s role in the global ADR landscape by establishing a competitive IADRC. With a commitment to innovation and quality, it could become the preferred choice for businesses seeking efficient and effective dispute resolution solutions. Today, what is costing India heavily in outboard ADR expenses could evolve into a thriving global industry.

## In space, no one can hear Musk’s rivals scream

**NAVIGATING SPACE IS** hard. It’s expensive, complex, time-consuming and dangerous. And yet you have to hand it to Elon Musk: His SpaceX firm makes it look easy. Space Exploration Technologies Corp.’s reusable Falcon 9 is today the world’s most flown rocket, a milestone in bringing down the cost of space transportation. It gives SpaceX a “de facto” monopoly on launch missions slinging payload like satellites into orbit. And that dominance extends to its own Starlink satellites, 6,000 of which orbit the Earth, offering high-speed internet almost anywhere. You don’t need to believe in Musk’s visions of humanity on Mars to see the power of vertical integration at work.

Musk’s rivals are far behind, but it’s Europe where space especially looks like a theater of cruelty. The continent that once dominated commercial satellite launches with its Ariane program — a symbol of industrial policy akin to Airbus SE — has lost its lead after initially mocking Musk and has even had to rely on SpaceX for launches in recent years. Meanwhile, establishment satellite firms Eutelsat Communications SA and SES SA have been eclipsed by the likes of Starlink and hurt by reliance on funding legacy businesses like beaming TV channels into homes in the age of Netflix Inc.

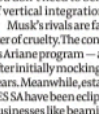
This is far more serious than your average Nokia Oyj v. Apple Inc. case study of European tech decline. Space is highly geopolitical, as Americans will recall from the Cold War. Starlink terminals have proven critical on the battlefield in Ukraine but also stoked doubts over whether Musk is doing enough to crack down on their illicit use by Russian forces. Musk has also appeared to use Starlink as leverage, such as when the service told Brazil it wouldn’t comply with a requirement to block access to Musk’s social media platform X (it later complied). For the European Union to accept dependence on SpaceX in a \$630 billion global space economy, where China is also resurgent, is a risk it assumes Musk will always “come in peace” despite his four-letter invectives against EU regulators and his pal Donald Trump’s trade barbs.

Brussels’ technocrats, as always, have some ideas on how to catch up — but there are so many issues it’s hard to know where to start. The Mario Draghi report on European competitiveness offers as many as 10 proposals, from promoting space startups to cutting complexity in the EU’s fragmented governance of space.

What’s missing, in my view, is something simpler: A moonshot vision that would enlist investors, entrepreneurs and regulators to deliver what Europe has traditionally done well, which is taxpayer-funded public service at low cost. Why not aim to compete with Musk by delivering an internet connection from anywhere at an affordable price — \$50 per month or less versus Starlink’s \$100 per month, for example? The target market of areas underserved or unserved by other connections would be small at about 5 million households in Europe. But it could go global and compete with Starlink, whose revenue is estimated to have gone to \$6.6 billion from zero in four years.

The advantage would be clarity on the why and the how of getting back into the space race at a time when voter frustrations are rising and every euro counts. Back-of-the-envelope estimates by economist Francesco Nicolli, a visiting fellow at the Bruegel think tank, suggest that approximately \$12 billion (less than 0.1% of EU gross domestic product) would be needed over seven years to get this “European plan” off the ground. Half of that sum would go toward reusable launchers; the rest would go to developing and launching satellites. There would no doubt be pushback from many quarters, but the last thing Europe needs is another missed opportunity driven by sceptical incumbents.

As always with space, the risks are high — but so are the dangers of staying on the launchpad. If Musk’s rivals can’t sell the earthly benefits of getting ahead in the space race, expect more silent, rocket-fueled wars.



LIONEL LAURENT  
Bloomberg



JAMAL MECKLAI  
CEO, Mecklai Financial  
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**WITH THE FED** raising rates since April 2022, the forward premiums fell sharply, and since April 2023, had fallen and stayed below 3% per annum (pa). In fact, the three-month premium bottomed out at 0.98% pa in November last year, by which time there was growing evidence that the Fed was getting ready to cut rates. Premiums inched up, averaging 1.35% — still very low historically — over the next eight months, and then finally jumped higher last month when the Fed cut its funds rate by a sharp 50 basis points, and indicated that there may well be two more cuts this year.

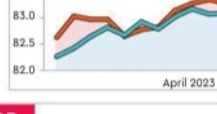
On the other side, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) held rates steady over the period, even as there was an increasing chorus, particularly from the outside members of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), calling for easing. There was also considerable talk on whether food inflation should be moved out of the RBI’s focus basket since food prices were more supply-driven. However, no such foolishness prevailed as the RBI/government needed to manage prices aggressively, particularly given the ongoing sale of state elections. In any event, growth was not doing too badly.

Forward premiums are largely driven by the difference between US and domestic interest rates, so when US rates fall the premiums go up and if Indian

interest rates decline the premiums fall. The road ahead is, unsurprisingly, looking more uncertain again. US employment figures for September showed a huge jump, which, together with the threat of further escalation of the horrors in West Asia, suggest that the inflation risk has not gone away; thus, the Fed may have to be more contained in its easing. Domestically, too, the September consumer price index came in at 5.49% much higher than expected and was at the highest level in nine months. Again, and particularly with a new set of outside members of the MPC on board, this suggests more status quo in India.

Thus, while the overall trend in the premiums is up, they could well stay at current levels for some time yet. This is obviously important for importers who are planning their risk management.

Another alternative is to use a structured approach which sets a risk limit to



## While the overall trend in premiums is up, they could well stay at current levels for some time yet; this is important for importers planning risk management

fix the worst case cost and follow a strict set of rules to capture some upside, since there is always some volatility in the market. (There are also different option structures that could provide both risk protection and some upside.)

The chart shows the performance of one of our clients who followed a modified version of our hedge programme (MHP), which was designed to perform best in an environment where the premiums were higher than 3% pa. The programme performed extremely well delivering a cost that was lower than hedging forward on Day 1 in 15 of the 18 months it was running. The average savings were 18 paise per dollar, and, while that may not seem like a lot, it was more than 50% of the average premium that needed over the period. The client, who had average imports of \$3 million a month, used this programme to save over ₹60 lakh a year on its import costs.

We would also like to point out that the volatility of the market was extremely low during this period and in more normal volatility (whatever that is), the performance would likely be even better.

Since, as explained earlier, the premiums are likely to stay around 2% pa for some time yet, and unlikely to rise above 3% for several months — perhaps more than a year — it would make sense to change your hedge approach to this model.

operators are concerned about potential disruptions, satcom and terrestrial networks have complementary strengths. Satcom can provide backhaul in areas where fibre is impractical, while telecom operators can enhance last-mile connectivity. The Centre must ensure fair pricing of the spectrum and have a transparent allocation process.

—Amarjeet Kumar, Hazaribagh

● Write to us at [letters@expressindia.com](mailto:letters@expressindia.com)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Diplomatic dilemmas

In a major setback for the Indian government, the US on Thursday announced the filing of murder-for-hire and money laundering charges against former RAW operative Vikash Yadav in connection with the alleged plot to assassinate pro-Khalistan extremist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun. The indictment implicates the Indian government directly in the attempted murder of a dissident. Although the

Indian government has said it is co-operating with the ongoing investigation in the US, it has not responded to the specific charges against Yadav yet. It is a big challenge for the government to resolve the issue as otherwise, it can lead to another big diplomatic row after the serious and similar kind of dispute going on with Canada over the killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Vancouver last year.

—Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

### A step forward

The Centre’s decision to allocate spectrum for satellite communications (satcom) administratively, instead of through auctions, is a positive step that relieves pressure for the telecom sector. This move follows global trends, recognising the unique needs of satcom and the regulatory flexibility required to foster innovation and competition. While telecom



## Green truths

Greenwashing guidelines good, but could be sharper

**T**aking cues from their global counterparts, well-heeled Indian consumers are seeking out products and services that cause less environmental harm and are willing to pay more for it. Businesses are not averse to capitalising on this fact by labelling their perfectly ordinary wares as 'organic', 'natural', 'eco-friendly', 'green' or 'sustainable' to extract a higher price.



In February 2024, after finding that a majority of advertisements with green claims were vague or misleading, ASCI (Advertising Standards Council of India) came up with guidelines on the do's and don'ts for them. Now the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA), a statutory body under the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, has sharpened the guidelines to give them greater legal heft. The CCPA guidelines expressly prohibit product sellers, service providers, advertisers, advertising agencies and their endorsers from the practise of 'greenwashing'. The definition of greenwashing is sweeping. It is defined as any deceptive practise that exaggerates or makes false and misleading environmental claims, conceals, omits or hides relevant information or harmful attributes. Using misleading images too fall under its ambit.

The CCPA imposes several obligations on those making green claims. One, terms such as green, eco-friendly, organic, natural, sustainable, carbon-neutral etc should not be used in a sweeping manner without verifiable evidence. They should be accompanied by qualifiers if any, with independent studies or third-party certification in a QR code or URL which can be accessed by the consumer. This requirement can weed out spurious and vague claims. But it is moot if there are official agencies who can certify all types of green claims and whether consumers are aware of them. Two, anyone making a green claim (such as eco-friendly or non-toxic for instance) should specify whether it applies to the whole product, its manufacturing process, packaging or its use and disposal. This will prevent vendors from making cosmetic changes to slap on a 'green' label. A bubble-wrapped product in a cardboard box cannot be labelled bio-degradable. Three, claims such as bio-degradable, recyclable, and so on need to be supported by scientific evidence or third-party verification. Sellers cannot cherry-pick from research studies to support such claims. They need to disclose the entire study.

Most of these provisions seem to be derived from the European Union's Anti-Greenwashing regulations, after leaving out its more stringent aspects such as revealing the product lifecycle. However, the CCPA's guidelines are still rather broad in scope, raising questions about their enforceability. The guidelines do not specify any route for consumers to raise complaints. They don't lay down penalties for violations. India is yet to implement waste segregation even in the major metros and lacks a formal reverse supply chain to recycle products. A basic ecosystem, literally speaking, needs to be in place.

## OTHER VOICES.

## The Observer

Joe Biden must use this moment to press for peace

Contrasting reactions to the chance killing by Israeli soldiers of Hamas's top leader, Yahya Sinwar, offer a chattering guide to the dismal, dead-end politics of the Middle East. Sinwar, reputed mastermind of the 7 October 2023 massacre of about 1,200 Israelis, has paid a fitting price for his crimes. It would have been preferable had he faced trial. The same holds true of Ismail Haniyeh, Hamas's political chief, assassinated by Israel in Tehran in July. Yet both these men lived by the sword. They knew the score. The killing is being widely described as a watershed moment that could presage an end to the multi-fronted war that erupted after 7 October. It is likened in importance to the US assassination of Osama bin Laden, who plotted the 9/11 attacks — and was similarly celebrated in Israel and western capitals last week. Yet such sweeping assessments may be premature. LONDON, OCTOBER 20

## 讀賣新聞

THE YOMIURI SHIMBUN

Outlook for Renewed Growth Must Be Presented

The Japanese economy is at a critical juncture, having emerged from a long period of stagnation and now heading toward renewed growth. Rather than competing with each other through proposals for budgetary handouts, political parties should debate specific measures to boost growth. Economic measures should be focused on how to deal with rising prices and ensure that larger wage increases take root. Political parties need set immediate measures against high prices as the main pillar of their campaign pledges for the upcoming House of Representatives election. The Liberal Democratic Party has pledged to provide cash benefits to low-income households. TOKYO, OCTOBER 19



P. S. KUMAR

**I**t is now accepted by the scientific community that climate change is caused by a rise in global temperatures, in turn caused by Greenhouse gases (GHG) emissions resulting from anthropogenic activities such as burning fossil fuels, releasing of gases in industrial processes, among others.

When we discuss Sustainability and ESG, and, as COP (Committee of Parties) meetings go, the Paris meeting of 2015, COP21 is a landmark meeting where 196 nations came to grips with the subject and laid targets for bringing down the global temperatures. It was recognised that unless climate change was controlled, it would lead to frequent and severe droughts, heatwaves, heavy unseasonal rainfall etc.

## THE THREE SCOPES

First conceptualised by the GHG Protocol (accounting and reporting standards for businesses and governments) to find a way to account for emissions of gases, its study has now been universally accepted when reporting on Sustainability and ESG and the categorisation of emissions into three Scopes.

Scope 1 emissions occur from sources that are owned or controlled by an entity. Scope 2 emissions are from the generation of purchased electricity and energy consumed and Scope 3 emissions are a consequence of the activities of an entity and occur during the operations of the value chain partners including vendors manufacturing inputs for the entity.

Within Scope 3, GHG Protocol has identified eight upstream activities and seven downstream activities. One should refer to the GHG Protocol publication 'Corporate Value Chain (Scope 3) Accounting and Reporting Standard' for understanding the Scopes.

Of late, one downstream activity listed in Scope 3 viz., 'Investments', also referred to as 'financed emissions' has been gaining significant interest. Investments are also an entity's activity which can cause emissions. By an extension, loans given by banks and other entities such as NBFCs being funnelled into investments come under this category.

## 'FINANCED EMISSIONS'

Reserve Bank of India has been encouraging 'Regulated Entities (REs)' including commercial banks, NBFCs coming under its purview to address these issues lately and to disclose the financial implications of risks faced by REs. Among RBI's publications, there are two that must be taken note of. These documents draw heavily from the

## The real 'scope' of emissions protocol

## GREEN RISKS.

Disclosures relating to Scope 3 of the GHG Protocol are the most difficult to implement



report issued by the Task Force for Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD). They are:

(1) Discussion Paper on Climate Risk and Sustainable Finance, dated July 27, 2022; and

(2) Draft Disclosure Framework on Climate-related Financial Risks, 2024 dated February 28, 2024.

The fundamental premise is that climate changes will cause severe disruption to businesses and damage to the assets of borrower-enterprises and will affect their ability to fulfil their commitments to the lenders, leading the lenders themselves to absorb those losses ultimately.

## PHYSICAL RISKS

As articulated by RBI, climate change can impact the financial sector through two broad channels — physical risks and transition risks. Physical risks such as floods, heatwaves, landslides wildfires etc., can impact expected cash flows of REs from exposure to these physical risks, and also can cause damage to the assets held as security against loans thus impairing the ability of the borrowers to service the loans.

There is also the possibility of damage

**Banks, NBFCs need to put in place climate-related risk management policies.** RBI has released two important discussion papers

to own assets of the REs.

## TRANSITION RISKS

The transition risks are those that are caused by a break in supply chains as a result of prohibition of certain materials in manufacture. There have been some instances in the past when materials such as asbestos and certain refrigerant gases were banned requiring shift to other materials.

Newer technologies conforming to emissions norms may require time to invent affecting businesses and may require fresh investments which may be beyond the ability of the entities already indebted to the banks and NBFCs. Even customers may request REs to direct their deposits and investments into more climate-friendly policies.

As the RBI notes, on account of the increased threat of climate change and the associated effects on entities, it is imperative for the REs to implement climate-related financial risk management policies.

Accordingly, RBI has now proposed disclosures required at a minimum detailed in Annex 1 to the Draft Disclosure. Initially, the guidelines are proposed to be applicable to Scheduled Commercial Banks and Top and Upper layer NBFCs from the financial year 2025-26 onwards in matters of Governance, Strategy and Risk Management and from 2026-27 for Metrics and Targets.

Admittedly, Scope 3 disclosures are the most difficult to comply with since the information is not with the entities concerned and it is not always easy to

calculate the emissions. For its part, following the Monetary Policy Committee's meeting on October 9, 2024, RBI is now proposing to form a Climate Risk Information System which will serve as a databank/source relating to local climate scenarios, climate forecasts and emissions to help REs.

PCAF is an industry-led initiative started in the Netherlands in 2015 by some leading Dutch financial institutions (FIs). Of late, PCAF has been gaining significant attention for being considered an acceptable guidance for calculation of emissions in the financial sector.

As it states in its acknowledgements, PCAF enables the FIs worldwide to consistently measure the GHG emissions caused by their financial activities. Per 'PCAF (2022), The Global GHG Accounting and Reporting Standard Part A: Financed Emissions. Second Edition', detailed methodological guidance has been provided for the following asset classes:

(1) Listed equity and corporate bonds, (2) Business loans and unlisted equity, (3) Project finance, (4) Commercial real estate, (5) Mortgages, (6) Motor vehicle loans, and (7) Sovereign debt.

Of the seven categories, except for the sovereign debt, the methodology adopted has been reviewed and approved by GHG Protocol. It is learnt that commercial banks in India have already started engaging with large borrowers on the above lines.

The writer is a Chartered Accountant

## Agenda for the new government in J&amp;K

The Valley is on the threshold of a transformation in its polity and economy

Vivek Bharadwaj

The first elected government since 2018 has assumed office in Jammu and Kashmir under the leadership of Omar Abdullah. While governance has vastly improved in the last few years with schools functioning smoothly, roads reaching remote corners of the region and thousands of languishing projects being completed, the Union Territory continues to face several challenges. With large scale unemployment and a clamour for government jobs on the one hand, the fiscal situation continues to be fragile and requires urgent attention.

