

# THE ASIAN AGE

23 AUGUST 2024

## Plethora of U-turns signals coalition era back for good

There is every sign that a consensus approach to issues is back and here to stay after just 75 days of the Narendra Modi 3.0 government. This is a welcome change from the days of the NDA-2 government of 2014-2019 when decisions were unilaterally taken and thrust upon the people.

In just the last month since the presentation of the Budget, the Modi government has taken four U-turns on a range of issues from a pullback on long term capital gains tax and allied indexation benefit to a change in the lateral recruitment policy that may be tweaked to bring in reservation to also serve social justice goals.

The switch to the more acceptable democratic norms of the coalition era post-1989 is the most desirable part of a transformation that has come about with the results of the Lok Sabha polls of 2024 in which the ruling BJP returned with a diminished number of seats that way was short of its crushing numbers of 2019 and a majority of seats in 2014.

Primarily, it may be coalition dharma that brought about a majority of the four quick U-turns, particularly the ones relating to holding the draft Broadcasting Services Regulation Bill for further consultations with media bodies, including digital media organisations, and civil society associations and the Waqf (Amendment) Bill that has been sent to a Joint Parliamentary Committee.

With allies like TDP, Jana Sena and Chirag Paswan's LJP raising objections to the Waqf bill, the concept of having to regulate the Muslim board, include non-Muslims and restrict donation of properties has been referred for wider consultation. For the BJP to go back on its objective of such action represents the biggest change of heart in the new coalition era.

The Opposition would like to claim the credit for forcing a few of the U-turns, specifically the Waqf bill since it has so much to do with its minority vote bank. The logic of coalition dharma may, however, have had more to do with three other U-turns, including the restoration of indexation benefits in the general sale of property and lowering of LTCG, which were needed in a country with a very high percentage of tax on everything.

The willingness to accept criticism and examine the issues in greater detail after listening to more voices is what makes the Modi 3.0 government different from its two previous avatars. The functioning of parliament, with the Opposition waking up to the possibilities of debating rather than boycotts and walkouts, has also helped diverse opinions being heard in the House.

Coalition dharma may have brought about this disposition to listen rather than railroad legislation through Parliament and then face the consequences. The people's verdict imposing a rule by an alliance of parties has been instrumental in democracy being in better working order now. Democracy is in better shape now, but governance cannot be indecisive.

While seeking a consensus is only likely to help, NDA-3 would have steer clear of pandering to coalition compulsions to extremes that had rendered UPA-2 ineffective in governance. Such was the extent of a policy drift that the economy was run down into a situation which may so easily have led India into the kind of problems that Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh have faced in the region.

## Train workers to avoid disasters

Wednesday's explosion at a pharma company in a special economic zone at Ahtatapuram near Visakhapatnam is another wake-up call for governments and factories for implementing long-pending worker safety measures to cut down on industrial disasters. The death toll stood at 18 people, and 36 hurt. Fortunately, many employees were not present at the explosion site as it was lunch time. Had it occurred at any other time, the death toll would have been higher.

Though the official version attributes the accident to the reactor, the office of deputy chief minister Pawan Kalyan twisted blaming the leakage of solvent oil for the blast. If it is true, the real cause of the current accident would be employer negligence and employee's ignorance.

According to the directorate general, Factory Advice Service and Labour Institute, three people die every day in industrial accidents in India. On average, 1,109 deaths and more than 4,000 injuries were reported in registered factories each year.

While India has one of the highly regulated labour markets in the world, with 15 laws aiming to cover various facets of worker's welfare, the lack of a unified approach for the chemical industry leaves loopholes in the enforcement of safety measures.

According to International Labour Organisation, lax investment in occupational safety and health is the key cause of occupational accidents. Most companies do not have a comprehensive chemical risk database, which creates a knowledge gap, hinders assessment of hazard and safety protocol. Most inherently risky jobs are done by untrained contractual workers, who lack a proper understanding of the risks, leading to accidents that impose huge human, environmental and capital costs on the society.

It is high time that the government enacts a comprehensive industrial safety code, which makes hiring of trained workers mandatory for factories dealing in hazardous materials.

### THE ASIAN AGE

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Subhani



## China's 'salami' warfare big danger to Himalayas

Claude Arpi



The planet is being turned, and wherever one looks, one sees natural and unnatural landmasses that occurred in six villages of Wayanad district of Kerala on July 30, but the entire Himalayan belt is disturbed.

In Wayanad, heavy rains triggered the collapse of hillsides, resulting in forests of mud, water and boulders cascading down into the valley. Similarly in the Himalayas, particularly in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand and Arunachal Pradesh, tragic incidents such as these are taking place.

In most of the cases, wild development activities have resulted in these mishaps. For example, in Himachal Pradesh, some environmental activists told the Down To Earth magazine that "most incidents of natural disasters that occurred in Himachal Pradesh during the last one year happened around some power (dams) or national highway project".

In Uttarakhand, wild construction, not taking into account the capacity of the mountains to sustain new roads, new hotels and millions of tourists, has been one of the factors triggering a tragedy after another. One basic fact has been forgotten: that mountains are fragile.

Flying over the Himalayan range, one has the impression that the snow-covered ranges and high peaks are massive and seemingly impenetrable mountains; however, on the ground, the Himalayas are in grave danger.

For millennia the Himalayan passes have been crossed by adventures, pilgrims, traders, monks or holy men looking for a mythic paradise upon earth, or simply good business, yet, during all that time the environment was not disturbed.

Another factor has to be taken into consideration is the militarisation of the Himalayan range, and for this India cannot be held responsible.

The finger must be pointed clearly at our northern neighbour. For centuries, life went on as usual, but in 1950 the troops of China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) marched into Tibet. The military base of the peaceful plateau as well as the ecological equilibrium quickly started to change.

During the following years, thousands of Tibetans managed to escape their colonised land and take refuge to India; it included the Dalai Lama, Tibet's religious and temporal leader, who arrived in India in 1959. Then came October 1987, when Chinese troops attacked India on the Himalayan slopes; from the arid Ladakh region in the west to the dense forests in the north-west, the PLA marched into Indian territory.

The conflict was short, just one month, but violent. More than 60 years after the event, it is still deeply engraved in the Indian psyche. It had incalculable consequences for the mountains and though the passes were closed, trade and pilgrimage routes stopped and communications were cut between northern India and the Tibetan plateau. India now had a bully instead of a friend as a neighbour.

At the beginning very few worried about the environment and even less about climate change. But the Chinese occupation slowly started to have disastrous consequences for the Himalayan ecology.

Today, it is not only India who is under threat of the Chinese "salami" tactics (taking over a few kilometres of territory at a time). On August 23, 2023, China released a new "standard map". The map included Taiwan and parts of the maritime zones of the Philippines, Vietnam, Brunei, Indonesia, and Malaysia. It did not leave much time for the new incumbent to show that he was in charge. Gen. Bajwa was of holding forth for hours on end on national and international issues, though he had no clear understanding of any of the complex challenges the country faced. Then came the 2018 elections.

Gen. Bajwa later told me that it was the view of the institution that Imran Khan should be supported. A new hybrid system came into being after the 2018 elections with the formation of the PTI government that had the total backing of the security establishment. But there were some inherent contradictions in the system that started emerging, with the new desire to assert his position and taking some decisions which came into conflict with the establishment's views.

A long meeting with Gen. Bajwa in October 2021

A solution had been proposed by the Dalai Lama in 1989 in his Five-Point Peace Plan: The whole of Tibet, including the eastern provinces of Kham and Amdo, should be transformed into a zone of 'Ahimsa'.

India reacted swiftly, at the cost of spending four winters at 15,000 feet, often with temperatures at minus 40 degrees Celsius.

Each army has today between 60,000 and 70,000 troops posted at the Line of Actual Control (LAC). China and India then began to frenetically develop the infrastructure on their respective sides. The immediate collateral damage was to the environment; this is compounded by climate change and wild tourism development.