An epochal event is to take place in the developmental trajectory of J&K this year. The railway link between the valley and the rest of the country will become operational in the next few months.

The impact of this event has not been fully appreciated by our policymakers. J&K is the country's largest apple producer with the total value of output being ₹10,000 crore. This is almost twice as much as the region's tourism sector.

The valley also produces other horticulture products like cherries, peaches, pears and oranges.

The price of fresh fruit is critically

dependent on efficient linkages to the markets. The apple growers of Kashmir have seen the price of their produce getting affected due to transport bottleneck on the Jammu-Srinagar highway. The administration makes special arrangements to ensure smooth movements of trucks to the Azadpur Mandi in Delhi but landslides and other hazards sometimes lead to trucks being stuck for days together.

While the region has been seeing record influx of tourists in the last few years, this is expected to rise exponentially with cheap travel options being available. It needs to be kept in mind that railway connectivity sometimes has unintended consequences. The extension of the railway line to Kathra resulted in decline in business for Jammu and the mushrooming of budget hotels at Kathra.

There is, therefore, a need to fully comprehend the impact of linking the Kashmir Valley to the rest of India and also take effective steps to utilise the benefits which will accrue from it.

On March 7, the Prime Minister in a public meeting in Srinagar spoke about the Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) Bank. The J&K Bank had been on the edge of bankruptcy a few years back. Loans had been extended to prominent business



HORTICULTURE. Connecting markets...

families in the valley without due diligence. NPAs were in double digit. There were also allegations of terror funding and the bank was about to collapse. The total business of the Bank had got limited to about ₹1.25 lakh crore with deposits of about ₹80,000 crore. The share price was at an all-time low of ₹12.

## J&amp;K BANK TURNAROUND

The last few years have seen a dramatic turnaround. The recent Business Today Bank Survey ranked J&K Bank sixth among the mid-sized banks. Profits have reached ₹1,700 crore. NPAs have more than halved to about 5 per cent and the

share price has climbed to about ₹140. The Bank is unique as it is the only one owned by a State/Union Territory (UT) government.

With a new elected government taking office, the contours of the relationship between Delhi and Srinagar would need to be reset. While Constitutional and legislative structures provide a framework, the working of political processes is moulded by the men and women who steer them.

Broadly speaking UTs are of two kinds, one with Legislature like Puducherry and the other without, like Chandigarh and Lakshadweep. There is also the unique case of National Capital Territory of Delhi. Keeping in mind the needs of a sensitive territory like J&K, the Union government may need to balance regional aspirations with national interests. This may include a stronger and more wide reaching role of the Lt. Governor.

The abrogation of the Article 370 has undoubtedly led to a welcome period of peace. It is now time for the new government to lay a firm foundation to prevent a return to the dark days of terrorism in Kashmir.

The writer is Secretary, Panchayati Raj, Views are personal

## BELOW THE LINE



Telecom Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia

## Spectrum showdown

In what's shaping up to be a cosmic clash, Elon Musk has publicly thanked Telecom Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia for opposing the calls from Indian moguls Mukesh Ambani and Sunil Bharti Mittal to auction satellite spectrum.

The dispute over the allocation of

airwaves for satellite services like Musk's Starlink, is heating up as Ambani's Reliance Jio and Mittal's Bharti Airtel bat for auctions, while Musk pushes for administrative allocation — common in global markets.

Musk's appreciation came soon after Scindia clarified that India's approach aligns with global norms by avoiding auctions. With billions at stake in India's booming digital economy, the friction between Starlink and local telecom giants is bound to raise eyebrows. Will this tussle end in the courts?

## Glittering golgappa?

With the gold prices touching the sky high, jewellers are displaying various means to attract buyers.

One of the jewellers recently put up a free pani-puri stall inside his showroom to woo buyers. Now that discounts are a given in all products we buy, whether the golgappa candelabra that sales magic remains to be seen.

## Freebies or bribes?

In a development that could have far-reaching implications for India's electoral landscape, the Supreme Court has issued a notice to the Centre and the Election Commission of India on a plea seeking to classify election freebies as bribes. The petition, which questions the legality of doling out freebies in the name of welfare, could open a new chapter in the debate on vote-bank politics and fiscal responsibility.

For years, political parties have wooed voters with everything from free laptops to subsidised electricity. But with the apex court stepping in, the line between public welfare and electoral bribery might soon blur. For the business world, the implications are also worth watching. State budgets already burdened by freebies could be redirected toward more sustainable, growth-driven initiatives. On the flip side, any sudden clampdown on freebie culture could have a political impact in the short term. As we wait for the legal dust to settle, one thing is clear — India's electoral playbook might be due for a serious rewrite. And for the first time, we might just see politics driven by fiscal prudence.

## Red alert controversy

The Met department was at the receiving end on giving Red Alert (heavy rainfall) to Chennai when the sun was out. A top department official put up a brave front on the media on Wednesday afternoon trying to convince them that since the 'system' (cyclone) was still in the sea, the Red Alert had to be there. However, the alert was withdrawn by night when it became clear that the cyclone will not have any impact on Chennai. In 2023, when the city was marooned by unprecedented rain, the Met department was under fire for not issuing the Red Alert on time. Finally, Nature befuddles one and all, alert or no alert. **Our Bureaus**



# THE ASIAN AGE

21 OCTOBER 2024

## Welcome directive to force ED officers to follow rules

The circular of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) to its officials and investigating officers (IOs) to record statements of individuals summoned under Section 50 of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002, during office hours and not keep them waiting for hours at their offices seems to right a wrong the agency has been indulging in for quite some time.

The ED was forced to incorporate such a guideline on the orders of the Bombay high court which took objection to the agency making a 64-year-old wait past midnight for taking his statement. The court invoked Article 21 of the Constitution, which guarantees right to life, and said recording of statement at unearthly hours "definitely results in deprivation of a person's sleep, basic human right of an individual". The court cannot countenance such a practice, it told the Central agency.

As per the new circular, the authorised officer or investigating officer "shall be well prepared with copies of documents to be confronted as well as a questionnaire to examine the person summoned at the appointed date and time". The officer shall examine the summoned person on the appointed time and date without keeping him waiting for hours and shall endeavour to conclude the examination expeditiously.

The ED officer must now examine the summoned person on the appointed time and date without keeping him waiting for hours and shall endeavour to conclude the examination expeditiously.

law, which went contrary to the legislative intent of the PMLA to be part of a global endeavour by the turn of the century to tackle the drug trade which has been one of the biggest threat human civilisation faces. Several draconian measures envisaged in the PMLA to principles that govern jurisprudence in democratic countries, got legislative sanction because of the cause the law espoused. That the law shifted the burden of proof to the accused and made bail almost impossible was proof that Parliament wanted it to be a special law to fight a crime that is otherwise tough to tackle.

However, it has become a favourite tool of the ruling dispensation, especially after the NDA came to power in 2014, to chase and hunt down political opponents. The law is invoked even in cases where political leaders are accused of corruption. Such was the misuse of the law that there are instances where the ED would proceed with arrest and remain even before the agency that investigates the predicate offence would not have started its job. Accused persons were arrested in the dead of night and dragged to courts; persons were made to wait in ED officers for hours on end, only to be told to come the following day. People were thrown behind bars for months and years with no shred of proof all due to the special provisions of the law.

The Bombay high court order and the subsequent circular of the ED should work as reminders for the agency and its political handlers that the law is a tool to make offenders pay for their acts, but not punish them with the process.

## WB govt, docs must find solution

The West Bengal Junior Doctors' Front held a long protest march Saturday to press on with their demand for justice for the victim of rape and murder at the R.G. Kar Medical College and Hospital in Kolkata. Their hunger strike was aimed at forcing the government to take steps to ensure the health of some of the participants being threatened by their fasting.

The issue of seeking justice for the victim may be justified, but the issue has lingered. It is time both parties, the West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee and the doctors, came off their high horses and started working sincerely towards finding a solution for the issue of safety of doctors.

A concrete plan for ensuring the safety of young medicals working long hours must be worked out and the Supreme Court itself has ordered this. A prerequisite for working out the details would be a normal atmosphere to prevail in the hospitals and among the medical practitioners who can then sit with the administration while a draft plan is drawn up for doctors' safety.

Harping on a detail like the sacking of the West Bengal health secretary should be a very small thorn in the long road to safety, not only in that state but in hospitals and clinics around the country. Practising medical professionals may come under pressure from sexual predators as well as kin of patients who become violent in the unfortunate event of deaths of patients which may have had nothing to do with the quality of medical care being given.

The chief minister of West Bengal and her administration may have been wrong in trying to cover up the horrific incident that took place on the night of August 10 to rob the life of a young intern. But since the ordering of a CBI inquiry on top court intervention, the fixing of guilt may have been completed.

There may have been too much bad faith in the talks thus far. The time to move on and find ways to prevent the recurrence of acts against medical professionals has come and that can happen only if the doctors as well as the politicians stop this battle of egos and work together on solutions.

Not only the career of young doctors and medicals is imperilled by such delays in acting on serious issues but also the health of people who need medical care in hospitals.

Subhani



## J&K: The importance of being Farooq Abdullah



A.S. Dulat

Farooq Abdullah, often referred to as happy go-lucky, has proven that he is the politician's politician. The writing had been on the wall ever since Doctor Sahab formed the People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD) — a masterstroke — with other political parties of Jammu and Kashmir in 2020 in the aftermath of the abrogation of Article 370. My friend Sajjad Lone, during a visit to Delhi soon afterwards, and while he was still a member of PAGD, told me Doctor Sahab in his new avatar was a man possessed. He determined to restore not just Kashmir's statehood but its dignity. Off and on, when I asked him how he would manage "accommodation", Doctor Sahab's response was: "Togetherness, not accommodation, is the key". Also "we need to unite or perish".

In due course, the Kashmiri leadership, from Mehbooba Mufti to Mohammed Yousuf Tarigami to Muzaffar Shah and others, began to realise the heights to which Doctor Sahab has soared; even those who disliked him acknowledged he was the tallest leader in Kashmir. I recall talking to young Iltija Mufti, one of the brightest stars before the Assembly elections, and she said Doctor Sahab was "nicest leader in Kashmir". Her mother, Mehbooba, told me more than once that Doctor Sahab was their leader.

When I met Dr Farooq Abdullah on his birthday on February 12, 2020, he was still under detention in Srinagar. We avoided talking politics. Except that I suggested he think and look ahead, and his response, as always, was:

The credit for the NC success in the Assembly and even the Lok Sabha elections goes to him. Nobody has the political instinct or the imagination to choreograph an election in Kashmir better than him.

Shaif Ull, I enquired which way the Jamaat would go in an Assembly election. Shaif Sahab felt the Jamaat, which was close to Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, would always vote for the PDP. When I asked, "Why not the National Conference?" Farooq looked at Shaif and said: "Batao?" Shaif had no answer, but I think Doctor Sahab understood what I was trying to say. Interestingly, despite doubters, Doctor Sahab was always emphatic that the Assembly elections must be held, and would be held, in September 2024.

As voting in the Assembly elections began, and the Congress campaign appeared to be weakening in Jammu, the BJP again began leaking for Doctor Sahab tie-up. Unfortunately for the BJP, the mandate was so emphatic that any such tie-up even in future would require time; the BJP needed to realise how and why they disappointed Farooq and wasted four years. Farooq's politics is of both the head and the heart. If he joined the INDIA bloc, it was because the BJP left him with no option and after walking out of the Gandhinagar Delhi for the Bharat Jodo Yatra, his heart took him towards the Congress. This ultimately resulted in the NC-Congress alliance in J&K. The National Conference now has a majority of its own, but it would be a huge mistake for it to ignore the Congress, which is the only bulwark, if required, against the BJP in Jammu. The Congress, of course, needs to pull its socks up and figure out what went wrong

INDIA RANKS 105 TH IN GLOBAL HUNGER INDEX 2024

## LETTERS KHALISTAN BOGEY

Political assassinations, such as those carried out by Mossad, are often the source of much debate on their effectiveness. Many believe such assassinations are necessary actions against such threats, but can these really destroy ideologies? What has recently transpired with the killing of Yahya Sinwar prompts another question: Does the death of a leader really destroy a movement? The appreciation of India for such tactics also raises a question as to whether it believes it is facing the separatist movement of Khalistan from across the border. Will these actions continue to sow more violence instead of bringing understanding and resolution? These are questions that deserve much more thought.

Anshu Bharti Begusarai, Bihar

## LEGAL HUMANISM

THE ISSUE of Bangladeshi immigrants and refugees in Assam has long been a contentious matter. The influx of migrants from Bangladesh, particularly after 1971, has altered the demographic balance in Assam, raising concerns about the preservation of its language and culture. The Supreme Court recently upheld the validity of Section 6A of the Constitution, which provides a legal framework for determining the citizenship of those who migrated before March 24, 1971. While the Indian government aims to address this through the National Register of Citizens, identifying illegal immigrants remains a challenge, as many lack proper documentation. Balancing legal enforcement with humanitarian concerns is critical.

Amareet Kumar Hazaribagh

## CHAOS AT TELLER'S

BANK UNIONS in Maharashtra plan to strike on November 16, citing unsafe working conditions caused by the Laidi Bahin Yojana scheme. Incidents of harassment and assault by scheme beneficiaries and local politicians have created a fearful atmosphere among bank employees. Unions are demanding better security and additional manpower. There is utter chaos in the banks while implementing the scheme.

Jayanthi Subramaniam Mumbai

₹500 for the best letter of the week goes to Gopalaswamy J. (Oct. 19). Email: asianageletters@gmail.com.

## Saeed Naqvi Wide Angle

## Sinwar's death is temporary relief for Israelis, will trigger resistance

The celebrations in Israel at the elimination of Yahya Sinwar, the Hamas leader who masterminded the Oct. 7, 2023 attack, is an expression of relief by some Israelis. Does Sinwar's death mean victory for Israel? A hundred or so hostages are still in Hamas hands. Hamas recruitment drive is in full swing for "the long war". Does Israel have the stamina for that war?

Bombing and destroying missions are easy as replenishments for such warfare are readily available with the US "military industrial complex". The real need is foot soldiers and military gear for a ground invasion. These are in short supply as the US is averse to putting boots on the ground.

The lesson Israel and its American patrons must learn is that while aerial attacks are good for destroying nations, it is useless in fighting nationalism, in Gaza or in Lebanon. Hassan Nasrallah's death in Beirut similarly fuelled resistance in south Lebanon. Was the IDF able to break the Hezbollah resistance on the ground? The Lebanese say Israel is having to ferry more dead and wounded soldiers than they bargained for. It just so happens that the terrain Israeli troops must break through to enter Lebanon is contiguous with the 120km Blue Line which the UN Interim Force (UNIFIL) monitors.

Let me share with you my Blue Line experience when in 2002 I did the Maj. Gen. Laith Mohan Tiwari was the force commander. An additional advantage

to me as an Indian journalist and my camera crew was that a 900-strong Indian battalion with its own chain of command operated under UNIFIL.

The UNIFIL headquarters was in Naqura, in the 100-sq km area the force commanded between the Blue Line, a sort of border between Israel and Lebanon. Gen. Tiwari's residence was in Haifa, Israel's third-largest city. He commuted daily between Naqura and Haifa.

Even though the headquarters was in south Lebanon, the force commander's base in Haifa may have given the Israelis a sense of control. The situation today is different. Until recently, the force commander was Irish, a nation critical of the genocide in Gaza.

The assumption that the entire UNIFIL area is Shia is wrong. While much of it is Shia and possibly Hezbollah, there are several villages supervised by Christian mayors. The Indian battalion was in a village whose mayor gave us a lecture one evening on how his village was known as the place where the world's best attack was brewed. A Shia Muslim village would not host of its attack. It was a Christian village. The 40 countries represented in UNIFIL manned the 50 posts scattered around. The fierce fighting is obviously causing the IDF to look for a "peace" plan. The Indian battalion was in a village. Today, UNIFIL can't be wished away because Israel finds it inconvenient. The sole superpower moment is over.

Gen. Tiwari had a plausible manner with Israelis as well as the Hezbollah side. He even advanced my case to meet Hezbollah supreme Hassan Nasrallah. The interview didn't take place but Gen. Tiwari did introduce me to a Hezbollah official who said "let me try". What happened was a clock-and-dagger sequence which began at a nondescript apartment block at Dahieh, much in the news recently. A smart young man with a trimmed beard led me into yet another large car. He apologised that our camera team was not being allowed to accompany me. I was led into a basement divided by a large curtain and invited to sit in one of two sofas arranged quite dramatically after the Shah of Iran, an ally of the West, fell in 1979. The consolidation of the ayatollahs in Tehran was only one of the reasons for Israeli defence minister Ariel Sharon to march into Lebanon in 1982 which, in turn, spurred Hezbollah's growth. This was the backdrop against which Syria and Iran were able to work together during the dramatic 17 days in 1985 when militants (no one knew who) forced a TWA flight from Athens to Rome to land in Beirut. To negotiate the release of 36 Western hostages, Speaker of Iran's Majlis Hashemi Rafsanjani and Syria's vice-president Abdul Halim

Khaddam pooled in their skills with the most influential Shia leader in Lebanon, Naji Berr, Speaker of the Lebanese Parliament. He played a key role in arranging for the release of the hostages.

Berri's parliamentary politics was overtaken by Nasrallah's military response to Israel's aggression internally from within Lebanon and frequent attacks on Palestinian positions in Lebanon, Syria, Gaza and the West Bank — all gave impetus to the resistance groups. By 2020, before his assassination by the US outside Baghdad airport, Iranian commander Qasim Soleimani had already created firm linkages between various resistance groups. Those linkages are still evident in the Gaza war.

Quite remarkably, the Israeli occupation of Lebanon and the US occupation of Iraq caused the world to wake up to a new reality — Shias were an overwhelming majority in Iraq and the largest block in Lebanon. Houthi-style Yemenis are a variant of the mainstream Shias are the Alawis, the most powerful group in Syria.

A great irony lies at the heart of these Shia groups pooling in their resources to Israel, genocide in Gaza: Hamas in Gaza is true-blue Sunni Akhwan-ul-Muslimeen, or the Muslim Brotherhood, a detail on which the Western media buries its head in the sand.

The writer is a senior journalist and commentator based in New Delhi





## FIRST COLUMN

## THE ART OF SAYING NO

Setting boundaries allows employees to focus on high-value tasks and protects their well-being



SAKSHI SETHI

In the modern workplace, professionals are often expected to handle a variety of tasks and responsibilities, making it easy to become overwhelmed. While many employees adopt a yes-boss mentality to stay in good favour or advance their careers, the ability to say no can be just as important. Learning to decline certain requests, combined with the effective use of delegation, is the key to managing time, preserving mental well-being and ensuring tasks that are completed efficiently and effectively. Looking at today's fast-paced and highly competitive work environment, learning to say no can be one of the most valuable skills for any professional. While the workplace often rewards the individual with a can-do attitude but the ability to refuse certain tasks or requests is equally essential to maintain productivity, well-being and professional integrity. There is often an underlying fear of being seen as uncooperative, damaging relationships with colleagues, or missing out on future opportunities.

The result of this is an overloaded schedule, which can lead to decreased productivity, poor work quality and even burnout. It can negatively impact both the individual and the organisation, as over-stretched employees may struggle to meet deadlines or produce substandard work. The ability to refuse is not just about rejecting requests rather it's about setting boundaries that protect one's time and energy, ensuring that the most important tasks get the attention they deserve. Saying no to unnecessary or low-priority tasks allows professionals to focus on higher-value work, leading to better outcomes, a stronger contribution to the organisation and helps prevent individuals to maintain focus on their core responsibilities.



Despite its clear benefits, saying a no is often easier said than done. Many employees find it difficult to refuse tasks due to cultural or organisational pressures that equate being helpful with taking on as much work as possible. Some even fear that saying no could label them as difficult or unwilling to be a team player, leading to missed promotions or opportunities.

Moreover, individuals often grapple with personal barriers to saying no. Perfectionism, fear of conflict or a desire to please others can make it hard to set boundaries resulting in employees worrying that a simple refusal to additional tasks reflects their inability or lack of dedication towards the job. But in reality, saying no in the workplace brings several important benefits, both for the individual and the organisation.

Effective delegation can offer a constructive alternative when refusing a task outright is not an option for it allows work to be distributed across a team, which can increase overall productivity, help build confidence and foster a sense of ownership and responsibility within the team. It even helps concentrate on strategic tasks and high-priority responsibilities that require their attention and most importantly demonstrates trust in the abilities of individuals, which can improve team morale and encourage a more collaborative working environment.

While learning to say no and delegating effectively are two critical skills for success in the workplace. Saying no helps protect time and energy for the most important tasks, while delegation allows leaders to distribute work more effectively and empower others. By mastering the art of saying no and delegating, professionals can not only manage their workloads but also foster a more efficient and empowered team.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

# Indian immigrants to Canada bear brunt of diplomatic row



K S TOMAR

The fallout threatens to disrupt visa processes, immigration pathways, and opportunities for Indian workers and students in Canada



The fallout of the current diplomatic tensions between India and Canada, particularly in the wake of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's accusations and expulsions of diplomats by both countries, could have significant consequences for Indian citizens working, studying, or planning to immigrate to Canada. Trudeau's Liberal Party has been facing declining support, and his minority government has been kept afloat by the New Democratic Party (NDP), led by Jagmeet Singh, a prominent Sikh politician.

The NDP's support base includes a significant portion of Canada's Sikh population, and Trudeau may be attempting to retain their support by taking a tough stance against India, which is perceived by some Sikhs in Canada as being hostile to their interests. The deteriorating relations between the two countries may affect several key areas:

**Impact on Indian Workers in Canada.** Indian Workforce in Canada: Indians form a significant part of Canada's skilled workforce, especially in sectors like IT, healthcare, engineering and finance. Over the years, Canada has become a top destination for experienced professionals from India due to its immigration-friendly policies. Visa and Work Permit Issues: While the immediate impact on Indian workers in Canada has been limited, any prolonged diplomatic standoff could lead to delays in the processing of work permits, visa renewals and permanent residency (PR) applications. The processing times might increase, and stricter scrutiny could be imposed.

**Uncertainty for Future Migrants:** Potential immigrants or those awaiting work permits may face hurdles in terms of visa approvals. If relations continue to sour, Canada might impose tighter immigration controls on Indian workers, which could hamper the flow of professionals into the country.

**Impact on Indian Students in Canada:** There is large Indian Student Population in Canada as it has become a major destination for Indian students, with nearly 320,000 Indian students enrolled in Canadian universities as of 2023. The country's world-class education system, relatively easier immigration pathways

post-graduation, and diverse work opportunities have made it attractive for Indian students. **Visa Delays:** The current diplomatic tension may lead to delays in student visa approvals or increased scrutiny of applications. While there is no immediate indication that Indian students stay in Canada after completing their studies under post-graduation work permits (PGWP) and eventually apply for permanent residency. The growing tension could complicate this process, making it harder for students to transition smoothly from education to employment. **Impact on Immigration Pathways:** Canada's Express Entry programme, which has been highly favourable for Indian professionals and students seeking permanent residency, might slow down or become more stringent if the diplomatic rift deepens. There could be longer processing times, more rigorous background checks, and even potential policy changes affecting Indian applicants. **Family Reunification:** Indian citizens who have family members in Canada and are in the process of family reunification (sponsorship programmes) could face delays in their applications due to the diplomatic standoff. **Trade and Bilateral Agreements:** Professional Mobility: If diplomatic tensions continue, professional exchanges, joint ventures, and corporate partnerships involving Indian and Canadian companies might slow down. This could reduce job opportunities for Indian professionals working for Canadian companies in sectors like IT, telecommuni-

cations, and consulting. Impact on New Immigration Streams: The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which India and Canada had been discussing, could be put on hold.

This would affect initiatives meant to streamline immigration for Indian professionals and create pathways for smoother trade and employment relations.

**Solutions to Mitigate the Fallout** **Diplomatic Resolution:** The most effective way to mitigate the fallout is through diplomatic dialogue. Both governments must find common ground and work towards de-escalation.

Diplomatic channels should prioritise resolving misunderstandings while protecting the interests of citizens on both sides. **Temporary Shift to Alternative Countries:** While waiting for the situation to stabilise, students and professionals might consider alternative countries such as the UK, Australia, or Germany, which offer similar educational and work opportunities for Indian nationals.

**Vote Bank Politics and the Sikh Community's Role in Canada:** Canada has one of the largest Sikh populations outside of India, with an estimated 770,000 Sikhs, making up about 2 per cent of the total Canadian population.

Many of these Sikhs are concentrated in electoral districts in British Columbia, Ontario, and Alberta. In some constituencies, Sikhs represent a significant voting bloc, which can influence election outcomes.

**Upcoming Elections:** With elections expected by 2025, Trudeau needs to consolidate his support among key communities. Given the current minority government status, he must rely on alliances, such as with the NDP, and maintain his standing in immigrant-rich constituencies, including those dominated by

Sikhs. His recent diplomatic actions appear designed to shore up this support by aligning himself with issues important to these groups. The Sikh community has historically supported the Liberal Party, particularly under Trudeau. Many high-profile Sikh leaders, including ministers in his cabinet, are from this community.

Thus, maintaining their support is crucial for the Liberal Party's prospects in the next election. **Khalistan Issue:** While not all Sikhs in Canada support the Khalistan movement, those who do have formed influential advocacy groups that have pushed the issue into Canadian politics.

Trudeau's overtures to this section of the electorate have been interpreted as efforts to protect his vote base, especially as his government faces increasing political pressure ahead of future elections.

Experts say that Trudeau may also be positioning himself as a defender of Canadian sovereignty by alleging foreign interference, a move that could resonate with voters concerned about national security. This fits with broader concerns in the West about foreign interference in domestic politics, even though India has categorically denied the allegations.

India-Canada ties are indeed at their lowest ebb following Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's accusation that Indian agents were involved in the killing of Khalistani leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar on Canadian soil.

This extreme diplomatic move, which has severely strained relations between the two countries, is seen as a combination of vote bank politics and Trudeau's handling of domestic pressures, especially in light of upcoming elections.

(Writer is a strategic columnist; views are personal)

# India's strides towards the design and component ecosystem in telecom

The telecom sector is evolving from a service-led growth model to a robust manufacturing ecosystem

The telecommunications sector in India has grown to become the world's second-largest, contributing around 6.5 per cent to the nation's GDP and emerging as a key economic growth engine. While we take pride in this impressive growth, there is something even more exciting - the rise of the telecom manufacturing ecosystem. India's growth as a telecom equipment manufacturing destination can be attributed to the 'Make-in-India' and 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' initiatives launched by the Government in recent years. The Production Linked Incentives (PLI), launched in 2020, and its subsequent amendments in 2022 to facilitate design-led manufacturing



S P KOCHHAR

facturing at an additional incentive rate with an allocated sum of Rs 4,000 crores also provided a major boost to telecom manufacturing in India. As per the latest update by the Ministry of Communications, sales of telecom equipment have surpassed the Rs 50,000 crore milestone under the PLI scheme, with exports at about Rs 10,500 crore. During this

period, India exported mobile phones worth Rs 1.28 lakh crores and with 300 million units produced, it has emerged as the second-largest producer of mobile phones in the world.

On the telecom equipment front, India has become almost self-reliant in antennae, Gigabit Passive Optical Network (GPON) and Customer Premises Equipment (CPE). As a result, India's status has turned from importing telecom equipment worth Rs 74,116.21 crore in FY 13-14 to exporting equipment worth over Rs 1.49 lakh crore in FY 23-24.

Though we are still importing certain products, the gap between imports and exports has gone down significantly. Apart from fostering self-

reliance, indigenous manufacturing of telecom equipment also addresses the national security concerns associated with telecom imports.

Manufacturing has emerged as an important aspect of the telecom sector's contribution to the GDP through the creation of substantial employment opportunities across the value chain, from manufacturing to research and development.

So far, telecom manufacturing has created more than 17,800 direct jobs and several indirect jobs. The Indian telecom industry is likely to attract investments in the areas of core competency and cutting-edge technologies; ensure efficiencies and create economies of scale, in turn, enhancing



exports and making India an integral part of the global value chain. Government's Push for 'Atmanirbhar' Under the government's 'Atmanirbhar Abhiyan', the Department of Telecom (DoT) aims to promote the ecosystem for research and development, transforming India into a glob-

al hub of technology development and telecom equipment manufacturing.

The Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia recently announced the Government's ambition to set up telecom communication equipment manufacturing zones as the country expects more inflow of foreign direct investments (FDI). Prime Minister Narendra Modi too emphasised the need for 'Design in India, Design for the World', calling for indigenous design capabilities and urging the citizens to create products that cater to both domestic and international markets. The Government has further established several task forces to ensure the smooth functioning of the telecom ecosystem. These include initiatives for

creating a component ecosystem, developing telecom chips from design to production, training skilled workers and designers, aggregating the demand for manufacturing from different departments and allocating them to eligible manufacturers, and optimising the use of test beds for product testing and certification. Following the Government's decision to allow 100 per cent FDI in telecom, the sector has attracted USD 39 billion in FDI for manufacturing, further boosting the momentum and solidifying India's role as a global telecom manufacturing hub. Thanks to these concerted efforts, India has been able to bring down the trade deficit in telecom from Rs 68,000 crores to Rs 4,000 crores, over the last

five years. Focus on design and creation of IP is crucial to fulfilling India's ambitions as a product nation as design elements add substantial value to products. To build a strong ecosystem for 5G, DoT has sanctioned 17 companies under design-led manufacturing within the PLI scheme. Further, global telecom equipment manufacturers like Cisco and Nokia have set up their manufacturing units in India, fostering world-class manufacturing prowess. These efforts, among others, emerge as a testament to the country's indigenous engineering and entrepreneurial capabilities, as well as manufacturing prowess.

(The writer is Director General, COAI; views are personal)



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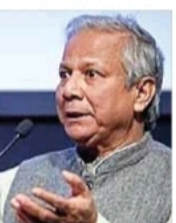
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PAPER WITH PASSION

## A path to democracy

Amid Bangladesh's political turmoil, the possibility of general elections in 2025 presents an opportunity for renewal

After a long wait, the possibility of general elections taking place in Bangladesh in 2025 is now on the horizon. Bangladesh's Law Adviser Asif Nazrul has said the next election could be held in 2025 after completing the pre-election preparations, including the formation of a new Election Commission. Amid the escalating crisis in Bangladesh, there is growing pressure for a new general election to restore democratic order and bring stability. The possibility of holding general elections in 2025 has become a central topic of discussion in political circles. Many see the election as a necessary step to establish a legitimate government that can address the country's economic woes, restore law and order, and guide Bangladesh towards a more stable future. However, there are significant hurdles to overcome before an election can be held. The interim government, currently tasked with maintaining order, must establish a conducive environment for free and fair elections. This involves addressing concerns about electoral fraud, ensuring the safety of voters and candidates, and reforming the Election Commission, which has been criticised for its partisanship in recent years.



International pressure, especially from the United States, and the European Union, is likely to play a role in pushing for transparent and credible elections. The international community's involvement may be instrumental in mediating dialogue among political factions and overseeing electoral reforms.

While the potential for a general election in 2025 offers a glimmer of hope, it is by no means a guaranteed solution. The path to stability will require a series of complex and delicate steps, including effective power-sharing arrangements, accountability for past political abuses, and economic policies aimed at alleviating the financial burden on citizens. The emergence of populist rhetoric and extremist groups could also pose threats to a peaceful electoral environment. Moreover, with Sheikh Hasina in exile and her Awami League party in disarray, a sizable section of Bangladesh's political milieu is likely to be away from the election process. Under Sheikh Hasina's leadership, the country experienced substantial economic growth. However, her tenure was also marked by accusations of authoritarianism, suppression of dissent, and manipulation of democratic institutions. The deterioration of democratic norms and crackdowns on opposition parties, including the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), exacerbated political polarisation and unrest. As Bangladesh teeters on the edge of a political precipice, the possibility of holding general elections in 2025 brings a mixture of hope and apprehension. The nation's future will largely depend on how the interim government manages the political transition and whether it can pave the way for a truly democratic process. The coming months will be crucial in determining whether Bangladesh can emerge from this turmoil with renewed democratic vigour or if it will remain mired in chaos and instability.



Visitors at the Virasat Mahotsav 2024, an art and heritage festival, in Dehradun

## India-Canada relations sink over Khalistan issue

As both countries grapple with domestic politics and external pressures, the ties are now at its most fragile point, threatening trade, security and people-to-people connections

Two of the world's leading democracies, India and Canada, are currently engaged in a rather unseemly, explosive diplomatic row over Ottawa's refusal to rein in Khalistani elements thriving on Canadian soil. New Delhi believes these elements, all Canadian nationals, have been allowed unfettered freedom, imperilling India's security interests. With Ottawa paying no heed to New Delhi's concerns, a traditionally close relationship nurtured over a long period now lies torn into shreds.

The spat with Canada could also impinge on India's geopolitical equation with members of the powerful intelligence-sharing 'Five Eyes' alliance. The Justin Trudeau-led government has approached the alliance and got the backing of the other four members—the US, UK, Australia and New Zealand—on its allegations linking the Indian government's 'agents' to 'criminal activities' in Canada, including the killing of Khalistani separatist Kuldeep Singh Nijjar in June last year. All these alliance partners have their eyes firmly set on the crucial Indo-Pacific. So does India. Surely, none would want the imbrolio to adversely impact their geostrategic alignment to counter China's aggressive expansionism in the region. If Ottawa's charges on the Indian government's involvement do turn out to be correct, New Delhi would have an egg on its face.

While covert operations to carry out hit jobs in foreign lands to take out elements inimical to a country's interests are nothing new, being caught with proof of overt involvement can prove to be a major embarrassment. It's noteworthy that the US, unlike Canada, has been far more discreet in its approach while seeking India's cooperation in investigating a plot to kill Khalistani separatist leader and its national Gurbatwar Singh Pannun, who leads Sikhs for Justice. The US strategy is driven in no small measure by its desire to not cause any major rift in bilateral strategic ties with India, even though it continues to put pressure on New Delhi on the issue. Trudeau, on the



other hand, is driven by his desire to woo for his domestic political gains a section of the Sikh diaspora who support Khalistan.