On July 25, India's external affairs minister S. Jaishankar met China's foreign minister Wang Yi. Mr. Jaishankar underlined the need for "full respect" of the LAC, ultimately, both sides agreed on giving "strong guidance for disengagement". It is, however, doubtful that it will translate in troops reduction on the ground.

The degradation of the Himalayan environment is obviously due to several other factors too, but the militarisation triggered by China's hegemonic tendencies has brought incalculable harm to the fragile ecosystem.

A solution had been proposed by the Dalai Lama in 1989 in his Five-Point Peace Plan: The whole of Tibet, including the eastern provinces of Kham and Amdo, should be transformed into a zone of 'Ahimsa', meaning a state of peace and non-violence.

Unfortunately, this dream seems much more distant today than 35 years ago; when the Dalai Lama had explained: "The establishment of a peace zone in Tibet would require the withdrawal of Chinese troops and military installations from the country, which would enable India also to withdraw troops and military installations from the Himalayan regions bordering Tibet."

A "Zone of Ahimsa" would be a great boon for the Himalayan environment, but for the time being, it may remain a dream.

Claude Arpi is Distinguished Fellow at the Centre of Excellence for Himalayan Studies, Shiv Nadar Institution of Eminence (Delhi), and writes on India, China, Tibet and Indo-French relations

### LETTERS

#### PROTEST ETHICALLY

The incident in Gopalganj, Bihar, where a mob attempted to set a bus on fire with students on board, is both heartbreaking and embarrassing. While it is understandable to express outrage and frustration against the government to fulfil your demands and urge for justice, attempting to burn the bus is completely unacceptable. Had it not been for the timely intervention of the police, the futures of those students — who stand by you through thick and thin and lead you toward a brighter tomorrow — could have been tragically lost. Please exercise patience and pursue justice in the right way.

Jakir Hussain  
Kanpur

#### RED-FACED SHINDE

THE PUBLIC OUTRAGE over the alleged sexual abuse of two four-year-old girls in the Badliapur school is a wake-up call for the Maharashtra government led by CM Eknath Shinde. The Bombay high court on Thursday voiced serious concerns about school safety, highlighting that if schools aren't safe, discussions on the right to education lose significance. This situation is extremely shocking. The court came down heavily on the Badliapur police, asking why there was a delay in recording of statements.

Sankar Paul  
Chakdaha, West Bengal

#### COALITION DHARMA

THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT has withdrawn lateral entry into the services due to the coalition government's pressure after the Waqf and Broadcasting Bills. The objective was to appoint those with private sector expertise to high-level government positions. In previous years, the inclusion of experts in the bureaucracy was referred to as progressive thinking. However, due to the lack of transparency in the selection process, protests erupted. And too, the NDA government not only modified its judgment on the high Bill but also sent the Broadcasting Bill to a parliamentary panel for assessment. This shows the NDA administration has begun to accept the lessons of coalition politics. Way to go!

Amrapali Roy  
Jamshedpur

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Zahid Hussain  
View from  
Pakistan

## Gen. Bajwa hand evident in fall of both Imran & Nawaz Sharif

There have been few instances in Pakistan's history where an Army chief has bowed out without generating controversy. This might not be surprising in a country where the military has for the most part been deeply involved in political power games. Retired Gen. Qamar Javed Bajwa may have been among the most controversial Army chiefs, but whatever is happening now is no less scandalous.

Gen. Bajwa has been held responsible by both sides of the political divide for the fall of their respective governments. Both accuse him of deceit. While he retired almost two years ago after serving two terms as Army chief, the controversy surrounding his contentious tenure refuses to die down. The recent arrest of his protégé and former ISI chief, retired Lt Gen. Faiz Hameed, who is now facing field arrest martial, has put Gen. Bajwa back in the spotlight.

New revelations have emerged about his alleged political manoeuvring that saw the fall of Prime Ministers and regime change. While former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif accused him and his now disgraced ISI chief of plotting his removal from office in 2017 and his subsequent conviction in a litany of criminal cases, his nemesis Imran Khan, too, blames him for his government's downfall. Interestingly, it was Gen. Bajwa who has been credited for installing the former cricket captain in power through an engineered election in 2018. He

was also seen as the architect of the hybrid dispensation that propped up the fledgling political set-up before the Khan-Bajwa partnership fell apart, clearing the way for the return of the PML-N led government. A dejected Khan shouted betrayal.

In a series of interviews on private TV channels, defence minister Khawaja Asif has made some startling revelations about the behind-the-scenes manoeuvring that led to changing political alliances. It was not merely the declaration of neutrality by the military leadership that led to the collapse of the three-and-a-half-year-long hybrid arrangement; in fact, there was active engagement between the then Opposition and the establishment, as revealed by Khawaja Asif, that changed the game.

But most interesting is the story of how Gen. Bajwa was chosen for the coveted post by the then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, despite being much lower on the seniority list. It was on the assurance of retired Maj Gen. Javed Anjum, his father-in-law, that Gen. Bajwa was appointed.

It was apparent that merit and seniority did not matter in the appointment of the Army chief. Sharif was already embroiled in the Panama case and his ties with the then military leadership had soured. He needed a trusted person in a critical position. Gen. Bajwa was indeed a political choice. But as a retired general, he was not expected to be loyal to anyone but his own institution. And that is exactly

what happened.

Some months later, Sharif was ousted via the Supreme Court. There was little doubt that the action against the three-time PM had the full backing of the security establishment. I remember a press briefing by Gen. Bajwa months after his taking charge. The apex court was expected to deliver its ruling on the Sharif case and it seemed certain that he would be convicted. A journalist asked the general what he thought would happen if the PM was removed. "Nothing will happen," he responded curtly. "Nothing happened even when we hanged Bhutto." One could see the arrogance of power.

By then, it seemed that the general had already opened a channel with the PML-N leadership, as also confirmed by Khawaja Asif. He told me that his frequent meetings with Shehbaz Sharif for whom he had developed a strong liking. He told me that when he asked Shehbaz Sharif about the money-laundering case against him and members of his family, the latter replied that his children had made a "mistake".

He also narrated a story about his meeting with Maulana Fazlur Rahman. According to the general, the only request made by the JUI-F chief was that he remove the Khan government. There was no doubt about the general's grand ambitions but these were never fulfilled.

—By arrangement with Dawn



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## IBC defeated

Promoter tactics to scuttle process, the main problem

**T**he Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code is premised on the idea of taking a speedy decision on whether sick units should be revived or liquidated, so that capital is efficiently allocated. Its chief feature lies in easing out the promoter, often at the epicentre of the problem, to speed up transfer of control or liquidation. But eight years after the code, most cases are mired in long-drawn litigations (initiated largely by promoters) leading to inordinate delays.

According to latest data from Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board (April-June newsletter), average time taken for approval of resolution plans (from the date of admission of the application) is now 761 days as on end-June 2024; more than double the time taken in the pre-Covid period in March 2019. It has been rising sharply since March 2023, when it was 611 days. Apart from the statutory limit of 330 days being relegated to the background, the delays are getting worse. Besides, there is no data on pre-admission delays — which could amount to a year, according to insolvency professionals. Malafide promoters capitalise on such delays to strip the assets of the company. This costs creditors dear — financial creditors in particular. Average realisation has dropped to 32 per cent of admitted claims, down from 43 per cent in March 2019. As a result, many financial creditors settle for large haircuts or even withdraw the case. The value destruction in liquidation is exacerbated by delay in the entire process.

Promoters at risk of losing their company have found ways to game the system. Despite Section 29A which debars promoters from taking part in insolvency resolution, they have devised ways to scuttle the system. They often initiate litigation immediately after the insolvency commencement date, or challenge the liquidation or resolution orders. Listing appeals against corporate insolvency resolution plans (CIRPs) or liquidation orders as a priority item in the appellate authority or even the Supreme Court could reduce delays. Frivolous complaints from promoters can be checked by mandating that promoters who have not filed their statutory returns, paid statutory dues, or fail to cooperate with insolvency professionals will not be allowed to litigate.