Discretion in such a sensitive matter, therefore, has been thrown to the winds. The Trudeau government's sovereignty concerns over the Nijjar killing, however, do not extend to alleged Chinese interference in Canadian federal elections both in 2019 and 2021. The eruption of the New Delhi-Ottawa diplomatic war was not unexpected, given the simmering tensions between the two for several years now over what the former believes is the Trudeau government's abject failure to rein in Khalistani separatists in Canada who pose a security risk to India. For New Delhi, what broke the camel's back this time around was Canada's contention that six Indian diplomats, including the high commissioner, were 'persons of interest' in the ongoing probe into Nijjar's killing and its demand that they be expelled from Canada. Nijjar had been designated a terrorist by India for his separatist activities. New Delhi has repeatedly raised the issue of Khalistani elements having a free run in Canada in recent years only to have 'freedom of expression' being thrown back at it by the Trudeau government. These elements have had floats depicting former PM Indira

IT'S NOTEWORTHY THAT THE US, UNLIKE CANADA, HAS BEEN FAR MORE DISCREET IN ITS APPROACH WHILE SEEKING INDIA'S COOPERATION IN INVESTIGATING A PLOT TO KILL KHALISTANI SEPARATIST LEADER AND ITS NATIONAL GURBATWAR SINGH PANNUN, WHO LEADS SIKHS FOR JUSTICE

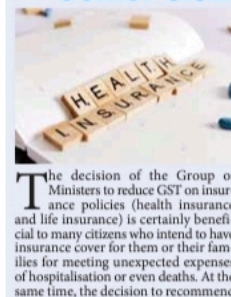
Gandhi's assassination in processions to mark the 40th anniversary of 'Operation Bluestar', and recently even published posters issuing death threats to senior Indian diplomats, stoking New Delhi's concerns. A pro-Khalistani Canadian politician, Jagmeet Singh, who leads the New Democratic Party, has played a crucial role in enabling Trudeau's minority government to remain in power by signing a deal supporting it in no-confidence votes. Singh called off this deal last month but elections in Canada are slated to be held next year anyway if Trudeau's government can survive until then. New Delhi, in any case, will be happy to see the back of Trudeau. Now, with his government even threatening 'sanctions' against India, it's fairly evident that Ottawa is willing to jeopardise even vital trade and economic ties with India. It halted negotiations for a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) in September last year as bilateral relations soured. Canada's own Indo-Pacific strategy had earlier recognised India as a 'critical partner', seeking deeper trade and economic ties.

Bilateral trade was pegged at \$9.36 billion in 2023. The turbulence in ties can have a deleterious impact on trade and economic links. What could also take a hit are people-to-people ties, especially with Canada being a favoured destination for Indian students for higher education. An estimated 4.27 lakh Indian students are studying in Canada, helping its educational institutes earn much-needed revenue. Canada is also home to a huge Indian diaspora of 1.8 million—Trudeau will only alienate himself from them while allowing Khalistani radicals to flourish. Trudeau would do well to remember that it was Khalistani separatist elements who carried out the bombing of AI Khashika Flight 182 in June 1985, killing 329 persons of whom a majority were Canadian citizens of Indian origin. Allowing radical elements to thrive for the sake of political expediency has never done any nation good. As two mature democracies who have often cited this fact as one that underpins their bilateral ties, both India and Canada need to pull back from the diplomatic war they are engaged in. A sour relationship can only cause further damage in the long run.

(The writer is a senior New Delhi-based journalist who writes on foreign affairs; views are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Senior citizens get relief



HEALTH INSURANCE

The decision of the Group of Ministers to reduce GST on insurance policies (health insurance and life insurance) is certainly beneficial to many citizens who intend to have insurance cover for them or their families for meeting unexpected expenses of hospitalisation or even deaths. At the same time, the decision to recommend

a total waiver of GST on health insurance policies for senior citizens is definitely laudable. However, these recommendations will be put up in the GST Council meeting for a decision after October 30, which is too long a period. In fact, many of the health insurance policies involving senior citizens under group cover expire by 30th October itself, and they have to be renewed well in advance to continue the coverage. Therefore, the senior citizens, especially, are more concerned immediately and the waiver of GST as decided and recommended in the GOM meeting, recently held, if implemented earlier, will certainly benefit the senior citizens who have to renew their policies by making premium payments.

K Durga Prasad Rao | Hyderabad

become more evident.

Bidyt Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

GATISHAKTI BOOSTS CONNECTIVITY

Madam—PM Modi celebrates GatiShakti's success in streamlining India's infrastructure development for multimodal connectivity. PM Modi has praised the achievements of the PM GatiShakti National Master Plan for Multimodal Connectivity, which has significantly enhanced infrastructure efficiency over the past three years. Launched in October 2021, the initiative integrates various infrastructure schemes from different ministries and state governments, improving seamless movement of goods and addressing supply chain bottlenecks. The plan has identified numerous infrastructure gaps and aims to develop sustainable solutions, ultimately fostering entrepreneurship and innovation across India.

Jayanthi Subramaniam | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## The changing dynamics of Bihar politics

As Bihar prepares for the 2025 Assembly elections, Prashant Kishor launches his new party. The big question is, can it make a difference?

Prashant Kishor has entered Bihar politics with a clear message: his role is that of a guide, not a contender for power. "My work is like that of a potter who shapes the best with the right tools. We aim to bring forward the best people in society," he stated, dismissing speculations about his ambitions for the Chief Minister's post. He reiterated that his newly launched party, 'Janasura', will be run by its members, not him, and he would only contest elections if the party deemed it necessary. Kishor's move has stirred the political waters in Bihar. His party's announcement to contest the upcoming Assembly elections has sparked debates on its potential impact on major alliances, the NDA, and the India Alliance. A former election strategist for both PM Narendra Modi and Bihar CM Nitish Kumar, Kishor has not aligned with the Congress or the RJD. Some political analysts even suggest that his presence might benefit the BJP by weakening the RJD's support base, an idea that



gained traction following the rally and Muslim unity meeting in Patna. Despite his history with the BJP, Kishor has not held back from criticising Nitish Kumar's governance. The Janata Dal (United) (JDU), however, remains firm on its stance, with leaders affirming that Nitish Kumar is still Bihar's true leader. In a recent meeting, JDU's acting national president Sanjay Jha dismissed any doubts about Kumar's relevance, pointing to the party's

resilience despite various narratives circulating before the elections. Ahead of the 2025 Assembly elections, Kishor has strategically targeted the Muslim and backward caste communities, which represent a significant portion of the electorate—17.7 per cent and 36.1 per cent, respectively. He has announced plans to field more candidates from these communities and has emphasised inclusivity by appointing a Dalit as the party's working president.



RAJESH KUMAR SINGH

This move has been seen as a counter to JDU's long-standing Mahadalit outreach.

Kishor has been preparing the ground for his political venture for the past two years, conducting a 'padayatra' across Bihar and engaging with the public through discussions in villages and towns. Drawing on the philosophies of Gandhi and Tagore, he has sought to resonate with the masses, though his stance on lifting the liquor ban has invited criticism for contradicting Gandhian ideals. The launch of 'Janasura' represents Kishor's effort to offer a new political alternative in Bihar. However, significant questions remain: can he address Bihar's pressing issues such as unemployment and crime? Will his strategies translate into a viable solution for the state's enduring challenges? As Bihar gears up for the next election, the answers to these questions will determine Kishor's political fate.

(The writer is a senior journalist; views are personal)

### SECTION 6A STAYS VALID

Madam—The Supreme Court's judgment on the validity of Section 6A of the Citizenship Act on Thursday not only put an end to concerns about an old issue resurfacing, but it also shed light on numerous factors that can help shape the current debate. In this regard, the ruling confirms the methodology established in the Assam Accord to address the issue of illegal immigrants in Assam.

The Supreme Court's five-member constitutional bench ruled Section 6A of the Citizenship Act statutory, clearing the door for the implementation of the 1985 accord reached by the Rajiv Gandhi government and the All-Assam Students Union (AASU). According to this agreement, by adding Section 6A to the Citizenship Act, those who came from Bangladesh before March 25, 1971, would be eligible for citizenship. Previously, this day was January 1, 1966. After the challenge to the constitutionality of this section of the Citizenship Act is dismissed, those who arrived in Assam from Bangladesh before March 25, 1971, will be permitted to petition for citizenship, but those who arrived after that date will be identified and deported. This ruling provided solace to all individuals who had arrived from other places and were living in Assam, feeling stuck in uncertainty. The verdict made it clear whose citizenship is safe, who can obtain citizenship, and who must be identified as illegal migrants and returned properly. In this sense, there is no room for ambiguity. Politics driven by immediate interests can be more harmful in this situation. The decision may have been made in the context of Assam, but the issue of illegal immigration is significant in many other locations.

Abhijit Roy | Jamshedpur

### NEW JUSTICE STAY UNVEILED

Madam—In a symbolic shift, a new statue of Nyaay ki Devi (Lady of Justice) at the Supreme Court (SC) replaces the traditional blindfold (serves as a reminder of

the ideals of fairness and justice that legal systems aspire to uphold) and sword with open eyes and the Indian Constitution, signifying an evolving justice system in India. Chief Justice of India (CJI) DY Chandrachud aims to reflect impartial justice and modernise the judiciary, moving away from colonial legacies towards constitutional values. The note-worthy element of this design is the replacement of the sword with a copy of the Indian Constitution. Generally, the sword has been associated with violence and disciplinary action, whereas the Constitution is a symbol of rights, equality, and fairness. This change represents the shift towards more emphasis on core values in justice and highlights how a judiciary must act as a protector of constitutional rights rather than functioning as a law enforcer. From now onwards, justice will be served to the 'right' persons. No longer will it be impartial nor will punishments be enforced. Yes, changing the attire to a saree is a welcome step. As time progresses, the positive effects of this change will



## The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

## Kiwis fly high

Cricket team humbles mighty India on home turf

THE New Zealand men's cricket team, often described as perennial under-achievers, punched above its weight to outclass India in Bengaluru, recording its first Test win on Indian soil in 36 long years. Beating India at home is no mean feat — over the past decade or so, Indian cricketers have become nearly invincible in their backyard in all formats of the game. Commendably, the Kiwis have overcome a big barrier by getting the better of the Rohit Sharma-led squad, with batter Rachin Ravindra and pacer Matt Henry being the star performers.

Team India was on the back foot right from the outset as the New Zealand bowlers bundled it out for a shockingly low total of 46 in the first innings. Though India put up a gallant fightback in the second innings, thanks to power-packed knocks by Sarfaraz Khan and Rishabh Pant, it was not enough to stop the Kiwis from romping home. The New Zealanders have been a thorn in India's side in recent years — they knocked their rivals out of the 2019 ODI World Cup and clinched the inaugural ICC World Test Championship two years later. Gone are the days when the Kiwis were regarded as 'softies' in the cricket arena; they are now as tough as nails and give no quarter even to the most formidable teams. The sterling performance of its women's cricket squad in the T20 World Cup in the UAE has given the island nation another reason to feel proud of its gutsy players.

The Bengaluru defeat is a wake-up call for Indian cricketers. They need to hit back strongly and show the Kiwis their mettle. The loss to Australia in the 2023 ODI World Cup final in front of a partisan crowd in Ahmedabad had left the team battered and bruised. However, seven months later, they were crowned the T20 world champions. Similar resilience and determination would be needed to turn the tables on the never-say-die Kiwis.

## Hooch disaster

It reflects a failure of Bihar's liquor ban

THE latest hooch tragedy in Bihar, claiming over 35 lives (unofficial reports put the figure at around 65) in Siwan, Saran and Gopalganj districts, exposes the stark inefficacy of the state's prohibition policy. Imposed in 2016, the liquor ban aimed to curb alcohol-related harm, but it has, instead, fuelled the rise of a thriving black market for illicit liquor, costing countless lives and leading to significant revenue loss. This tragedy is not an isolated incident. Bihar has repeatedly faced such fatal outcomes, with over 350 deaths linked to spurious liquor since prohibition began. The recurring nature of these incidents highlights the flawed implementation of the policy, where black-market operations exploit vulnerable communities, often targeting the poorest sections of society.

While law enforcement agencies have responded with arrests and raids, seizing large quantities of illegal alcohol, the ground reality reveals a persistent availability of illicit liquor. The parallel economy that runs on this trade reportedly results in a revenue loss of Rs 20,000 crore to the state. Yet, there appears to be no significant impact on reducing the access or consumption of dangerous brews.

The state administration, despite its efforts, has failed to offer a sustainable solution. The dichotomy between the wealthy, who have access to safe alcohol despite the ban, and the poor, who fall prey to toxic alternatives, further reflects the socio-economic divide that prohibition has exacerbated. The Bihar Government must re-evaluate its approach. Either the liquor ban must be strictly enforced with a strengthened regulatory framework or a regulated market could offer a safer alternative. Until then, the lives lost in these tragedies will continue to be a tragic reminder of failed policy.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

## The Tribune.

LAHORE, TUESDAY, OCTOBER 21, 1924

## Spinning franchise

IN the latest issue of *Young India*, Mahatma Gandhi has written a short article in which he beautifully sums up the case for making spinning the qualification for membership of the Congress. "If a monetary qualification, that is, restriction," he writes, "may be imposed, why not a working qualification?" Is it more honourable to pay than to labour? The last question raises a somewhat irrelevant issue. We are not aware that among the hundreds of critics who have objected to the spinning franchise, even one has based his objection on the ground of spinning being dishonourable or even less honourable than the payment of a subscription of four annas per annum. How, indeed, could anyone consider a thing dishonourable which is done by the foremost man in the country and by hundreds of others held in universal respect and admiration? Mahatmaji is in this matter less than just to himself and is clearly forgetting that one glorious achievement that lies to his credit is that he has materially changed the country's standard of honour and respectability. With tens of thousands of persons, including many who do not wear it themselves, the wearing of *khaddar* has today become a sure insignia of honour and respectability. If anything, the danger lies just the other way about. So far from anyone, anyone that really matters, considering spinning to be dishonourable, there is a tendency among some people to make too much of the wearing of *khaddar*, to look upon it not as a symbol of patriotism and national self-respect but as a substitute for them.

## US voters quest for 'change'

Concerns over AI, unemployment and immigration are driving a bitter electoral contest

MADE IN AMERICA  
ASHOK LAVASA

ABOUT 400 years ago, a band of 104 pilgrims set foot at Plymouth in Boston in an attempt to 'change' their lives and seek a new future. In the process, they evolved into a country — the United States of America — which eventually became the most powerful economy in the world and arguably the most robust democracy. The people of that democracy once again seek 'change' as they prepare to vote in a few days from now.

On display in the democratic marketplace are two products; the one tried and tested, the other on trial and yet to be tested. There are billboards exhorting people to vote in a democracy that doesn't boast of a very high percentage of voting. The polling percentage in 2020 was around 66 per cent; it steadily climbed from 58.6 per cent in 2012 to 60 per cent in 2016. Although a little higher at 61.6 per cent in 2008, it has generally been below 60 per cent for the last four decades. With about 100 countries representing half the world's population going to the polls in 2024, the US would, perhaps, be the last major country democratically electing its head of government in an era where democracy itself faces serious challenges globally.

What is the 'change' that people in the US seek? What are the issues concerning the voter? What does it forebode for democracy?

The sense that one gets is that people are undecided as yet about who is capable of bringing about 'change' as Trump and Harris are locked in a bitter battle. According to opinion polls, immigration and the southern border are the top issues for the voters. Trump seems



MOOT POINT: Who is capable of bringing about 'change' — Donald Trump or Kamala Harris? REUTERS

to be persuading workers to vote as they form a large part of his support base. He is hoping to count on their support amidst the overwhelming feeling that household wealth for college graduates has increased by 95 per cent since 1989, while remaining stagnant for non-college graduates.

The average household wealth index, when plotted from 1989, shows a disturbing trend of an increasing gap between those who have gone to college and those with a high school background or none. The average real wealth by education, as of 2021, for those with a college background was \$18,32,000 in comparison to \$4,32,000 with a high school background and \$1,85,000 with no high school education.

Although the official data doesn't talk of an alarming level of unemployment, it is generally felt that the infusion of artificial intelligence in all spheres of business has created redundancies, causing retrenchment and layoffs. The unemployment rate in September 2024 was 4.10 per cent, marginally lower than the 4.20 per cent of the previous month but higher than the 3.80 per cent of September 2023. The long-term average unemployment rate is around 5.69 per cent as per the Bureau of

The swing factor could be influenced by occasional voters — not only those who are undecided but also those who generally don't vote.

Labour Statistics. This economic issue of the widening income gap and unemployment has increasingly got mixed with the political issue of immigration, which has polarised Americans.