Financial creditors need to play an active role in watching for early distress signals to reduce resolution time and protect value. These include non-filing of audited accounts, income tax returns and tax audit reports, large borrowings — far above the bank lending rate — from non-banking sources and non-payment of statutory dues such as GST, PF, TDS, etc. Information from the portals concerned should be linked so that compliance status is reflected in one place. Delays also arise on account of problems in the NCLT with respect to vacancies and, at times, lack of technical competence of members. Separate benches in the NCLT to deal exclusively with real estate and company law related issues, respectively, will free up the remaining benches for IBC cases.

## POCKET



"Eight tables, one chair, and seven AI systems...ASAP!"



ADITYA SINHA

**I**ndustrial policy often walks a tightrope between overreach and neglect. Excessive government intervention can lead to market distortions, dampen competitive dynamics, and foster inefficiencies, turning the economy into a bureaucratic drag. Yet, a laissez-faire approach can leave market failures like negative externalities and public goods under-provided, destabilising the economy. The key is to apply just the right amount of regulatory nudge — enough to correct market failures and guide resource allocation efficiently, but not so much that you kill the goose that's supposed to lay the golden eggs.

India's industrial policy post-independence, much like the absurdity in Alice in Wonderland and the oppressive control in Orwell's 1984, created a system where progress was trapped in a maze of bureaucracy. The Industries (Development and Regulation) Act of 1951 birthed the "license-permit raj," where every industrial decision required government approval, turning ambition into a bureaucratic hurdle. The Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices (MRTP) Act of 1969 and the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act (FERA) of 1973 further restricted growth and isolated Indian industries from global competition. Intended to protect and foster growth, these policies instead stifled innovation and redirected business efforts towards navigating regulatory obstacles rather than competing in the market. This legacy of excessive control and inefficiency is precisely why industrial policy has earned a bad name in India. It is often vilified as a harbinger of inefficiency and protectionism.

However, the recent resurgence of industrial policy, after a period of decline, is driven by a global rethinking of market-driven approaches and the challenges posed by technological disruption, economic stagnation, and geopolitical competition, particularly with China. Developing countries, disillusioned with the Washington Consensus, seek proactive government interventions to diversify and upgrade their economies, while advanced economies grapple with declining manufacturing employment and the lingering effects of the financial crisis. China's rapid industrialisation, coupled with rising concerns about technological transfer and competition, has prompted both protectionist measures and calls for stronger industrial strategies in the US and Europe. Technological changes, including automation and digitalisation, further emphasise the need for government involvement in shaping economic activities.

While the Production Linked



## The case for a new industrial policy

**PRIORITY SHIFT.** India needs a policy that will facilitate sustained economic growth and transform the country into a global manufacturing hub

Incentive (PLI) scheme is often seen as an industrial policy. It primarily offers financial incentives to boost manufacturing in specific sectors and does not fully address the broader structural challenges needed to transform India into a global manufacturing hub.

There are several reasons why India needs an industrial policy. The first reason is grounded in straightforward, undeniable logic. Structuralist economists like W Arthur Lewis and Albert O Hirschman emphasise that economic development involves transitioning from agriculture to manufacturing and services. India's economic structure remains skewed towards agriculture, which employs a disproportionate workforce despite contributing a declining share of GDP.

## WHY GO FOR A NEW POLICY

A well-designed industrial policy can guide this structural transformation, facilitating the shift towards more productive sectors essential for sustained economic growth. There are three reasons why India should come up with a new industrial policy.

**First, Romer (1990) and Lucas (1988)** provide a basis for understanding how government intervention can foster innovation and knowledge spillovers.

**India's economic structure remains skewed towards agriculture, which employs a disproportionate workforce despite contributing a declining share of GDP**

leading to sustained economic growth.

**Second, Stiglitz and Greenwald (2014)** in "Creating a Learning Society" provide a theoretical foundation for industrial policy by demonstrating how learning and innovation are endogenous processes that require government support. Their work is backed by data on productivity growth in sectors where state intervention facilitated technology transfer and skills development, particularly in industries such as electronics and automotive manufacturing in countries like Japan and Germany.

**Third, Joseph Stiglitz and George Akerlof** have extensively written about the inefficiencies in resource allocation driven by information asymmetries, externalities, and the public goods problem. In India, these market imperfections are particularly evident in sectors such as research and development (R&D) and infrastructure, where private firms underinvest because they cannot fully capture the returns on their investments.

Information asymmetry leads to suboptimal investment in R&D, while the non-excludable nature of infrastructure deters private sector involvement, resulting in gaps in essential services. However, instead of broad government intervention, a market-oriented industrial policy can strategically target these inefficiencies by providing selective incentives and fostering a more favourable business environment.

**Fourth, empirical studies** in this domain show that countries with active industrial policies tend to experience higher rates of total factor productivity growth, as seen in the case of China's

strategic investments in high-tech industries (Lin, 2012). The phenomenon of premature deindustrialisation, as discussed by Dani Rodrik, occurs when developing countries begin to deindustrialise at much lower income levels than historically industrialised nations. This can lead to a situation where economies fail to fully exploit the productivity gains from manufacturing before transitioning to a service-dominated economy, resulting in lower overall growth and limited job creation.

**Fifth, the Developmental State Theory of Amsden (1989) and Johnson (1982)**, provides historical evidence of the effectiveness of industrial policies in driving rapid industrialisation in East Asia, with data showing significant increases in GDP per capita and manufacturing value-added in these economies during the periods of active state intervention. Sixth, geoeconomics, a field explored by scholars like Edward Luttwak, emphasises using economic instruments to achieve geopolitical objectives. Economic strength is a critical component of national security in a multipolar world. India's industrial capabilities, particularly in strategic sectors like defence manufacturing, telecommunications, and critical technologies, are essential for maintaining strategic autonomy and reducing dependency on foreign powers. An industrial policy that prioritises these sectors can align economic growth with national security objectives.

The writer is Officer on Special Duty, Research at Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister. Views are personal

## BEPS' pillar two law will apply to Indian MNCs

India is yet to formally adopt the OECD's minimum tax law, but Indian multinationals will have to pay up

Utkarsh Trivedi

**O**ne of the expectations from the Budget 2024 was the likely announcement of the Pillar Two law. However, that was not to be. The raises questions on whether India-based multinational enterprises (MNEs, or MNCs) will be absolved of Pillar Two related compliances.

Pillar Two is a part of the two-pillar solution developed by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Inclusive Framework (comprising 147 countries) to combat the issue of Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS). It seeks to ensure that MNEs, with consolidated annual revenues of €750 million or more, pay at least 15 per cent tax in each jurisdiction they operate in. To achieve this, any top-up tax (that is, the 'top-up' amount needed to bring the overall tax on the profits in each jurisdiction up to the minimum Effective Tax Rate (ETR) of 15 per cent) will be collected through the Income Inclusion Rule (IIR), Undertaxed Profits Rule (UTPR) or through Qualified Domestic Minimum Top-up Tax (QDMTT).

Budget 2024 proposes the withdrawal of the 2 per cent Equalization Levy (EQL) on overseas e-commerce supplies or services. In the post-Budget briefing, the Finance Minister clarified that India is close to finalising the global negotiations on Pillar One and Pillar Two and has hence withdrawn EQL. More than 30 countries have adopted the Pillar Two law into their legislation ("implementing countries"), but there has been no policy announcement on Pillar Two so far in India.

## IMPACT ANALYSIS

Despite the lack of a formal announcement, India-based MNEs, having presence in implementing countries, will be required to undertake Pillar Two related compliances. Assume an India-based MNE has revenue of more than €750 million with subsidiaries in the UK, the UAE and Bangladesh. Since the UK has incorporated Pillar Two law, the group is in scope of Pillar Two and is required to calculate Pillar Two ETR for each of the four countries. In case the ETR of any of the four countries, including India, is less than 15 per cent, a "top-up tax" liability under Pillar Two could arise.



**BE READY.** To file disclosures, tax

That India and the UAE have not adopted Pillar Two and Bangladesh is not an Inclusive Framework member, is not relevant. This would require the Indian MNE group to undertake an immediate impact analysis of the Pillar Two law and provide for "top-up taxes", if any, in its consolidated books of account.

Though India has not yet notified mandatory disclosure of Pillar Two impact in its financial statements, most countries have mandated such disclosures under the IFRS/local country GAAP standards. It would be ideal for an Indian MNE to undertake such disclosures in its financial

statements if it is likely to have a "top-up tax" in the implementing countries.

Recently, Belgium has come up with a mandatory Pillar Two registration requirement for in-scope MNE groups, having any presence in Belgium. Similar requirement has also been brought in by the UK. Indian MNEs with a presence in Belgium/UK will have to obtain Pillar Two registrations and undertake compliances. Other implementing countries are also likely to follow suit and come up with the requirement of obtaining Pillar Two registrations.

Indian MNEs will also be required to file GloBE Information Returns (GIR) in the implementing countries within 15 months, after the end of the fiscal year (18 months for the transitional year), even in absence of any such requirement in India. A QDMTT local tax return filing will likely also be needed in jurisdictions where QDMTT is in place.

With the abolition of 2 per cent EQL, India has indicated its commitment to two-pillar solutions. The absence of Pillar Two announcement in the Budget does not absolve Indian MNEs from Pillar Two compliances elsewhere.

The writer is Partner, Deloitte India

✉ **LETTERS TO EDITOR** Send your letters by email to [bleditor@thehindu.co.in](mailto:bleditor@thehindu.co.in) or by post to "Letters to the Editor", The Hindu Business Line, Kasturi Buildings, 859-860, Anna Salai, Chennai 600002.

## Evolution of products

Apropos "Why being a product nation helps" (August 22), it was insightful to anchor the discussion around Stan Shih's curve. To further strengthen the narrative, Clayton Christensen's "Product Evolution Cycle" could also have been incorporated.

This cycle explains how products evolve through different stages as they mature in the market, focusing on how they meet customer needs over time. By applying the Product Evolution Cycle, Indian companies could develop functionality, reliability, convenience, and personalisation simultaneously rather than sequentially. Leveraging agile development, rapid

prototyping, and real-time customer feedback allows all stages to be addressed in parallel.

**Nandagopal B**

Chennai

## Tech in pharma sector

This refers to "Indian pharmacy's quest" (August 22). In this digital era, new technologies like automation and artificial intelligence are changing many pharma companies across the globe. Indian pharmaceutical companies can also use these high-tech tools to increase the manufacturing and entire production cycle of medicines. Also, global collaborations and partnerships are essential for domestic pharma companies to

learn modern techniques to discover new drugs. Such teamwork will certainly open doors to innovative solutions and new markets.

**P Victor Selvaraj**

Pallapattanam, Tel

## Oil-palm farmers' plight

This refers to "Being self-reliant in edible oils" (August 21). Among oilseed cultivators, only palm-oil farmers are facing hardships in view of the crop pattern, which is long term and not easily reversible. Coconut farmers are much better placed. Unless the government recognises their plight and assures them substantial and long-term incentives, it is likely that oil-palm farmers may once and for all switch

over to other lucrative crops, since uprooting oil-palm trees is a herculean task and highly expensive.

**Rajiv Magesh**

Hoskote Village, Karnataka

## Career guidance vital

This refers to "Career guidance as a joint stakeholder programme" (August 22). Career guidance in schools is indispensable for shaping the human capital and economic future of any nation. India is not an exception to the rule. Drawing from my own experiences as a teacher, it is important that children are clear about their career choices when they complete their tenth standard. A student who doesn't have aptitude for science and mathematics should

not be made to pursue them. Any discipline has value in the job market provided the student approaches it with enthusiasm.

**S Ramakrishnaswamy**

Chennai

## Simplify IT process

This refers to "Sitharaman calls for simplifying tax notices, and faster refunds" (August 22). While earlier ITRs could be filed by oneself, it now requires professional help. The ITR-2 runs into about 34 pages and includes complex concepts like pass-through income. The tendency to frequently change tax slabs and rates must be eschewed.

**V Vijaykumar**

Pune



# Text & Context

THE HINDU

## NEWS IN NUMBERS

**Foreigners detected in FT in Assam from 1971 to 2014**

**47,928** In a written reply to a query by AGP MLA Ponakan Baruah, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said the Foreigners Tribunal (FT) detected the highest number of foreigners in Cachar. PTI

**Hydropower projects damaged due to flash floods in Himachal**

**14** Hydroelectric projects in Himachal Pradesh have suffered damage due to flash floods since July 25, with some being affected multiple times over the past 10 years. Experts are calling for disaster risk analyses to be conducted. PTI

**Number of Palestinians killed in Gaza since October 7**

**40,265** The toll includes 42 deaths in the previous 24 hours, according to the Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza. At least 93,144 people have been wounded in the Gaza Strip. AP

**People staying in relief camps due to heavy rains in Tripura**

**65,400** At least 12 people have died and two others went missing in Tripura following heavy rainfall in the past few days. Thousands have taken shelter at 450 relief camps in the State. PTI

**Decline in number of Indian students going to U.K. for studies**

**23** in per cent. The latest Home Office statistics revealed that Indians are beginning to show signs of being put off applying to U.K. universities amid greater migration curbs. PTI

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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## A look at ongoing Indian space missions

Over the past year, ISRO has made significant strides with several key missions: the Aditya L1 spacecraft began studying solar radiation from the earth-Sun Lagrange point, while the Gaganyaan TV-D1 mission successfully demonstrated crew safety systems

### FULL CONTEXT

Pradeep Mohandas

#### The story so far:

After a busy 2023, things have been quiet at Sriharikota, India's spaceport. But silence here doesn't mean India's space programme itself has been dormant. A lot has been happening since the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) successfully landed the lander of its Chandrayaan 3 mission, Vikram, on the surface of the moon. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has declared this date, August 23, India's National Space Day.

#### Highlights in the last year

**Aditya L1:** India followed its lunar success with the successful launch of its solar science mission Aditya-L1 on September 2, 2023. The launch was the easiest part of the mission, onboard ISRO's Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV). The spacecraft executed a series of manoeuvres to move into an orbit around the first earth-Sun Lagrange point (L1) on January 6, 2024. It completed its first orbit around L1 on July 2, 2024. It studied a solar storm in May 2024 together with observatories on the ground and spacecraft in lunar orbit.

**Gaganyaan TV-D1:** ISRO used a modified L-40 Vikas engine to build its Test Vehicle (TV) that it used to perform the first abort mission on October 21, 2023, as part of its 'Gaganyaan' human spaceflight mission. The mission demonstrated the ability of the Crew Escape System (CES) to separate from the TV, take the crew module to safety, and the crew module's ability to decelerate before splashing down in the Bay of Bengal. The crew module at the test's end was recovered by the Indian Navy vessel INS Shakti.

**XPoSat:** ISRO celebrated the new year with the launch of its X-ray Polarimeter Satellite (XPoSat) on January 1, 2024. The satellite will study how radiation from various celestial objects is polarised. It is the second such space-based observatory after NASA's Imaging X-ray Polarimetry Explorer (IPEX), launched in 2021. The two instruments on board XPoSat, called XSPECT and POLIX, began operating on January 5 and 10.

**INSAT-3DS:** ISRO launched the meteorological satellite INSAT-3DS on February 17 onboard a Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV). This mission was important to prove the vehicle's credibility before the critical NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar (NISAR) mission, now expected to launch in early 2025. This version of the GSLV had previously successfully launched the NVS-01 satellite in 2023.