Harris, on the other hand, is banking on the support of the large chunk of the immigrant population and women voters, besides traditional Democrat voters. Data indicates that the percentage of women voting far exceeds that of men, with almost a 10 per cent gap between the two. Reproductive healthcare has been an issue of major concern for women, especially after the US

Supreme Court overturned the constitutional right to abortion by a 6-3 verdict in its decision in June 2022 in the *Dobbs vs Jackson Women's Health Organization* case, setting aside the right recognised by the landmark verdict in *Roe vs Wade* (1973) and *Planned Parenthood vs Casey* (1992). Even as women have outnumbered men in voting, the million-dollar question is whether a country that swears by equal opportunity and liberal thinking is ready for a woman President.

According to poll watchers, the swing factor could be influenced by occasional voters — not only those who are undecided but also those who generally don't vote. Recent polls show that while Harris' supporters are high on enthusiasm as compared to Trump's, the latter outdo the former in their belief that their candidate is more capable to deal with the economic issues facing the country, including inflation. It is a strange irony that the working-class population has found a champion in Trump, an unabashed capitalist. An expert at the Harvard Kennedy School left me with the impression that while voters don't want to vote for Trump, they are not yet convinced about

Harris' ability to bring about the 'change' they are looking for. There is also a feeling that while Harris is not doing enough work in the field, Trump is seen as a 'happy warrior'.

Amid this cliffhanger, the one depressing feature is the dilution of decency in public discourse, that has a striking similarity with the Indian election campaigning. The frequent use of coarse language, making unsubstantiated statements and hurling disparaging abuses have become par for the course. While such instances in India are behind us, it is depressing to see Harris being called 'mentally impaired' and 'mentally disabled'.

Trump was particularly harsh against illegal immigrants, calling them 'monsters', 'stone-cold killers' and 'vile animals' and accusing some migrants of wanting to 'rape, pillage, thief, plunder and kill the people of the United States of America'. JD Vance, Trump's vice-presidential pick, has been criticised for his comments about 'childless cat ladies' running the world. Harris has faced racist and misogynistic attacks, being called a 'DEI hire' (a disparaging term that refers to quotas or targets for hiring racial and ethnic minorities, women and people with disabilities for positions of authority and/or power). Tim Walz, Harris' running mate, has been accused of stolen valour due to his military record being challenged. Trump has been rather liberal with profanities during his campaign speeches, including using terms like 'loser', 'jerks' and 'morons'.

Here, too, people feel the use of abusive language in politics contributes to a toxic political climate and is deleterious to democratic traditions, with or without a model code. There is also a view that the US poll, like elections in other countries this year, is an 'issues' election, which means that democracy itself is undergoing a stress test.

The author is a former Election Commissioner of India

## THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

That government is the strongest of which every man feels himself a part. — Thomas Jefferson

## Nehruvian roads sans barricades

COL MAHESH CHADHA (RETD)

THE oath-taking ceremony of the new Haryana Chief Minister and his Cabinet, held in Panchkula last week, was lavish despite those in power claiming to be frugal. It saw the masses being subjected to great inconvenience. Roads leading to the venue were barricaded, with commuters forced to take long detours at peak office hours. Many travelling by cars were searched, causing them harassment. A huge contingent of cops, armed with guns and dandads, was deployed; they were stationed every few metres.

Seeing all this, I was reminded of the days of 1959-60 when I was studying in a school in Chandigarh. One day, we were told that Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru would be visiting the city the next day and that we should be clad in neat and well-ironed uniforms and well-polished shoes.

After the morning assembly, the principal declared that all students and teachers would be given the Tricolour and the children would march in their respective school 'houses' to Madhya Marg. Disciplined as we were, we reached the designated spot, enthusiastically waiting to have a glimpse of the PM. Soon, at a distance, a pilot jeep appeared, followed by a small cavalcade. Panditji, in his trademark *sherwani* adorned with a red rose and sporting a white cap, was standing in a slow-moving open car. He was greeting all people who were gathered there. Waving the flags, we schoolboys raised slogans at the top of our voices: "Chacha Nehru zindabad, Bharat Mata Ki Jai." Nehru waved back at us in his inimitable style. Soon, it was all over and we went back to our classrooms.

Nehru was a role model for us youngsters. Indeed, he inspired reverence and awe among the masses — our parents and teachers would sing poems to leaders like him who were instrumental in getting us freedom from British rule without taking recourse to violence or revenge for the atrocities leashed upon Indians.

Nehru's book *The Discovery of India* gave us every reason to be proud of our civilisation and heritage. His philosophy of self-reliance became a topic of declamation contests and, ultimately, a part of our daily lives.

His declaration that the Bhakra Dam was the 'temple of modern India' fuelled the agricultural and industrial revolutions in the country.

On another occasion, when we lived in Shimla, we had a close glimpse of Dr Rajendra Prasad, our first President, while he was taking a walk on The Mall. There were hardly any barricade stoppings us from going near him.

Indeed, those were different times and different people, who deserved the respect accorded by the people for the sacrifices made by them in laying the foundation of a strong nation.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Strong leadership to counter US

With reference to 'The blood on America's hands' (*The Great Game*), the US is ok with certain Canadians of Indian origin rooting for Khalistan. The suffering caused by extremists is best defined by an Urdu couplet, "Bad khalistan ko rokhita hai Allah apni par, keh zago zago ke ghonawley banayayee shahak par" (Even God endures ill-tempered beings to let them stay safe at the zenith, allowing ticks and crows to build their nests on upmost boughs). Nevertheless, let Americans, as also the Chinese, nurse evil designs; so long as India has a strong political leadership, it will manage any crisis that comes its way.

KL NOATAY, KANGRA

## Maintain strategic autonomy

Apropos of 'The blood on America's hands', our muscular foreign policy approach of 'ghar mein ghar kas maraenge' may provide political advantage to the ruling party at home but it adversely affects India's relationship with other countries. The issues with Canada are causing anxiety in Punjab. The country does not have good relations with most of its neighbours today, leading to national security implications. Strategic autonomy in foreign policy comes from economic and military strength and not from interference in others' affairs. We have made a mockery of the honourable position of our ambassadors abroad. We must redeem ourselves by co-opting with Canada in its investigation as we are doing with the US. Let our flag fly high in the world.

LT COL GSI BEDI (RETD), MOHALI

## Russia India's traditional ally

Refer to 'The blood on America's hands'; the writer has cogently analysed the current international geopolitical scenario. Under such circumstances, India looks forward to further cement its relations with Russia through PM Modi's ensuing visit. Russia has been India's traditional ally since the Indo-Soviet Treaty and its subsequent diplomatic support during the 1971 war. India faces the challenge of recalibrating its foreign policy and security policies to protect its geopolitical interests, especially amid growing concerns about Khalistani dissidents operating from abroad.

GURPREET SINGH, MOHALI

## Diplomatic fallout deepens

Refer to 'Yadav's removal'; the government's removal of Vikash Yadav under US pressure highlights a troubling episode that reveals the strain in relations between the two countries. Yadav's alleged involvement in a plot to assassinate Gurneet Singh Punnon on US soil not only underscores tensions but risks damaging India's global standing. The ongoing diplomatic row with Canada in the Nijjar case further complicates matters. The close scrutiny by the Five Eyes alliance of India's counter-terrorism practices abridges indicators growing unease about extrajudicial measures. India must tread carefully, ensuring its actions align with international law while protecting national interests.

CHANCHAL S. MANN, UNA

## Parties must introspect

Apropos of 'Saini is back'; to the dismay and distress of the Congress, the BJP managed to pull off a comfortable victory against all odds. It is rightly stated in the editorial that the dynamics of electoral politics are such that the seat tally often hides the subtleties. It is natural that the BJP is in very high spirits and gloating over the decisive win. But both parties need to give a thought to this verdict. The Congress should introspect as to why its expectations ended in a fiasco. The BJP should also take cognisance of the fact that the list of grievances across the state is long and the mandate is for far better governance, not more of the same.

ROSHAN LAL GOEL, LADWA

## A call for change

With reference to 'Saini is back'; the resounding mandate for Nayab Singh Saini and the BJP in Haryana is more a call for change than an endorsement of past governance. While Saini's return as CM marks a personal triumph, it is essential that his administration avoids the overconfidence that cost the Congress dear. Voters did not merely reject anti-incumbency; they signalled a desire for governance that delivers on promises. Saini must bridge the gap between rhetoric and reality particularly on the pressing state issues. His Cabinet's careful balance of caste and regional considerations sets the tone, but it is effective governance — not political manoeuvring — that will define his tenure.

AMANJOT KAUR, BY MAIL



# Hamas leader Sinwar's death won't end Gaza war



SHYAM BHATIA  
LONDON-BASED  
SENIOR JOURNALIST

ISRAELIS celebrating the death of Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar, the man they say was responsible for the worst Jewish massacre since the Holocaust, are also aware that his demise does not mean the end of the conflict with the Palestinians. For years, Israelis used to complain about how Palestinian families ritually handed out baklava sweets on the streets as a way of celebrating the murder of every Jew in any terrorist attack. These celebrations were denounced as an example of how Arabs glorified terrorism and violence against their Jewish neighbours. The irony is that many Israelis today have endorsed the very same practices they once used to abhor. Now, following last October's Hamas-led invasion that resulted in the deaths and injuries of thousands, a growing number of Israelis find it hard to hold back their own jubilation every time a Hamas official is killed. In fact, scenes of Israelis

handing out baklava sweets and greeting each other with smiles and laughter have become part of TV talk shows and different social media platforms. So, it was no surprise on Thursday (October 17), when a lifeguard on one of Tel Aviv's largest beaches used his loudspeaker to break the news that "arch terrorist Yahya Sinwar has been eliminated", bikini-clad swimmers and sunbathers responded to his announcement by breaking into spontaneous clapping, cheers and whistles. For the first time in more than a year, all of Israel is now engulfed in a kind of joyful euphoria that has not been seen before. Some Israelis have even gone as far as comparing Sinwar's death with the capture and subsequent execution of Nazi commander Adolf Eichmann. He was kidnapped from Argentina and brought to Israel, where he was tried and executed in 1962. Others compare Sinwar's passing with the capture and killing of Osama bin Laden, whose unmarked body was dumped by the Americans in the middle of the sea. Hence, suggestions have been made to Tel Aviv and Jerusalem that Sinwar's body, too, should be disposed of either in the ocean or burnt and dispersed in an unknown location. For its part, the Israeli government has removed Sin-



RELIEF: Israel is engulfed in joyful euphoria after the news of Yahya Sinwar's death. REUTERS

war's body from Tal-al-Sultan, a suburb of the Gaza city of Rafah, and is holding it in a secret location, pending a final decision about what to do with his remains. The joy at Sinwar's death, however, is marred by concerns about the fate of the 101 Israeli hostages — many of whom are believed to be dead — still held in various locations by Hamas and other Palestinian factions as well as ordinary, non-combatant families who view any Jewish hostage as an asset. One of the declared objectives of the Israeli government was always to secure the liberation of all

Sadly, Israelis have no obvious long-term strategy when it comes to Gaza.

hostages. More than 100 were released late last year in a deal between Israel and Hamas in return for hundreds of Palestinians in Israeli prisons. Since then, only a handful of hostages — dead or alive — have been rescued in what Israelis describe as 'daring' and 'heroic' commando operations. When he confirmed the death of Sinwar, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made a rare and unprecedented offer to the hostage-takers, telling them, "This war can end tomorrow if Hamas lays down its arms and returns our hostages...and

Israel will guarantee the safety of all those who return our hostages." Netanyahu's offer shows the Israeli public's continuing anguish about the fate of their loved ones who remain in captivity somewhere in the tunnels of Gaza. Without their release, there can never be an end to what has turned out to be the longest running war in Israel's history. Yet, hopes that their Hamas captors would respond positively to Netanyahu's offer have proven to be elusive. Even worse, Sinwar's deputy Khalil al-Hayya has proven to be as defiant as any of his militant colleagues, telling the Israeli public in a televised address, "The hostages will not be released until the Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip comes to an end." This announcement by the best-known current Hamas leader is a reminder to the Israelis that their celebrations and expectations following Sinwar's death are premature. In other words, the war will continue, and this news is bad for both sides. Israel will sink even more deeply into the Gaza quagmire and the Palestinians will continue to face the same death and destruction that has seen their body count rise to more than 40,000. Sadly, Israelis have no obvious long-term strategy when it comes to Gaza. They are not bothered about

humanitarian aid to the Palestinians and their daily suffering. Their only fixation is the hostages, who represent an open wound, and liquidating each and every one of those responsible for last October's attack. To try to understand the psychology of the Israeli society requires an understanding of the established norms and mindsets in a region where national dignity is all-important. The Hamas surprise was, accordingly, much more than just a military and intelligence setback for Israel. It was also an unparalleled humiliation for a proud society that has always prized its military and technological superiority over its Arab and Islamic rivals. Widely publicised pictures of helpless Israelis being picked up in their pyjamas from their bedrooms and kitchens as well as stories about the alleged sexual abuse of Jewish women continue to haunt Netanyahu and his countrymen. For them, their national self-respect has suffered a savage blow with unpredictable long-term consequences. Israelis, who look at themselves in the mirror every morning, have every reason to wonder how their enemies still mock them, perhaps, even rubbing their hands with satisfaction at the once invincible superpower that was briefly brought to its knees in October 2023.

# How Canada's US complex is straining its ties with India



KP NAYYAR  
STRATEGIC ANALYST

COVERED Canada for almost 15 years as a foreign correspondent. Canadians have a complex about their neighbour, the United States. They are unable to get over this complex, that they are an inferior cousin of their next-door superpower, although the superior cousin offers the former protection and security through treaties and alliances. The prosperity of both the US and Canada is inextricably tied to their mutual cooperation and deep economic collaboration. Yet, it constantly troubles the Canadians that the entire world treats the US and Canada differently. They want to be equals, which they are not. It is similar to the inferiority complex that some South Asian neighbours have about a mightier, richer India with global influence. In the current spat over the killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, this is an important psychological input that the India has not taken into account in its dealings with Prime Minis-

ter Justin Trudeau and his fellow Liberal politicians. It has ranked many Canadians since the start of the Nijjar episode, that India has treated the US allegations about an alleged murder plot against Gurbat Singh Pannun quite differently from the killing outside the Surrey gurdwara. It is counter-productive to impress upon Ottawa that the US has supplied evidence to India while Canada has not. This inferiority complex about the US became apparent from the moment I walked into Canada's embassy in the US to get my work visa for Ottawa, while I was a resident in Washington. The consular official told me that my work visa for Canada would be co-terminus with my US media visa. Weird, I thought. The second time I applied for a Canadian visa, another official told me — out of the blue — that Canada is a sovereign country and that the duration of my US visa would have no bearing on Canada. I was granted a five-year work visa, much longer than the validity of my US media visa. Looking back, the two incidents are indicative of how Ottawa has tied itself up in knots over its stand on the Nijjar killing and the spiralling descent in bilateral relations. I have met numerous people across Canada —



DOWNWARD SPIRAL: Ottawa has tied itself up in knots over its stand on the Nijjar killing. REUTERS

from British Columbia on the Pacific coast to Newfoundland on the Atlantic coast — who want to live in the US. It is a safe assumption that for a huge number of Canadians, the other side of the American border is the promised land. However, unlike Mexicans, who flood the US border or sneak across it, Canadians simply don't behave in the same way because they are far richer. The compulsions which persuade Mexicans to risk their lives simply don't exist in Canada. Yet, the desire remains and is all-pervasive, which adds to the Canadian complex about the US. Even Canadians who ought to know better do not think better. A Canadian

It constantly troubles the Canadians that the entire world treats the US and Canada differently. They want to be equals, which they are not.

diplomat in Washington once told me that the US had permitted only a dozen Canadian consulates to open in the US, compared to 50 Mexican consulates. To suggest that the Americans treat Mexico better than Canada is the height of this complex. It does not help that for Indian students, the US remains the first choice for higher studies, barring very few universities of excellence, like McGill in Montreal. Thousands of H-1B visa-holders have become permanent residents of Canada only to abandon it and move to the US once they get their green cards. Canada's immigration planners feel cheated when these quali-

fied Indians migrate, because Canada does have a population shortage. Canada obviously doesn't like it when potential immigrants use it only as a stop-gap until they can permanently move across to the border. Walking along the beautiful waterfront of Windsor, Ontario, I have watched Canadian citizens — including my European relatives who have lived in Windsor for half a century — look wistfully at the seedy areas across the Detroit river with regret writ large on their faces. Former US President Donald Trump recently disparaged Detroit as a "Third World" city, but that is where my Euro-Canadian relatives would rather be, instead of the much better-off Windsor. Indians are now making a mistake in believing they are being singled out for whining over Nijjar's killing. When Canada lost its election bid to India in the US Security Council in 2020, it could not believe that it had been spurned by the international community, for the second time in a row. India won that election for the Asian seat. Trudeau does not realise that being sanctimonious does not pay. His ongoing quarrel with New Delhi is the most recent example. In 2011, Canada picked a

fight with the UAE, when the Emiratis closed a Canadian military base, imposed visa restrictions on Canadian passport-holders and even refused to allow a plane carrying the Canadian Defence Minister to land in the UAE. Seven years later, Canada made peace with the UAE by granting more flying rights to Emirati flag carriers. Canada's lobby in India is made up of people whose ambition is to emigrate to that country at the first opportunity. The Indian lobby in Canada has been ineffective. Otherwise, better sense may have prevailed and stopped the ongoing downward spiral in relations. The India-US nuclear deal would not have come about if it had not been for an influential Indian lobby in the US. Vice-versa, the US lobby in India helped transform the bilateral defence relationship. Similarly, the Israel lobby in India and the American-Jewish lobby have ensured that Israel-India relations have galloped forward in the last three decades. The Nijjar episode has shown that few Indians are willing to stand up for Canada and vice-versa. As their two defeats at the UN demonstrated, shared values alone will not guarantee good relations. Canadians must realise that this is true with India too.