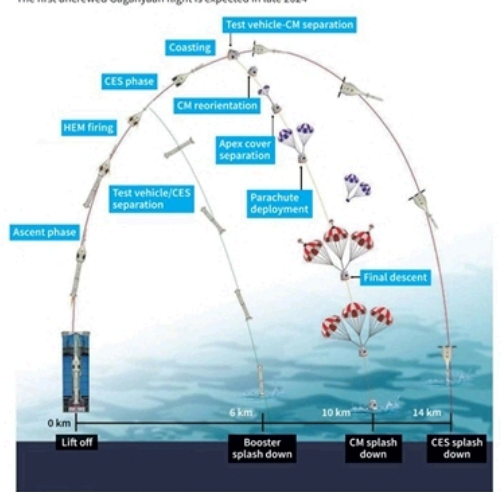
**RLV-TD:** ISRO used a downscale version of the Reusable Launch Vehicle, called Pushpak, to conduct two landing experiments - LEX-02 and LEX-03 - on March 22 and June 7 at its Aeronautical Testing Range in Challakere, Karnataka. The tests simulated landing conditions from space by dropping the Pushpak vehicle from a Chinook helicopter, in LEX-02 along its landing path and in LEX-03 500 metres to one side. Successes in these tests gave ISRO the confidence to move on to the 'Orbital Return Flight Experiment'.

**SSLV:** On August 16, ISRO launched the third and final development flight of the Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV), placing the EOS-08 and the SR-0 Demosat satellites in orbit. With two consecutively successful test flights, ISRO declared the SSLV's development complete and green-lit its transfer to industry. EOS-08 carried three payloads: one for earth observation in the infrared range, one to



Maiden test flight of Gaganyaan mission

The first uncrewed Gaganyaan flight is expected in late 2024



SOURCE: ISRO

demonstrate the use of reflections from a global satellite navigation system for earth observation, and one ultraviolet dosimeter and alarm to be tested ahead of their use in the Gaganyaan crew module.

#### ISRO roadmaps

After handing over operational responsibilities to NewSpace India, Ltd. (NSIL), ISRO has prioritised research. In December 2023, ISRO Chairman S. Somanath announced a 25-year roadmap until 2047 for Gaganyaan. It intersects with the lunar exploration roadmap in the form of an Indian landing on the moon by 2040. Mr. Somanath also shared a lunar exploration roadmap that includes - apart from a crewed lunar mission - a sample-return mission, a long-duration mission on the moon's surface, docking with NASA's Lunar Gateway (under the Artemis programme), and building moon habitats.

#### Gaganyaan

One of ISRO's primary focus areas of late

has been to train its astronaut-candidates, or Gaganyatris, for spaceflight.

Prime Minister Modi revealed the candidate's names on February 27: Wing Commander Shubhanshu Shukla and Group Captains Prashanth Nair, Ajit Krishnan, and Angad Pratap.

Earlier this month, Mr. Shukla and Mr. Nair travelled to the U.S. for advanced training ahead of a flight to the International Space Station (ISS). Mr. Shukla is likely to fly in this mission, with Mr. Nair as his designated backup. The mission will be conducted by Axiom Space, a private company, with inputs from NASA and using SpaceX's launch vehicle and crew capsule. The flight is scheduled for 2025.

ISRO has also planned at least four more abort tests using its Test Vehicle before the historic crewed flight. The first uncrewed Gaganyaan flight is expected in late 2024.

Mr. Somanath's roadmap also includes plans to build an Indian space station called the 'Bharatiya Antariksh Station'

(BAS) by 2035.

#### Next-generation Launch Vehicle

Since India is aspiring to both the BAS and a full-fledged lunar programme, it requires a new launch vehicle that can deliver heavier payloads per launch than its PSLV or GSLV rockets. This is set to be the Next Generation Launch Vehicle (NGLV).

ISRO set up a team led by S. Sivakumar that submitted a project report to the Union Cabinet in February with a request for funding and details of the NGLV, including manufacturing requirements.

ISRO has planned for NGLV to be a three-stage launch vehicle powered by a semi-cryogenic engine, a liquid engine, and a cryogenic engine. ISRO doesn't plan to continue the use of the GSLV once the NGLV is ready. The PSLV is already under production by a private consortium led by Larsen & Toubro and Hindustan Aeronautics, Ltd.

This said, ISRO is developing a semi-cryogenic engine for the LVM-3 rocket - another name for the GSLV Mk III - to enhance its launch capability. On May 2 and 21, it successfully tested the engine's pre-burner ignition test article.

#### NSIL missions

ISRO is focusing on research because NSIL has been tasked with conducting missions and chaperoning commercial activities. On May 1, ISRO transferred all commercial activities related to Indian Remote Sensing satellite data and products to NSIL.

NSIL signed an agreement with SpaceX to launch the GSAT-20/GSAT-N2 satellite. LVM-3 currently can't launch this 4,700-tonne machine. SpaceX is expected to launch it in August 2024.

On May 10, NSIL released a request for qualification for the production of LVM-3 through a public-private partnership and signed a dedicated launch service agreement with an Australian private space company to launch the SSLV.

#### Private space missions

Agnikul Cosmos successfully launched its SoRted-01 vehicle from its launch pad at the Satish Dhawan Space Center in Sriharikota on March 21. This was the first launch of a vehicle powered by a semi-cryogenic engine as its first stage from Indian soil.

Skyroot Aerospace is progressing towards the launch of its Vikram 1 rocket. It had previously pressure-tested solid-fuel engines between May and July 2024 and launched a test vehicle called Vikram S from Sriharikota on November 18, 2022.

Dhruva Space and Bellatrix Aerospace flew their experiments on the fourth and final stage of the PSLV-C58 mission on January 1.

#### IN-SPACE

In the last year, there have been several notable policy updates and licences issued by India's new space regulator, IN-SPACe. Most importantly, it released the 'Norms, Guidelines, and Procedures for Authorisation of Space Activities' on May 3.

It also granted the country's first satellite broadband licence to Eutelsat OneWeb on November 21, 2023, and the first licence for a ground station as a service to Dhruva Space on July 15.

Finally, on February 21, the Government of India amended its foreign direct investment (FDI) policy to allow 100% direct FDI in all space and spaceflight segments except for a 74% ceiling in satellite manufacturing and operations and 49% in launch infrastructure.

Pradeep Mohandas is a technical writer and space enthusiast in Pune

### THE GIST

ISRO made major progress with missions like Aditya L1 for solar research, Gaganyaan TV-D1 testing crew safety, and XPoSat for X-ray studies.

Successful launches and tests include the SSLV's final development flight, the INSAT-3DS meteorological satellite, and the RLV-TD landing experiments.

ISRO is focused on its 25-year roadmap for Gaganyaan, a new Next Generation Launch Vehicle, and the Bharatiya Antariksh Station by 2035.

NSIL manages commercial missions, and private companies like Agnikul Cosmos and Skyroot Aerospace are advancing their own space technologies.

New policies and licenses are boosting private sector participation and foreign investment in India's space sector.



## CONTRAPUNTO

How's bringing an asteroid back to Earth space exploration? It's now turned into a planetary defence exercise, at the cost of outward exploration

—BUZZ ALDRIN

## Back To Politics

No party seems in pole position in J&K. Expect much intrigue post-poll, and fragile coalitions

In their brief press briefing yesterday, on their first visit to J&K after polls were announced, Congress chief Kharge and parliamentary Lok Rahul Gandhi were markedly short. The two captured the tightlippedness, and jitters, expected in the run-up to the J&K elections that start Sep 18. Rahul's casual comment that Congress had expected statehood would be restored before elections was no passing remark. Soon after revoking Article 370, BJP had said it would restore statehood at the right time. But in the 10 years since the last assembly polls, what elections mean, and what J&K reclaiming statehood can mean, have changed.

**On elections** | Since 2014, both J&K's state parties Mehbooba Mufti's PDP and the Abdullahs' NC stand whittled. Neither, as of now, has the influence to single-handedly swing any meaningful haul of seats to the 90-seat assembly. In 2014, PDP formed govt with BJP. PDP's now losing footing fighting both NC and BJP. NC has cadres, but sort of waffles on its politics — its manifesto makes the meaningless promise of restoration of Article 370. When Sajad Lone and Altaf Bukhari don't see major political damage in hobnobbing with BJP, it can be assumed NC here is barking up the wrong chinar.

Coming to BJP, while it remains unpopular in the Valley it has retained its hold on Jammu. Upshot: BJP's base is firm in Jammu, but vote shares in Kashmir are scattered between a number of hyper-local parties, including UAPA-accused Engineer Rashid's. His shock win in Baramulla LS seat (he took 15 of 18 assembly segments) was an example of politicians with separatist tendencies embracing democratic processes — a poster child for 'ballot-over-bullet'. But this win equally captured the deep disaffection among the people.

**On statehood** | It is almost certain no single party will have a majority of 46 seats. No matter what govt gets cobbled together, it will be in a J&K that is a UT with a legislature. In July, MHA amended J&K's Transaction of Business Rules to enhance LG's powers, giving him final say in all matters related to police, public order, transfers and postings. BJP reckons it's going to be a win-win, whether it calls the shots in the new legislature or not. But LG vs new govt battles are likely. Fragile alliances built on political compulsions are the order of the day in J&K. Rahul's comment — it's a tough time for J&K — could apply to political parties as well.

## Price Of Intervention

Regulators can look at pricing. But be careful of creating market disruption

Commerce minister Piyush Goyal's criticism of multinational e-commerce players for "predatory pricing", which he argued damages mom-and-pop players and small retailers, revives an old debate in this country. It's true e-commerce giants have been accused of such tactics even in developed economies. But underlying this issue is a more fundamental one. Market economies are governed by demand and supply and pricing is best left to the interplay of those forces. And govt and regulators must be very cautious about intervening in pricing mechanisms. Global and local experience suggests that price controls can lead to shortages, inferior product quality and illegal markets. Price interventions may have good intentions but they often result in bad outcomes, as a World Bank paper said.

**Markets need free play** | There are also several benefits of a market mechanism to consider here. For instance, the e-commerce boom has not just been a boon for consumers but also helped with formalisation and digitalisation of economy and generated more than, by one estimate, 15mn jobs. In the telecom sector, it's the entry of an Indian behemoth with aggressive pricing in 2016 that led to a fall in tariffs and data revolution in India. The sector, which has seen tariffs rise again, is also proof that beating competition with such a strategy has its limits. Fact is no company can indefinitely keep suffering losses to gain market share.

**Regulate but with caution** | Besides, what's the line that separates competitive pricing from predatory or over pricing? We need very sound and efficient regulatory systems to make such distinctions and balance market sanctity with ensuring a sector doesn't turn into a monopoly. There will certainly be cases where regulators need to step in. Take for instance, the issue of surge pricing by taxi aggregators. There must be a ceiling on what passengers shell out in rush hour. But such interventions must be kept to a minimum. Concern for investment, growth, and job creation is also why formulation of India's e-commerce policy has seen long delays. Create no major market disruption, must be the mantra.



SUPPLY DEMAND

## Are you a have-yacht?

Some have sea legs and some get seasick

Bikram Vohra



I bet your friend doesn't have an 80ft yacht. Mine does. Sleek and super stylish. He invited me on a deep sea fishing trip, so all ye mates, ahoy there, looking like a cross between Morgan the pirate and Johnny Depp, this young salt fetched up at the pier singing yo ho ho and with a bottle of rum, anchors away, old pier awaits, batten the hatches, shiver me timbers and all hands on deck.

The thing about boats is you cannot get off them. As the shore recedes like a shy bride the songs of the seas die on the lips. The difference is my friend and his crew have sea legs and I don't. Half an hour into the trip the waters are choppy enough to jump-start the windmills in your tummy. This is known as the onset of *mal de mer* and the churning is made worse by all these sailor types eating rich, greasy food while you are considering swimming to the shore might be a decent option...anything would be compared to draping yourself over the railing and moaning softly.

As misery does a dance on you a fish is caught and then another one and now they decide to fry the catch and this sends the only seasick wretch back to the balcony. Not feeling too good, says my friend, master of the observant. Too good? Are you kidding? I am green at the gills, my stomach is doing Fosbury Ploos, nausea is an orchestra within and *terra firma* is a distant dream. If I had a gun I would give it wrapped in ribbons just to stand on land again. By now the others are singing and just the sound of laughter stages a mutiny in my gut.

Nice calm sea today, says my friend, knocking back an onion redolent sandwich, we are in luck, sometimes the waves get really rough, there is this groundswell. Look at him in horror as the whole digestive system goes into a trapdoor act.

## Consumer India's Amma Jaans

Large e-commerce platforms haven't played out in India quite like in the West. Here, they have empowered both small consumers and small suppliers. This is an inclusive growth story

Rama Bijapurkar



All modern market economies have regulations to define the rules of the marketplace, and put checks and balances on players, especially big players. Commerce and industry minister Piyush Goyal's criticism of large e-commerce players' practices, including "predatory pricing", should be seen in this context.

● First, consumers' well-being is central to many of the rules. They prohibit 'unfair trade practices' or 'abuse of dominance' or mergers or price cartels or any behaviour that destroys competitors, weakens competition and creates monopolies — all of which, as we know from pre-1980, are really bad for consumers. Such protection of consumers and competition is, of course, welcome. Plus, such rules apply to everyone, regardless of corporate nationality.

● Second, antitrust issues pitting regulators against big business players have been increasing the world over, with big businesses accused of exploiting their power and hurting vendors and consumers. The US Federal Trade Commission and 17 US states have filed a lawsuit against Amazon's conduct, where it is accused of abusing its dominant position, to keep prices high and quality low, limit competition and depress innovation.

● Third, the opposite has happened in India. Indeed, before deciding how to deal with Amazon, we need to assess what its entry has done for consumers, small suppliers and the future of competition in India. Like everything else in our country, there are many truths and perspectives, all true and valid, which need to be weighed carefully rather than blindly following the West.

**Why Indian consumers embraced Amazon** | With Amazon, Consumer India has got, and embraced, access to huge variety of goods made in India (besides imports), lower prices, ease of buying, and service like never before. Earlier,

you could not return even a defective item, leave alone something you didn't like.

● No, Consumer India is not being forced to buy pasta or hot pants instead of sunbar powder or saris — it is being given the courtesy of choice. Varieties of packaged good dung are available if you are ritually inclined and black rice at your doorstep if you are a homesick, young, shopgirl from Meghalaya in Bengaluru.

● Modest income consumers love the status-blind service that e-commerce gives. Live in a slum and you get the same

wages — by providing price discovery and benchmarks.

**How Indian kiranas stood up to Amazon** | What of competitors getting decimated and Amazon becoming the last man standing? One argument is that when we have seen predatory pricing in other categories like telecom, we have been sanguine. But beyond this, there is more solid and nuanced evidence of market dynamics to consider.

● Small shops will continue to do



speed of delivery, price discounts and ability to return as if you live in a big condo. Humans discriminate, digital platforms don't.

● A WhatsApp University joke sums up Consumer India's relationship with Amazon — the husband asks the wife to buy X, Y and Z and each time she says "Amma-Jaane-pooch", Annoyed, he asks, "Why bring my mother into everything?" It turns out she means, "Amazon".

● Amazon prices have disciplined many a high street, small electronics shop to reduce prices the same way Naga forced many a rural employer to raise

well because Consumer India's behaviour is never "either-or" but is "and". Consumer India searches in small physical shops and buys on Amazon (many of the small garment shops, by the way, neither have a trial room nor do they allow returns) or researches thoroughly on Amazon and buys from the neighbourhood store to ensure easy, related services.