QUICK CROSSWORD

ACROSS

- Not reliably successful (3,3-4)
- Musical work (4)
- Unusual collectable object (5)
- Put out of joint (9)
- Avoiding extremes (8)
- Reside (5)
- Showing friendly spirit (7)
- Explosives (7)
- Rush about wildly (7)
- Harmful (7)
- Burn with hot liquid (5)
- Noise (8)
- Exaggerate (9)
- A prescribed circuit (5)
- The Abominable Snow man (4)
- Shrewd watchfulness (7,3)

Saturday's solution

Across: 1 Prosak, 5 Prior, 8 Take amiss, 9 Teg, 10 Post, 12 Insolent, 14 Affray, 15 Melody, 17 Adherent, 18 Idea, 21 Din, 22 On average, 24 Neely, 25 Descend.

Down: 1 Put-up, 2 Oak, 3 Away, 4 Client, 5 Pass over, 6 In the mood, 7 Rightly, 11 Off chance, 13 Fair copy, 14 Abandon, 16 On hand, 19 Ahead, 20 Zeus, 23 Ape.

SU DO KU

SATURDAY'S SOLUTION

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

V. EASY

CALENDAR

OCTOBER 21, 2024, MONDAY

- Shika Samvat 1946
- Aashwin Shaka 29
- Kartik Purnima 5
- Hijri 1446
- Krishna Paksha Tithi 5, up to 2:30 am
- Varanasi Yoga up to 11:11 am
- Rohini Nakshatra up to 6:51 am
- Migashikha Nakshatra up to 5:51 am
- Moon enters Gemini sign 6:15 pm

FORECAST

CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	33	18
New Delhi	35	18
Amritsar	32	20
Bathinda	36	20
Jalandhar	34	19
Ludhiana	33	19
Bhivani	36	20
Hisar	37	17
Sirsa	37	21
Dharamsala	28	16
Manali	22	09
Shimla	23	13
Srinagar	26	07
Jammu	31	19
Kargil	26	08
Leh	13	01
Dhruvraj	30	17
Musoorie	20	12



# 10 THE EDITORIAL PAGE

WORDLY WISE  
DIPLOMACY IS A GAME OF CHESS IN WHICH  
THE NATIONS ARE CHECKMATED.

—KARL KRAUS

## The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY  
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

# A new accord for Assam



ALOK PRASANNA KUMAR

It is needed — to assuage cultural and linguistic concerns  
in line with the constitutional value of fraternity

## INTELLIGENCE QUESTIONS

On Pannun case, Washington's approach is self-righteous and disappointing. But for India, the real challenge lies at home

THE INDICTMENT of a former Indian official, Vikash Yadav, on charges of conspiracy to murder an American citizen, Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, in the summer of 2023, sets the stage for the trial in US courts. The naming of Yadav and the FBI lookout notice for him followed the visit of the Indian inquiry committee to Washington this month. The committee was formed after the US allegations were communicated to Delhi last year. On its part, India had declared that assassination on foreign soil is not government policy, even as it kept its promise to examine the evidence proffered by the US government and take necessary action. If India had hoped that its cooperative attitude would result in a quiet American handling of this incident, Delhi stands disappointed.

Many in India see the ostentatious American trial with frequent media leaks and outrage in Washington as rank hypocrisy from a country with an expansive record of murder and violence in other countries. Worse still, Washington refuses to recognise the broader context — the permissive attitude towards Khalistani extremism and separatism in Canada and the US over the last many decades. Although the Canadian record is more egregious, the US approach has not been different. Sooner than later, Yadav is likely to be convicted, but Delhi is unlikely to hand him over to Washington. India has more than 60 extradition requests pending with the US, including those for David Headley, involved in organising the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks. It is a pity that Washington's narrow, legalistic and self-righteous approach to the Pannun case is undermining popular goodwill in India for the US relationship that has been generated through sustained political and diplomatic efforts over the last quarter of a century. Optimists would say India-US relations have seen worse and that this too shall pass. But pessimists are right to worry about its impact on bilateral relations.

The challenge for Delhi, though, lies at home. There must be serious reflection on the broader political and reputational costs from the Pannun episode. There is much greater international scrutiny now, even in friendly countries, on the activities of Indian diplomatic missions, especially their engagement with the growing diasporic communities. If the Yadav story is a rogue affair, there is an urgent need for Delhi to nail down its sources and prevent similar acts in the future. Rather than get into a defensive crouch amidst the dribs and drabs of information that will flow out of the Yadav trial in the US, Delhi needs to take the political class and the broader public into confidence on the episode. That is the best Indian defence against the growing US and Canadian pressures on the Nijjar and Pannun cases. Delhi also needs to appoint a high-level expert commission that will assess the Yadav affair, outline concrete government protocols for political, policy and organisational oversight of the Indian intelligence agencies. This is a good moment for a bipartisan parliamentary effort to develop a clear legal mandate for the intelligence agencies and lay down norms and procedures for their accountability. For all their "anti-imperialist" rhetoric, Indian political parties have been quite comfortable in persisting with the inherited colonial framework that guides these agencies. Time for the political class to wake up and democratise the intelligence apparatus.

THE SUPREME COURT did the right thing in holding Section 6A of the Citizenship Act, 1955, constitutionally valid. In doing so, it has also continued an unhappy status quo. This is not a contradiction but a reflection of the complicated history of Section 6A and what the petitioners challenging it were hoping to achieve.

Concern over demographic change in Assam has a long history. Even as the Constitution was being debated and finalised, representations were received from Assam asking that citizenship in Assam be limited to Assamese speakers only and not migrant Bengali speakers. Though these concerns reduced a bit due to a hard border existing between India and (then) East Pakistan, it flared up in a violent uprising in the 1970s and 1980s on the perception of increasing numbers of illegal migrants entering Assam from what had become Bangladesh.

As part of the Assam Accord and in an effort to bring peace to the state, Section 6A was introduced to create an exclusive citizenship regime for Assam. It granted citizenship to everyone who became a resident of Assam between 1950 and 1966. It allowed a pathway to citizenship for those who had come into the country illegally between 1966 and 1971. Only those who came into Assam illegally after March 25, 1971, would be considered illegal immigrants and therefore not eligible to apply for citizenship. Section 6A was not a stand-alone provision — it was supposed to be part of the legal framework which allowed the government to identify and deport illegal migrants from Assam.

Decades after Section 6A was introduced into law, organisations from Assam wanted to have it struck down, arguing that it treated Assam differently from the rest of India by legalising illegal immigrants between 1950 to 1971 and that the cut-off date for getting cit-

In upholding Section 6A, the judges in the majority are keenly aware that Section 6A is woven into the larger Assam Accord and attempting to undo one thread (even assuming the arguments of the petitioners are valid) would be a judicial unravelling of what is essentially a political settlement. The Court acknowledges that Indian federalism is sufficiently flexible to allow for the Union to have different relationships with different states, keeping in mind the unique needs and history of each. The court is also aware that striking down Section 6A in its entirety would render a large number of people in Assam stateless, and though it does not explicitly say so, this is clearly a consideration that has weighed on its mind.

izenship should be the same across the country. Among the challenges to the provisions of Section 6A, two novel arguments were made — one that Section 6A violated the cultural and linguistic rights of the people of Assam (guaranteed under Article 29) by allowing non-Assamese to settle and gain citizenship and two, that Section 6A had become unconstitutional due to non-implementation over a period of time.

By a majority of 4-1, the Supreme Court dismissed the challenges and upheld the constitutional validity of Section 6A. The majority judgments delivered by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud and Justice Surya Kant reject all the arguments raised against Section 6A. The minority opinion of Justice J.B. Pardiwala accepts the second argument and holds Section 6A unconstitutional, but only from the date of the judgment. His opinion, however, does not disturb the citizenship of those who have already applied for or received the benefit under Section 6A.

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Nonetheless, even while upholding Section 6A, the Supreme Court seems to want to get itself involved in the minutiae of iden-

tifying illegal immigrants and border fencing. We have been down this path before. The court involved itself deeply in the National Register of Citizens exercise in Assam, only to create a new set of problems.

The court-monitored NRC exercise which was supposed to identify all those who were illegal immigrants (those who could not trace their ancestry to someone who was not a citizen before March 25, 1971) has identified 19 lakh residents (or 5.77 per cent of Assam's population) as potential non-citizens. Contrary to popular perceptions, these include Hindus, Muslims, Assamese speakers, Bengali speakers, tribal peoples and many others. A large number of those excluded are married women who could not produce documents either because they didn't have them or because such documents were lost in floods and other catastrophes.

Contrary to what the Chief Minister of Assam said, even the Hindus among those left out will not be able to get the benefit of applying for citizenship after the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019. This is because they will not be able to show they came from Bangladesh before the cut-off date prescribed in that amendment since they don't have any documentary proof at all. It is likely that most people left out of the NRC were actually born in India and there is no possibility of them being deported en masse to Bangladesh or any country.

Leaving such a large number of people and their descendants stateless in perpetuity is not feasible or desirable. The judiciary cannot offer a way forward on this and it is once again for political leaders to step up to offer Assam a new accord — one that assuages cultural and linguistic concerns in line with the constitutional value of fraternity.

The writer is a co-founder of the Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy. Views are personal



MANSI KEDIA AND SRUTHI VANGURI

## THE DIGITAL WAY FORWARD

Impact assessment studies can ensure digital public goods are accessible, inclusive

## WATER IN COMMON

Report of Global Commission on the Economics of Water is a message to countries for better management of stressed aquifers

A MAJOR ASSESSMENT of hydrological systems has concluded that the global water crisis could spiral out of control if urgent remedial measures are not undertaken. Set up by the Netherlands in 2022, the Global Commission on the Economics of Water draws on the findings of leading scientists and other experts to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the management of aquifers worldwide. The Commission's report, released last week, warns that more than half of the world's food production could be imperilled if countries do not find better ways to manage water resources. The crisis could shave off 8 per cent of the global GDP by 2050, with poor countries facing a 15 per cent loss. The panel reckons that the "demand for freshwater will outstrip supply by 40 per cent by the end of the decade." In fact, as the report underlines, a large part of the Third World is already water-stressed. Every day, more than 1,000 children die, most of them in economically poor countries, from the lack of access to safe water. The panel urges countries to rethink how water is regarded: As a global common good, not as an endlessly renewable resource.

Several of the report's conclusions have been issues of national conversation for more than a decade now. The links between perverse subsidies and imprudent water use in agriculture, for instance, have been well-established in India, for instance. Yet, governments have rarely summoned the political will to nudge the farm sector to use water prudently. Similarly, industries too are rarely penalised for polluting water. About 80 per cent of the wastewater generated by industries worldwide is not recycled, the panel reveals.

Despite the interconnectedness of water systems, there is no global governance system for water. The UN has held only one water conference in the past 50 years. The Commission suggests a global pact to conserve water. For that to happen, however, countries must tweak its findings to their contexts. For instance, the Commission slots India amongst those countries whose landmass supports water flow outside national boundaries. This understanding should be qualified because inter-state water disputes are a major policymaking challenge within India. In other words, countries like India would need to find better ways to resolve conflicts over aquifers within their borders before thinking of a global pact. The trouble also is that analyses by planning agencies often do not find adequate resonance in policymaking. In India, the NITI Aayog's report of 2018 on the perilous state of groundwater is a case in point. The Global Commission on the Economics of Water report should be a message that such imperatives cannot be postponed for long.

THE ADOPTION of the Global Digital Compact (GDC) at the UN Summit on September 22, 2024, officially marks the beginning of a period of global multi-stakeholder cooperation in digital governance. It is a commitment by the 193-member UN General Assembly to ensure that the design, use, and governance of technology benefits all. It follows the multi-phase Universal Safeguards for Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) initiative, launched in 2023 by the Office of the UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology (OSET) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

India, through its G20 presidency, mainstreamed the idea of DPIs as an instrument to accelerate the pace of economic development, especially in the Global South. With the world's largest digital identity programme, Aadhaar, and the highest volume of real-time digital payments (last recorded at 14.96 billion for the month of August), India has been at the forefront of global dialogues on DPIs. However, the DPI euphoria is now expanding longitudinally — the World Bank's ID4D (Identity for Development) is supporting nearly 60 countries, G2Ps (Digitising government-to-person payments) is in 35 countries, and India's not-for-profit initiative Modular Open Source Identity Platform (MOSIP) is working with 11 countries. Given its potential for scalability, the UN's safeguard framework brings early words of caution, highlighting the need to carefully manage and regulate the deployment of DPIs.

As DPI and DPI-type initiatives spread foundationally and sectorally in India, impact assessments can directly support policy makers, not only to track success, but also to guide design improvements, and ensure that DPIs remain accessible, inclusive, and effective. Without such an assessment, governments risk investing in infrastructure ecosystems

that may not fully serve their intended purpose, or worse, exacerbate existing inequalities. Initial evidence suggests that DPIs have catalysed financial inclusion in India. Bank accounts for adults increased from 25 per cent in 2008 to more than 80 per cent in the past six years, with women owning 56 per cent of these accounts. The value of digital transactions reached nearly 50 per cent of India's nominal GDP in 2022-23, and enabled access to credit through pre-sanctioned loans on UPI. However, beneath these macro-level achievements lie deeper questions about how DPIs affect citizens' livelihoods, income, physical well-being, and social agency.

Initial evidence suggests that DPIs have catalysed financial inclusion in India. Bank accounts for adults increased from 25 per cent in 2008 to more than 80 per cent in the past six years, with women owning 56 per cent of these accounts. The value of digital transactions reached nearly 50 per cent of India's nominal GDP in 2022-23, and enabled access to credit through pre-sanctioned loans on UPI. However, beneath these macro-level achievements lie deeper questions about how DPIs affect citizens' livelihoods, income, physical well-being, and social agency.

One of the biggest hurdles in conducting impact assessments is the lack of data. Tempting as it can be to rely on familiar metrics, such as the number of people enrolled in Aadhaar, the total number of transactions processed through UPI, or the number of Jan Dhan accounts, this data alone does not provide an adequate reflection of impact. Data on socio-economic background of users, frequency of usage, or behavioural changes prompted by these systems are important — for instance, finding evidence for whether DPI-enabled lending increased or decreased systemic risk. Intersectional data is important to examine how demographic factors like gender, income and education interact to shape outcomes. Can we quantify UPI's effect on the financial independence of rural women? Much of what we read is anecdotal evidence, not systematic or data-driven. While privacy and security concerns related to data collec-

tion are paramount, there is much to gain from anonymised granular insights. Data that can be analysed to reveal who is benefiting, who is left behind, and why. This is not to exclude assessments on markets and governance.

To overcome these challenges and make impact assessments routine for DPIs in India, we propose 3Ds — design, data, and dialogue. The first step is to integrate impact assessment mechanisms in the design of DPIs, much like privacy or security. Systems should be designed with the ability to collect data that enable impact assessments, forming a continuous feedback loop. The second is to make data available through trusted and well-governed mechanisms. Most government agencies err on the side of minimisation, which can compromise quality of assessments over data misuse. Building trust with citizens and the private sector through well-designed data collection systems can make high quality assessments possible. Technical designs will also be important for data discoverability and use. Finally, fostering a dialogue among stakeholders and building a community that involves third-party assessment agencies, policy makers, private sector and civil society can drive ownership. Establishing protocols for engagement will enable participative governance and improve overall accountability.

India's confidence in DPIs is not misplaced. However, by emphasising on impact assessments and institutionalising the process, corrective and timely action, where necessary, can be taken. This will help accomplish the promise of DPIs in not only transforming economies, but millions of lives. The journey has begun well, but it's only half done.

Kedia is Senior Fellow, ICRIER and Vanguri is Research Assistant, ICRIER. Views are personal

## FREEZE FRAME

E P UNNY



## OCTOBER 21, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO

### DEVELOPMENT BOARD

THE PRESIDENT ISSUED an ordinance constituting the statutory board for controlling land use and preventing haphazard development of the National Capital Region (NCR). The ordinance was promulgated by Works and Housing Minister Buta Singh recently after pressure from the Chief Executive Councillor of Delhi, Jag Prakash Chandra. The board will have 21 members with the Works and Housing Minister as chairman.

### NEW PARTY LAUNCHED

A NEW PARTY will be launched under the

presidency of Charan Singh, Lok Dal president, to fight the Congress (I) in the coming Lok Sabha elections. Opposition parties likely to join the new party, besides the Lok Dal, are the DSP led by H N Bahuguna and the Rashtriya Congress led by Ratsubhai Adani. Some Janata Party leaders are also likely to join the party.

### PM'S WARNING

WHILE CALLING UPON Congressmen to sink their differences at all levels and forge unity as they "do in face of danger or in distress", Prime Minister Indira Gandhi made a frontal attack on opposition parties and their efforts

for what she described as "artificial unity", which was "dangerous for the country". Mrs Gandhi was addressing a general body meeting of the Pradesh Congress (I) Committee.

### VAJPEYI'S APPOINTMENT

SENIOR IAS OFFICERS of the Delhi Administration have seriously resented the appointment of S Vajpey as Chief Secretary, albeit temporarily. They are resenting on the ground that Vajpey, placed in the IAS in 1961 and currently holding the rank of Joint Secretary, has superseded at least half a dozen colleagues, four of them of additional Secretary rank and senior in service.



# THE IDEAS PAGE

## Low ground, Ottawa to Delhi

Both Canada and India have to reckon with the glaring contradictions that characterise their respective societies and states, and sitting on the high horse of honour doesn't do them any favours



AMIT JULKA

THE LATEST INDO-CANADIAN diplomatic fracas has once again revealed the blow-cold-blow-colder nature of bilateral ties. Pundits on both sides are recycling familiar rhetoric. In Canada, the coming election has meant that partisan lines are being drawn, and, ironically, the Liberals are trying to play the patriotic card by acting tough and accusing the Conservative Party of being in cahoots with the Narendra Modi government. Meanwhile, in New Delhi, breathless anchors and experts are shouting, "How dare they accuse us of doing this," followed by a slightly softer, "but even if we did it, they had it coming." There is plenty to criticise in this charade, but let us look away from the immediate to the more structural factors at play.

While Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's actions may seem sudden, or simply a cynical electoral ploy, they have to be understood in the context of deeper forces at play within Canadian society. Amid rising inflation and shrinking employment, anti-Indian racism is rising in Canada and the West. Social media, and especially generative AI, has acted as a catalyst. Fake images (or deep fakes), which show Indians excreting on Canadian streets, or Indian men being generally dirty, smelly, and sexually aggressive towards Canadian (white) women, are being shared online. This has also led to the proliferation of the derogatory term "pajeet" being used for Indian men. These stereotypes are being wielded and weaponised by sections of Canadian society to criticise Trudeau's immigration policy. Since it cannot give back in the same racist coin, Trudeau's Liberal Party seems to have used national sovereignty vis-à-vis the Indian government to assert its tough image to counter the Conservatives. However, regardless of the fact that Trudeau's actions may have been positioned against the Indian government and not "Indians" per se, they may open a racial Pandora's box in Canada. Indians might find themselves on the receiving end of direct and indirect forms of prejudice. This may impact both Indian citizens in Canada as well as Canadians of Indian origin — as racists seldom observe nuance in these matters. To make matters worse, the hyper-nationalist online discourse emerging from India doesn't help, as the much-trumpeted superpower status becomes the target of derision and scorn.

While race may seem removed from the world of diplomacy, one needs to keep in mind that like the United States, Canada too was built on a bedrock of Anglo-Saxon domination and the violent erasure of native communities. Despite the considerable progress the country has made towards inclusion, whiteness is as much a structural feature of domestic society in Canada, as it is for alliances such as the Five Eyes which, not coincidentally, comprises countries that share the Anglo-Saxon bond. The other factor at play is the protection afforded by the American imperial umbrella. Thus, Indians may fume about Western double standards



C R Sasikumar

("How come Israel is allowed to do what it wants"), but they must remember that despite the depoliticised language of "interests" and "multialignment" that is loved by the commentator, race, empire, and capital form the invisible walls of international politics. They are in the in-group, we are in the out-group.

This brings me to the flip side of the coin, the political context in India. India's own response has to be seen in a wider context of what I term "Israel envy". For decades, India's self-styled security experts have been afflicted by the fantasy that one day, India could be just like Israel — kill whoever it wants, wherever it wants, whether *ghar mein* *ghusse* or elsewhere. While the actual efficacy of this policy is up for debate, it does yield handsome domestic dividends. This domestication of foreign policy also means that diplomacy becomes a means to uphold national honour and avenge any slights. And, much like in Trudeau's case, it helps the ruling party. However, the shortcoming of an honour-based response is that the long-term ramifications, such as the impact of such a stance on India's sizable immigrant population in Canada, are not considered. Moreover, the current crisis can also have domestic repercussions — so while official discourse may only name Khalistanis as a threat, majoritarian forces may be all too eager to conflate Khalistanis

While Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's actions may seem sudden, or simply a cynical electoral ploy, they have to be understood in the context of deeper forces at play within Canadian society. Amid rising inflation and shrinking employment, anti-Indian racism is rising in Canada and the West. Social media, and especially generative AI, has acted as a catalyst. Fake images (or deep fakes), which show Indians excreting on Canadian streets, or Indian men being generally dirty, smelly, and sexually aggressive towards Canadian (white) women, are being shared online.

with Sikhs to bolster their politics.

On the external front, for reasons mentioned previously, India does not enjoy the same standard of impunity — it can do a Balakot against Pakistan all it wants, but playing Agent Vinod in the imperial core does have consequences. So, while the United States may continue to be friendly towards India, it may subtly allow Canada to do the dirty work on its behalf. As some have observed, the kind of intelligence that the Canadian police investigation requires would be impossible without intelligence inputs from the Five Eyes. Essentially, the message for India is, "You are our friend, but don't get too big for your boots".

Where does all of this leave us? Foreign policy experts usually have useful policy prescriptions. Since I don't have those, I will end with a sobering reality check. Both Canada and India have to reckon with the glaring contradictions that characterise their respective societies and states, and sitting on the high horse of honour doesn't do them any favours. Tit-for-tat politics, whilst useful for narrow ends, can have profound societal repercussions and pundits sitting in Ottawa and New Delhi would be wise to remember this.

The writer is assistant professor of International Relations, Ashoka University. Views are personal.

## A nascent but welcome thaw

Minister Jaishankar's visit could be a first step. How the Modi government responds to Pakistan in its third term will be instructive



C. UDAY BHASKAR

THE VISIT OF Indian External Affairs Minister (EAM) S Jaishankar to Islamabad for the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation meeting of the Heads of Government on October 16 has led to a nascent but welcome thaw in the troubled India-Pakistan bilateral relationship. The fact that this is the first high-level visit by an Indian cabinet minister in nine years is testimony to the total lack of political contact between the two neighbours in recent years.

While the visit was not expected to address any of the long-standing bilateral issues that have been festering — some for decades, going back to October 1947 — the fact that the Jaishankar visit did not lead to any acrimonious India-Pakistan exchanges, as was the case in the SCO meeting in Goa in May 2023, is symbolic of the positive ambience of the EAM's visit. In the current visit there was no discordant reference to Kashmir or the abrogation of Article 370 by the host nation and this was a positive augur.

During his visit, apart from the formal SCO agenda where the EAM delivered India's national statement, Jaishankar met with his Pakistani counterpart, Ishaq Dar, who is also the Deputy Prime Minister and a close aide of former Pakistan PM Nawaz Sharif. The two ministers met on the sidelines of the SCO meeting in a convivial manner, over lunch and dinner — and incidentally, their images were splashed in the audio-visual media and on social media platforms.

What aroused immense interest in both countries is the suggestion that some form of cricketing ties could be resumed. Pakistan is scheduled to host the Champions Trophy in February 2025 and getting India to participate in a venue like Lahore would be a tremendous fillip to Pakistan's image, its cricket coffers and could restore the people-to-people contact among millions of enthusiastic cricket fans in both nations. Cricket introduces an amazing degree of malleability in India-Pakistan ties, however foreign they may be. However, the Indian foreign ministry denied the reports about cricket being discussed and the emphasis was on "pleasanties" exchanged.

At the official level, both sides are proceeding with considerable caution to avoid any hype about a breakthrough and have gone to great lengths to emphasise to the media that the conversations were "casual". Sources have been quoted to reiterate the point that the Jaishankar-Dar conversations were "preliminary" and "need to be thought through" on both sides. The reason for this caution is valid, for there have been many false dawns in the vitiated India-Pakistan bilateral relationship. The experience of PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee's recall. After the May 1998 nuclear weapon tests by India and Pakistan, both nations agreed to a Lahore Accord in early

1999. Vajpayee made a historic bus journey across the border to further peace and amity with a neighbour who had become an adversary.

However, even before the ink could dry on this extraordinary and ambitious agreement, the Pakistan army, led by its then chief, General Pervez Musharraf, was embarking on covert plans to wrest Indian territory in the high Himalayas. The Kargil war of 1999 followed, and ever since, there has been no meaningful progress towards restoring trust and amity.

To his credit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his first term, sought to improve ties with Pakistan and made a dramatic visit in December 2015 to Lahore. But it was an impulsive initiative that did not lead to any substantive peace outcome. In anything, the deep state in Rawalpindi was emboldened to turn on the terror tap and the February 2019 Pulwama attack and the Balakot air strike that followed placed India's relations with Pakistan on the back burner.

India has since held Pakistan's feet to the fire over its support to jihadist terror groups and in September at the UNGA, Jaishankar had castigated it for exporting terrorism. Against this backdrop, Jaishankar's visit with its positive reverberations, is a slender silver lining to a very dark cloud, when the Modi government responds to Pakistan and related electoral compulsions in its third term will be instructive. On current evidence, when Delhi is dealing with other diplomatic challenges (with Canada and to an extent, the US), an improvement in bilateral relations with Pakistan will have positive impact on the regional grid.

At the SCO meeting that included Chinese PM Li Qiang, Jaishankar highlighted the common challenge facing all members — combating terrorism, separatism and extremism. A subtle signal to Beijing about the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor was also included. Evolving a consensual approach would be a major achievement but that appears elusive for now. The deep state in Pakistan that is invested in jihadi terror is both unwilling and unable to wean itself away from providing support to these groups and China, while being cognisant of the reality has chosen to turn a blind eye, as long as its own interests in Xinjiang are not adversely affected.

While the Jaishankar visit points to the possibility of a more abiding thaw in the otherwise arid bilateral relationship, much will depend on how the Islamabad and Rawalpindi power brokers (political and military) respond to the window that beckons. Deeply entrenched vested interests and domestic lobbies that are opposed to a substantive improvement in the India-Pakistan bilateral can pose hurdles. And there is no escaping the reality that there is a Sisyphus cross that has bedevilled the bilateral relationship and the rock of acrimony and enmity has invariably triumphed.

One hopes that the Jaishankar-Dar "casual conversation" on the sidelines of the SCO was the first step towards a dialogue — however slender.

The writer is director, Society for Policy Studies, New Delhi.



ANAND KRISHNAN

IT IS THAT time of the year again when the air pollution issue takes centre stage in discussions and newspapers. Despite the surfeit of solutions suggested by experts, the situation remains the same. While the problem is well acknowledged, especially its impact on health, the solutions are not that easy to find.

So, it is surprising that in July, the Minister of State for Health told the Rajya Sabha that there is no conclusive data in the country to establish a direct correlation between death/disease due to air pollution. This was in response to a question which cited an estimate of mortality. Seven per cent of daily deaths in major cities can be attributed to air pollution. Subsequently, she went on to list the steps taken by the government on air pollution. This has been the government's standard response to most public health issues — question the data or estimate and list the steps taken — be it air pollution, the COVID pandemic, or malnutrition.

The operative word in the minister's response was "direct correlation" as she went on to elaborate that these diseases (cardiac conditions, cancers etc.) have multiple causal factors including tobacco, alcohol, diet, heredity, and occupation and therefore one cannot lay the blame only on air pollution. This assertion would be true for estimates for any of the above-mentioned risk factors including tobacco use. But no-body questions the tobacco-related disease burden estimates. Why are those estimates

## How not to check pollution

Accurate data is first step to solving problem. Let's not fight the numbers

treated as acceptable and one on air pollution questioned?

Both tobacco smoke and air pollution consist of multiple chemicals and pollutants which can lead to multiple diseases. One understands that intuitively, exposure to tobacco is perceived to be at the personal level while exposure to air pollution is at the population level. This does introduce additional epidemiological and statistical challenges. Also, while the strength of association is much stronger for tobacco than air pollution, the exposure is at a much larger level for air pollution. There is no acceptable scientific range for exposure to tobacco, while for air pollution we have some degree of acceptance, given our current state of development.

Epidemiologists routinely account for other risk factors when they look at association with a disease for a specific risk factor. There are statistically robust methods for estimation of the fraction of a disease or death burden "attributable" to a particular risk factor. Thus, while individual deaths cannot be attributed to air pollution, or for that matter tobacco, as a "direct" causative agent, morbidity and mortality at the population level can be ascertained. Air pollution as a population-level cause of cancers and cardiovascular disease satisfies the epidemiological criteria of causation in terms of dose-response (the higher the pollution level, the more the health effect), biological plausibility (the cellular mechanism action of the pol-

lutant chemicals known), consistency (multiple studies done in different populations show similar findings), temporal relationship (exposure precedes the disease). Thus, from an epidemiological point of view, there is no doubt that deaths attributable to air pollution can be estimated.

This does not mean that I am endorsing the above estimates. A critical appraisal of that estimate should occur in the academic domain. All estimates can be criticised as they invariably involve some assumptions and generalisations. As in the case of other public health problems, there will be many researchers who will come up with different estimates using different methods. The differences are because of inherent statistical treatment as well as data challenges.

It is the government's responsibility to make available a "true" estimate of any public health problem or at least provide the data that is required for such estimates to be generated. This is to ensure that policy development is based on good science and not to please the global academic world. This is also important for advocacy and for evaluating interventions in terms of prevention of disease and deaths. The government could generate these estimates itself and put them in the public domain. Experts would then be free to look at it and suggest improvements which can be handled in the next iteration of estimation. There should be a standing mechanism for data collection, collation and

estimation for major public health problems as this is a continuous cycle. This is one investment the state and central governments must make.

The minister listed many steps taken by the government to show that it is cognisant of the problem and is addressing it. Then why question the estimate? It appears that the government is ready to acknowledge that air pollution is a problem that is addressing, yet not ready to put a number to it. Why not look at an estimate as the first step in our understanding and addressing a problem rather than as an admission of failure to address it? There is no doubt that air pollution, like malnutrition, is a complex public health challenge that requires an all-of-government, all-of-society response. Having an estimate of disease burden is the starting point to get everyone on board (so that they collude rather than collide). The availability of periodic estimates enables us to understand how we are doing, and where we have failed. We can modify strategies accordingly.

One understands that public perception is very important in politics but so is performance. Instead of fighting over numbers, let us fight the public health challenges together.

The writer is a professor at the Centre for Community Medicine at the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi. Views expressed are personal.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### AN UNWISE MOVE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "Not a smart hike" (IE, October 19). The price of wheat in the international and domestic market is less than it was in 2023-2024. This has not satisfied the demands of the farmers who are pressing for legal guarantee of the Minimum Support Price. To increase the profit margin for farmers, input costs of sowing seeds should be substantially reduced. Government has to do away with malpractices and wastage in PDS where enormous losses occur.

Subhash Vaid, New Delhi

### HOPE IN SOUTH ASIA

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "Two cheers" (IE, October 18). Publicly at least, apart from short chats with the Pakistan PM, Shehbaz Sharif, and foreign minister, Ishaq Dar, EAM S Jaishankar is not known to have had any meaty conversation aimed at restarting talks between the South Asian neighbours. Still, the very fact that Jaishankar visited Islamabad opens up a tiny window for India and Pakistan to explore mechanisms to engage with each other. The Sharif's speech is a non-starter for the SCO as a bloc. India is opposed to the BRI, which already passes through PoK. If this week's conclave is anything to go by, there is hope for the grouping: It might still escape SAARC's fate.

SS Paul, Noida

### TREAD CAREFULLY

THIS REFERS TO the article, "In dangerous territory" (IE, October 19). The arrest of Indian official Vikash Yadav has escalated diplomatic tensions between India and the US. Yadav's indictment underscores Washington's strict stance against foreign interference. Allegations of an extraordinary rendition and assassination plot targeting US diplomat Shiv Panun on US soil have sent shockwaves through diplomatic channels. The US decision to publicise these charges suggests mounting pressure on India. New Delhi must carefully navigate this situation.

Khokan Das, Kolkata

### CHALLENGE FOR PAK

THIS REFERS TO the article, "A kind of hope" (IE, October 18). Pakistan has now become hostage to the extremist streak that it had once incubated. The TIP is seeking to carve out autonomous regions within the Pashtun areas. Added to this is the disproportionate amount of budget assigned to the Punjab region while ignoring the other provinces. Imran Khan's PTI has also taken to a more pugnacious and militant outlook in the wake of the assassinations of rigged elections. The Pakistani state will have to rein in the internal contradictions within the society in order to be able to successfully portray itself as the undisputed representative of the people of Pakistan.

Vinay Saroha, New Delhi



# 14.E. EXPLAINED

## \$1 tn over 30 years: the huge cost of pivoting away from coal

NIKHIL GHANEKAR  
NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 20

FOR A just transition away from coal, India will require over \$1 trillion or Rs 84 lakh crore over the next 30 years, according to a study by environment and climate change research think-tank Forest (International Forum for Environment, Sustainability and Technology). The first-of-its-kind study, published last week, attempts to estimate the cost of phasing down coal mines and coal plants, along with the costs of ensuring socio-economic stability in coal-dependent regions.