● Kirana won effortlessly over physical modern retail by providing personalised value, and India has the largest number of vibrant small shops in the world. Quick commerce of Dunzo

## Without Funds, Innovators Are Grounded In Space

Thought for National Space Day: GOI's proposed ₹1k cr for space startups is too little to make a difference for India in a complex global market

Chethan Kumar@timesofindia.com



On National Space Day today, India marks its historic landing on the moon of Chandrayaan-3 on the Moon exactly a year ago on Aug 23. It was a milestone that not only catapulted India into an elite group of lunar-landing nations but also reignited public interest for space exploration. The journey to the Moon has a history of over six decades. While Isro has long been lauded for its capacity to carry out intricate missions with budgets incomparable with top space-faring nations, given the competitive landscape that is Space, GOI will have to revisit its criteria for annual budgetary allocations.

Space is no longer restricted to govt agencies. Private players, global entities, are vying for supremacy in areas ranging from lunar exploration to missions, from satellite constellations to space tourism.

**Moolah matrix** | Current levels of funding pale in comparison to investments by space-faring nations. China, for instance, spends seven times more than India on its space programme, while US, Japan, France, and Russia all outspend India significantly. Consider budget allocations in recent years: Department of Space has got ₹15k cr for 2024-25, up from revised estimate of ₹11k cr in 2023-24, which was down from more than ₹12k cr allocated in budget estimates. In 2022-23, it got ₹10k cr.

This year, GOI's proposed a ₹1k cr fund for startups. The sector requires significant capital investment, and this fund is grossly inadequate to meet financial needs of startups. Given that this money — if all of it is disbursed by the end of this fiscal — would reach tens of startups, only means no firm will receive any substantial amount.

The disparity in funding becomes even more glaring when we consider the ambitious projects Isro

has lined up. From human spaceflight programme Gaganyaan to a potential space station and a reusable new-gen rocket, Isro's to-do list is both extensive and exciting. Notwithstanding the fact that Isro gets indivisible dual funding for big missions, the absence of substantial increase in funding could lead to restricted R&D and IP creation — Isro's future mandate.

GOI should remember space sector's importance extends far beyond scientific curiosity. Space tech plays a crucial role in areas of climate monitoring,



disaster management, agriculture, telecommunications, and national security among others. India aims to leverage space capabilities for societal benefits and strategic purposes. A well-funded sector will have far-reaching consequences for the nation's development and security.

**IT-like boom a pipe dream** | GOI's initiative to open up space sector to private participation was a step in the right direction. However, Indian private sector is in its

infancy and requires significant support to flourish. More than four years after India opened the sector, growth has remained slow in the absence of real big-ticket domestic investments.

One of the key hurdles has been low GOI spend. Recent relaxations in FDI norms will take time to produce results, leaving Indian space startups and companies reliant on venture capitalists and other private investors. But this funding source comes with its own challenges — investors typically seek quicker returns in a sector known for its long gestation periods.

Industry's hope for a transformation similar to the 1990s IT boom could well be a pipe dream. The IT sector benefited from relatively low entry barriers and rapid scalability. But space industry has different complexities. Space ventures are high-risk, alongside challenges of meeting stringent regulatory requirements and need for specialised infra.

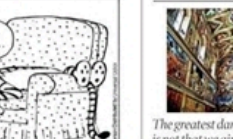
Space sector demands a unique blend of advanced tech, skilled workforce, and long-term strategic planning. These contribute to slowing the pace of development when compared to other tech-driven industries.

**Multi-pronged approach** | For India to realise its potential, GOI has to start with a significant increase in funding. This shouldn't only bolster Isro's capabilities but also support private companies via grants, subsidies, or preferential contracts.

Secondly, Isro must continue to evolve its role, focusing more on cutting-edge research, development of future tech, and big-ticket science missions, while simultaneously playing enabler for the private sector, sharing expertise, facilities, and tech — some of this is already happening — to help Indian companies compete globally.

Thirdly, initiatives like IN-SPACE need to be empowered and resourced adequately to bridge the gap between Isro and private industry — facilitate tech transfers, technical guidance, and help Indian firms navigate the complex global space market steadily.

## Calvin &amp; Hobbes



Sumit Paul

We are great lovers of beauty, seeing it in the people, places and things around us while completely missing it in ourselves. Some of us feel that it is vain to consider our appearance too much, or we may find that when we look at ourselves, all we see are imperfections. Sometimes, we see our beauty in a shallow way, noticing how well we are conforming to social norms but failing to see the deeper beauty that shines out from within.

If we simply appreciate how beautiful we are, we free up so much energy. We also become less dependent upon the opinions and feedback of others since we become our own greatest admirers. Often, after a great

yog practice or a long, deep meditation, we are more able to see how beautiful we are with our own beauty. We can surround ourselves with images. The best way, though, is to look keeping deeply into our own souls.

Is loving oneself selfishness? Is self-love demeaning? It never is. We are capable of loving others when we learn to love ourselves. Charity begins at home. Love also begins at home and it blossoms through self-love. If the key to wisdom is to know thyself, the essence of universal love lies in loving oneself. It

is not narcissism. It is the sublimation of love burgeoning from one's own self.

The whole world that we get to see and feel is our own reflection. It is our manifestation. All its creations are our extensions. Adi Shankara says, Jagat sva adhyaj abraham — the world is our realisation. To love oneself is to know oneself. It is the beginning of a deeper wisdom that we all have negative as well as positive facets and features. If we can love ourselves so deeply despite our imperfections, why can't we extend the same love to others who also have the same negative as well as positive qualities? Self-love is not ego. It is the seed of the tree of love. A tree will have

no existence without a seed, which is in oneself.

Universal love remains in books and ideas until one is in love with oneself. When the Buddha was in a deep samadhi, contemplation, to attain enlightenment, he did not care for his body. One farmer advised him to love his own body because self-preservation leads to higher realisation. The Buddha realised his mistake and first preserved his body for the ultimate wisdom.

We have wildflowers in our backyard, but we go to the garden to appreciate exotic flowers. Why not admire those flowers in our backyard that have blossomed on their own? Similarly, love that has always existed in our hearts must be acknowledged before loving the world. Universal love begins with self-love.



SMILE



The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Unsafe women

Laws, guidelines must be implemented effectively

THE Kolkata rape-murder has glaringly shown how unsafe and vulnerable working women are. Twenty-seven years after it acknowledged sexual harassment at the workplace as a human rights violation and issued the Vishaka Guidelines, the Supreme Court has directed the Centre and the states to take urgent steps to institutionalise the safety of workers. A National Task Force, set up in compliance with the apex court's directive, has been tasked with formulating effective recommendations relating to the safety, working conditions and wellbeing of medical professionals. It is hoped that these recommendations — if they indeed prove to be effective — will have a bearing on the security of women in any profession. For that to happen, all stakeholders must be on the same page.

While charting a new action plan, there is a dire need to assess how far the existing laws and guidelines have succeeded in bringing about a difference on the ground. The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, was enacted as an extension of the Vishaka Guidelines with the primary aim of ensuring safe working spaces for women. Last year, the Supreme Court flagged 'serious lapses' and 'uncertainty' regarding the implementation of this Act.

The Nirbhaya Fund, set up by the Union Government to implement initiatives and schemes for enhancing the safety and security of women, has often been in the news for the wrong reasons — money being under-utilised or misused. Over the past nine years, nearly 76 per cent of the allocated funds have been spent by various states and union territories, but there has been a drop of only 9 per cent in the number of rape cases reported across India. These sobering facts should be borne in mind while undertaking any new initiative. Women's safety and their greater participation in the workforce will remain elusive unless stringent action is taken not only against the offenders but also the authorities guilty of dereliction of duty.