Coal will be central to India's energy mix for at least another decade, and moving away from it poses a massive challenge.

What will a 'just' energy transition look like?

The terms "just" here refers to an equitable and inclusive shift towards a low-carbon economy, which will keep in mind the interests of fossil-fuel dependent workers and societies. India is currently the second-largest producer of coal globally, with a vast number of people employed in the industry. According

to a PIB press release from March this year, public sector coal-producing entities alone employ a workforce of 3,69,053 individuals. Many more individuals are employed in the private sector, thermal power plants that run on coal, transportation, logistics, etc.

As India grows its renewable energy capacity to achieve net-zero emissions—amount of greenhouse gas emitted which are offset in the atmosphere and/or with technology—by 2070, it will be important to not leave behind those who depend on coal for their livelihoods. But such a transition will not be cheap.

What are the costs associated with a just transition?

Based on assessments of four heavily coal-dependent districts in India, and review of just transition economic plans in South Africa, Germany and Poland, the study arrived at eight broad cost components.

These include the cost of mine closures and repurposing, retirement of coal plants and repurposing of the sites for clean energy, labour skilling for green jobs, economic diversification in the form of new businesses, community support, investments for green energy, revenue substitution for covering loss



Women carrying freshly mined coal at an open-cast mine in Jharkhand. File

to states, and planning costs.

Roughly 48% of the \$1 trillion that the study estimates will be required to meet these costs over the next 30 years will go towards green investments for building energy infrastructure, which will have to replace coal mines and coal-fired plants.

Where will the funds for a just transition come from?

A combination of public funding, through grants and subsidies, and private investments

in green energy plants and infrastructure will be required to fund the costs. Most of the public funding, the study estimated, would be for "non-energy" costs such as supporting community resilience during the transition, skilling of coal workers for new green jobs, and providing economic support for new businesses that will replace old coal-based industries.

India has nearly \$4 billion in district mineral foundations funds, with monies collected from miners. This fund can be used as a resource, along with Corporate Social Responsibility

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(CSR) funds, for supporting new businesses in coal districts, and to support communities. Private investments, the study highlighted, will cover much of the "energy costs" of transition, and fund most new clean energy projects.

How have other countries approached a just transition?

Both developed and developing countries have adopted legislation or opted for investment plans with international funding to phase-down coal use.

South Africa's Just Energy Transition Investment Plan (JET-IP), for instance, will see it getting financial support for phasing down coal from the UK, France, Germany, the US, the European Union, the Netherlands, and Denmark. A sum of \$38 billion will be required over the next two decades to support South Africa's 20-year energy transition, with \$8.5 billion to be supplied in the 2023-2027 period. A bulk of this will be for green energy investments. The finance will be provided in the form of concessional loans, grants, and public-private partnerships.

Germany, meanwhile, enacted laws to phase out coal power by 2038, and sanctioned

an outlay of over \$55 billion to close coal mines and coal-powered plants, while supporting development of coal dependent regions.

What did the study of four coal-dependent districts in India find?

The districts identified were Korba in Chhattisgarh, Bokaro and Ramgarh in Jharkhand, and Angul in Odisha. These were studied to assess their economic dependence on coal and coal-based industries, and to estimate the costs of a just transition.

For instance, it was found that the coal-based economy of Bokaro, with its multiple coal plants and an integrated steel plant, contributes to about 54% of the district's domestic product. Around 1,39,000 workers were employed in coal mining, at coal plants, and in allied sectors, such as steel and cement. A full phase-down of coal in the district, the study estimated, will begin after 2040. It will require an outlay of Rs 1.01 lakh crore over the next three decades to rehabilitate workers, repurpose mines, and start green energy production at locations where coal plants stand today.

**EXPLAINED CLIMATE**

### EXPLAINED SCIENCE

## HOW EARLY HUMANS EVOLVED TO EAT STARCH, WHY THAT MATTERS

AS SOON as starch—whether it be in the form of boiled rice, french fries, or momos—enters the human mouth, an enzyme in the saliva starts breaking it down. This enzyme, known as amylase, was critical for human evolution, helping the species adapt to a changing food supply.

Two new studies, one published last week in the journal *Science* and the other published last month in *Nature*, have revealed that our ancestors began carrying more amylase genes in two major waves. The first one occurred several hundred thousand years ago, possibly in response to the invention of fire, and the second one came after the agricultural revolution, only 12,000 years ago.

A useful enzyme

In the 1960s, scientists discovered that some people produced extra amylase in their saliva. But it has only been in the past few years that researchers have been able to zero down on the amylase genes.

Both the studies catalogued a wide range of amylase copies in people's DNA. Some had a single amylase gene on each copy of chromosome 1, whereas most people had many more—in some cases, as many as 11 copies. These numbers were in stark contrast to even the closest extant species to humans, chimpanzees, for instance, also make amylase in their saliva, but they carry only a single gene for the enzyme.

History in our mouths

The two studies looked at fossil evidence for when (and how) humans' early ancestors began more amylase genes.

Their findings indicated that natural selection might have started favouring human ancestors with more amylase genes roughly around the time humans began to create and control fire, hundreds of thousands of years ago. This is because prior to the advent of cooking, humans likely did not consume starch-rich plants, which would have been used to chew and digest (consider eating a raw potato).



Potato domestication coincided with production of more amylase. Express

That said, the studies found no evidence that hunter-gatherers gained any evolutionary advantage from the extra amylase genes. This changed drastically about 12,000 years ago. It was then, at the end of the last ice age, that a number of societies began domesticating crops, including starch-rich foods like wheat, barley and potatoes.

The studies revealed that DNA containing extra amylase genes became more common over the past 12,000 years as people with more amylase genes were more likely to survive and reproduce with the kind of nutrition that was now available. The study published in *Science* also found that extra copies of amylase rose rapidly in the past few thousand years in Peru, where potatoes were domesticated over 5,000 years ago.

Speculation for future

Omer Gokcimen, a geneticist at the University at Buffalo who led the *Science* study, speculated that people today who have fewer amylase genes may be more vulnerable to diseases like diabetes, that are fueled by a starch-heavy modern diet. He said that more amylase might prompt people to have more insulin, which would in turn make them absorb more sugar from starch. Down the line, the findings could point to potential amylase-based treatments for these diseases.

ENS WITH INPUTS FROM THE NYT

### EXPLAINED AGRICULTURE

## Comeback of krishi in Bharat

The farm sector's share in employment is rising despite India registering high GDP growth rates in recent years, reversing a decades-old trend of rural India becoming increasingly less tethered to agriculture



HARISH DAMODARAN

DEPENDENCE on farming for livelihoods and incomes rising in India, reversing a decades-old trend of the rural countryside becoming increasingly less tethered to agriculture?

The All India Rural Financial Inclusion Survey for 2021-22, released earlier this month, found that 57% of rural households in the country—including households in semi-urban centres with a population of less than 50,000—were "agricultural". This was significantly higher than the 48% reported in the previous survey of 2016-17.

The survey, commissioned by the National Bank for Agriculture & Rural Development (NABARD), defined an "agricultural household" as one that (i) reported a total value of produce from farming exceeding Rs 6,500 (be it cultivation of field and horticulture crops, livestock and poultry rearing, or aquaculture, sericulture and apiculture); and (ii) had at least one member who was self-employed in such activities during the reference year (July 2021 to June 2022). In the 2016-17 survey, the threshold cut-off value of produce was Rs 5,000.

More krishi in Bharat

The share of rural households identified as agricultural, based on the above definitions, has gone up for nearly all states between 2016-17 and 2021-22. (See Table)

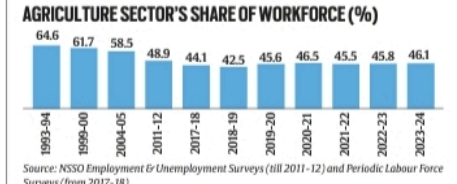
Also, the all-India average monthly income of agricultural households, at Rs 13,661 in 2021-22, was more than the Rs 11,438 for non-agricultural rural households. In the 2016-17 survey, too, agricultural households earned a higher average monthly income (Rs 8,931) compared with their non-agricultural counterparts (Rs 7,289).

Within agricultural households, the contribution of cultivation and animal husbandry to total income was over 45% in 2021-22, up from 43.1% in 2016-17. This increased share of income from farming activities was seen for agricultural households across most size classes of land possessed: from 23.5% to 26.8% for those with less than 0.01 hectare, from 38.2% to 42.2% for those with 0.01-1 hectare, from 52.5% to 63.9% for those with 1.01-2 hectares, and from 58.2% to 71.4% for those with more than 2 hectares.

	2016-17	2021-22		2016-17	2021-22
J & K	77	73	Uttarakhand	41	57
Jharkhand	51	69	Karnataka	59	55
Assam	47	67	Telangana	47	55
Uttar Pradesh	63	66	Gujarat	58	54
Chhattisgarh	55	66	Andhra Pradesh	34	53
Rajasthan	63	66	West Bengal	35	49
Madhya Pradesh	58	64	Bihar	47	45
Himachal	70	63	Tripura	39	40
Odisha	58	60	Punjab	42	36
Maharashtra	36	59	Kerala	13	18
Haryana	34	58	Goa	3	18
Tamil Nadu	13	57	All-India	48	57

\*Includes only Jammu; \*\*Excludes Ladakh.

Source: NABARD All India Rural Financial Inclusion Surveys, Data (in %)



Source: NSSO Employment & Unemployment Surveys (till 2011-12) and Periodic Labour Force Surveys (from 2017-18).

those with more than 2 hectares.

Simply put, the proportion of households in rural India reliant on agriculture as a livelihood source has registered a sharp increase between 2016-17 and 2021-22. Even for agricultural households, the income from farming has gone up as a share of their overall income. There is correspondingly a smaller share of income coming from non-farm sources (such as government/private jobs, self-employment, wage labour, rent, deposits and investments), which applies to all land size categories.

The recent period, in other words, has witnessed more, not less, of *krishi* (agriculture) in rural India or Bharat. Not only is there a higher share of agricultural households, they are also accruing more income from farms.

Impact of Covid-19?

The reference year (2021-22) for the latest survey was one that followed the Covid-induced lockdowns. The impact of the restrictions on economic activity, imposed in the

wake of the pandemic's first and second waves, may well have been reflected in the survey's findings. While the curbs were fully lifted from July 2021, the economic scars took time to heal.

Agriculture-related activities were specifically exempted from the lockdowns. Since the farm sector didn't suffer the disruptions that the rest of the economy did—and India also had four consecutive good monsoon years from 2019—the 2021-22 survey findings might overestimate agriculture's share in rural livelihoods and incomes. Comparisons with the 2016-17 survey should, therefore, be made keeping this in mind.

But there is also an additional data source that points to Indians increasingly returning to, rather than leaving, farms.

According to the National Sample Survey Office's Periodic Labour Force Surveys (PLFS), agriculture engaged 64.6% of the country's workforce in 1993-94. That share fell to 58.5% in 2004-05, 48.9% in 2011-12, and a low of 42.5% in 2018-19. Thereafter, a reversal of

trend has taken place, with the farm sector's share of the employed labour force rising to 45.6% and 46.5% in the two pandemic-affected years of 2019-20 and 2020-21 respectively. The PLFS reference year is July-June; Covid first struck in March 2020).

The paradox

The significant point to note is that agriculture's share has remained elevated even after 2021-22, despite the economy coming out of the pandemic, and recording an average annual GDP growth of 8.3% in the three years ended 2023-24. The latest PLFS data, for 2023-24, was only available in the pre-pandemic low of 42.5% in 2018-19, (see Chart). The above trend reversal is equally visible in rural areas. Agriculture employed 57.8% of the Indian rural workforce in 2018-19, which climbed to 61.5% in 2019-20 and 60.8% in 2020-21. That dropped to 59% in 2021-22 and 58.4% in 2022-23, but only to soar again to 59.8% in 2023-24.

The increased dependence on agriculture for employment and livelihoods—home out both by the NABARD and PLFS data—in an economy that has expanded over 14 times in constant rupees between 2016-17 and 2023-24, is a paradox requiring some explanation. It may partly have to do with the lack of jobs in manufacturing, which employed only 11.4% of India's workforce in 2023-24, down from 12.6% in 2011-12 and 12.1% in 2018-19.

Manufacturing's share of employment in 2023-24 was even below that of trade, hotels & restaurants (12.2%) and construction (12%). The movement of surplus labour in agriculture is occurring, if at all, not from farms to factories. Instead, it is to sectors that stand to have quite similar employment characteristics as agriculture—having low marginal productivity (output per worker), paying just above subsistence wages, and largely informal.

As per the PLFS data for 2023-24, the states with the highest share of their labour force employed in agriculture included Chhattisgarh (63.8%), Madhya Pradesh (61.6%), Uttar Pradesh (55.9%), Bihar (54.2%), Himachal Pradesh (54%), Rajasthan (51.1%) and Jharkhand (50%). Among the ones with relatively low shares were Goa (8.1%), Kerala (27%), Punjab (27.2%), Haryana (27.5%), Tamil Nadu (28%) and West Bengal (38.2%).

The reasons for an economy, whose size has grown from \$182 billion in 2011 to \$2.29 trillion in 2016 and \$3.55 trillion in 2023 (World Bank data), having to depend more on agriculture for employment should be a subject of debate among economists.

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## Why gangster Lawrence Bishnoi can be interrogated only inside a prison

SADAF MODAK  
MUMBAI, OCTOBER 20

AS PART of their investigation into the murder of Maharashtra MLA Babu Siddique earlier this month, the Mumbai police alleged that the two men accused of shooting him had links to the Lawrence Bishnoi gang. Bishnoi is currently lodged in Gujarat's Sabarmati jail, in a case of cross-border drug smuggling.

He was previously also named in the case of a firing outside actor Salman Khan's residence in Mumbai in April, but Mumbai police could not take his custody.

Usually, a person facing trial is brought before the court to attend the proceedings against him, to ensure a fair trial. A criminal court is empowered to issue an order for the same during an inquiry, trial or other proceedings under section 267 of the Criminal

Procedure Code (CrPc).

However, any investigating agency seeking to interrogate Bishnoi will only get access to him within the jail premises. Here is why.

What prevents investigating agencies from taking Bishnoi's custody?

In August 2023, the Ministry of Home Affairs issued an order referencing Bishnoi, restricting him from being taken out of jail for any purpose. This was under section 268 of the CrPc and was effective for a year. In August 2024, it was extended for another year under section 303 of the new Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNS), which replaced the CrPc.

As a result, Bishnoi cannot be directed to be produced in court and any agency seeking access to him will have to get an order from a court to question him only within the jail premises. Any court order re-

quiring Bishnoi to be produced for legal proceedings would be rendered inoperative until the restrictive order remains in place.

What does the restrictive orders say?

Section 268 of the CrPc gave state governments the "power to exclude certain prisoners from operation of section 267". Under section 303 of the BNS, both the Central government (in cases instituted by central agencies like the NIA), and state governments can "by general or special order, direct that any person or class of persons shall not be removed from the prison in which he or they may be confined or detained, and thereupon, so long as the order remains in force."

Section 303(2) of the BNS specifies three criteria for invoking the section: The nature of the offence for which the

person(s) has been ordered to be confined or detained in prison; the likelihood of the disturbance of public order if they are allowed to be removed from the prison; and public interest, generally.

Investigating agencies argue that interrogating a person in jail can be limiting, as only one or two officials may be permitted to question the person for a few hours or a specific period. Other accused persons cannot be brought in during the interrogation.

**EXPLAINED LAW**

When can such orders be imposed?

Governments have cited security reasons, submitting apprehensions that if the person is allowed out of jail, they may attempt to abscond or their lives could be in danger. Authorities also refer to the person's criminal history and if many cases are pending against them, an argument on their

movement leading to law and order problems can be made.

In May 2013, the Maharashtra state passed a Government Resolution (GR) invoking section 268 of the CrPc to restrict the production of Zakiuddin Ansari alias Abu Jundal before the court, Jundal is an accused in the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks case, and the nature of the case against him was cited for the GR.

Ansari then approached the Bombay High Court seeking the GR be quashed, stating he wanted to be present in court and had a right to a fair trial. The court rejected his plea and said it could not interfere, given the sensitive nature of the case. It allowed Ansari to attend the trial through a video link from jail.

At times, courts have quashed orders of the state government, citing non-sufficiency of reasons to restrict movement. The Gujarat government issued a circu-

lar in 2014, giving guidelines for restricting the movement of prisoners in the state. It said the police should give a clear opinion on the accused person's movement, after considering the prisoner's conduct and the gravity of the case. Further, arrangements for a speedy trial should be made in cases where the person faces such an order, to ensure that he does not remain in jail without a trial for a long time.

Additionally, these provisions have been used to restrict furlough and parole for prisoners in terror cases. In a case before the Gujarat High Court, a man serving 20 years in jail in a terror case approached the court, stating he was not permitted to leave jail to avail of his furlough as an order had been passed under section 268 of the CrPc. Since it had been over a decade since such an order was passed and the convict had previously been permitted parole, the court directed authorities to reconsider their view.