Ram Madhav returns

J&K polls a challenging assignment

IN the last Assembly elections held in Jammu and Kashmir in 2014, the Bharatiya Janata Party won 25 seats, more than double the 11 it got in 2008. With a three-seat lead, Peoples Democratic Party patriarch Mufti Mohammad Sayeed became the Chief Minister, but the man of the moment was Ram Madhav. The RSS's poster boy was credited with the BJP's electoral success and for engineering an alliance with the PDP Out of favour for nearly five years, Madhav's induction as BJP's election incharge in the UT, along with Union minister G Kishan Reddy, marks an end to his political hiatus. Madhav is back in familiar territory — but with a vastly altered political, geographical and electoral landscape. The abrogation of Article 370, bifurcation of the state into UTs and the delimitation exercise have changed the dynamics. The BJP may fancy its chances with the Jammu division gaining seats in the redrawn electoral map, but the new assignment, and at such short notice, will test Madhav's skills.

Madhav's return is being attributed to the RSS asserting itself and the BJP being pragmatic. His recent opinion piece, suggesting that the 2024 Lok Sabha election result was a mandate for humility, is a sign of the times. A pushback is apparent against the BJP's perceived brand of politics that reeks of arrogance, with no room for accommodating contrary views. Madhav has a point to prove on a personal level, and his experience in building bridges with the unlikelyst of candidates could come in handy for the party.

J&K has been without an elected government since 2018. The restoration of the democratic process through three-phase elections provides an opportunity to all political parties to let people's issues take centre stage. What the UT deserves is a campaign that offers hope.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

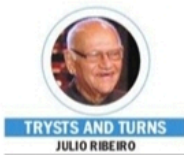
LAHORE, SATURDAY, AUGUST 23, 1924

Lord Lytton's remarks

THE great demonstration held in Calcutta on Tuesday to protest against Lord Lytton's remarks about Indian women in a recent Dacca speech shows more clearly than anything else could have done the depth, intensity and universality of the feeling of indignation which those remarks have caused. The demonstration was originally intended to be held in the Town Hall which, two decades ago, had witnessed a similar gathering in connection with a similarly offensive speech by a more exalted authority, but could not be held there owing to the immensity of the crowd. As many as four meetings had to be held in the Calcutta Maidan to give suitable expression to India's feeling in the matter. These meetings were appropriately presided over by Sarojini Naidu, perhaps the most gifted and distinguished member of the gender specially affected by Lord Lytton's remarks, while among those who took part in it were not only the leaders of Bengal but all India leaders like Pandit Motilal Nehru, Sir PC Roy and Mr CR Das. Some of the speeches made on the occasion were as strong as any ever made in this country in connection with a similar matter. Naidu, in particular, rose to the pitch of animated indignation and, while condemning Lord Lytton's speech in the most vehement language she could find, called upon his Lordship in the name of the womanhood of the world and of his own mother, sister and wife to take back his words. How strongly she felt on the subject is shown by the fact that she was prepared even to do without the Reforms rather than that Indian womanhood should be slandered with impunity by a Briton, howsoever high may be the position he holds.

Political patronage emboldens offenders

Laws on sexual misconduct should be uniformly and firmly enforced across the country



TRYSTS AND TURNS  
JULIO RIBEIRO

MANAMA Banejee, West Bengal Chief Minister and the feisty boss of the Trinamool Congress (TMC), is squarely on the back foot today. Is this the beginning of the end for this born fighter? If so, the BJP will have succeeded where Bengal-based parties have failed. The BJP is cashing in on Manama's many mistakes in dealing with the rape-murder of a trainee doctor at RG Kar Medical College and Hospital in Kolkata to turn even some of her own party workers and supporters against her.

The doctor was shamelessly brutalised at her workplace. It almost seems that young men are on the prowl looking for opportunities to rape and kill their chosen victims. There is a loud call from some stringent laws. The question to ask is: Is the Indian state truly concerned about these girls of ours or is it led by men who believe, like Mulayam Singh Yadav, the late Samajwadi Party leader, that "boys will be boys"?

Why are boys not boys in every state of the Indian Union or in other countries of the world? The answer to this question should guide those in power to take remedial measures. Much depends on the political will to combat the menace of sexual pervers running amok. The solution does not involve formulating new laws but ensuring that existing laws on sexual misconduct are uniformly and firmly enforced.

With regard to the Kolkata case, the insidious practice of appointing 'civic volunteers' in government-run hospitals



SETBACK: Some of Manama Banejee's own party workers and supporters are turning against her.

should be immediately discontinued. These workers are chosen from among the ruling party's supporters without proper verification of their antecedents, habits and proclivities. Lumpen elements who constitute the stormtroopers of every political party are allowed to slip in. The 'carte blanche' given to them to roam around in hospitals, 'helping' patients secure beds and medical attention, has led to this sad occurrence.

Regularly recruited social workers who train students for their social work should replace these 'civic volunteers', whose main job is to extract 'speed money' from patients in distress. All indications point to the sharing of the proceeds of corruption with those who have helped them secure unofficial employment.

This menace is not exclusive to Bengal or to one political party. In Gujarat, I learnt that besides teachers recruited from amongst the ideologically aligned people,

With regard to the Kolkata case, the insidious practice of appointing 'civic volunteers' in govt-run hospitals should be discontinued.

the ranks of the Home Guards were chosen from the same partisan source. The Home Guards are often sent to assist the police in law and order or traffic regulation. If such recruitment of untrained men and women is not discontinued, incidents like the one that has hit Kolkata in its solar plexus will multiply.

Another very urgent remedy to reduce cases of sexual misconduct is to send out a clear message to potential offenders that they can expect no mercy

from parties in power. They will be caught by the police and sentenced by the courts. At present, there is a very wrong message being circulated that if you support or help the party in power, your time in jail will be curtailed by the easily obtained parole and even jail sentences can be prematurely terminated.

Gummet Ram Rahim, a self-styled godman with a large following in Haryana, was convicted of two rapes and a murder. He was released on parole for long periods coinciding with the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections. That may have helped the ruling party get a few more votes, but it encouraged sexual offenders to go ahead with satisfying their lust.

Similarly, the dozen or so men convicted in Gujarat for rape and murder during the 2002 riots were released prematurely, thereby sending out a clear message that a partisan government would not stop aiding and abetting such offenders as long as they are the party's support-

ers. The Calcutta High Court fortunately intervened when the TMC was more than kind to the medical college principal, who appeared to have shut his eyes to the unlawful activities of the 'civic volunteers'. The principal should have been given a punishment posting but instead was sent to a bigger and better hospital before the court stepped in. That error of judgment was widely interpreted as an indication of the TMC's support for what was a radically evil in the hospital management.

These instances of an anti-women attitude of parties in power in order to bolster their political fortunes is what contributes to the general disrespect for womanhood and, further, disrespect for the law itself. Unless public pressure is built on all parties to desist from showing mercy to sexual offenders, the menace will continue to haunt the national conscience.

Mulayam's adage that "boys will be boys" is presently the reigning philosophy in our land. It is fortunate that educated women have revolted against this philosophy. It took the BJP leadership quite a long time to sideline Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, a party MP who doubled as the president of the Wrestling Federation of India. He was a serial offender who ran several educational institutions in and around his home town. He commanded votes in more than three Lok Sabha constituencies. And that mattered more to the BJP than all the slogans that placed women on a pedestal and that were glibly repeated day in, day out by the party's eminent leaders.

If action had been taken earlier against Brij Bhushan, Vinesh Phogat would not have missed the trials for the Olympic wrestling slot in her preferred weight category. And we would not have had to approach the Court of Arbitration for Sport, begging for rules to be changed!

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Men are more easily governed through their vices than through their virtues — Napoleon Bonaparte

Learning one lesson after another

LT GEN RAJ SOJLANA (RETD)

HALF a century ago, on my first posting to Ladakh, I arrived by the Air Force AN-12 courier flight. As I stepped on the tarmac of the Leh airfield, the chilly morning wind hit us, but its freshness, sans pollution, was distinct. However, I did not realise the low level of oxygen in the atmosphere. On being received, we were cautioned about the precautions to be observed, but the exuberance and fiery blood of youth failed to give these necessities due importance.

Come sundown, oblivious of the warnings, I walked to the officers' mess and asked for a rum and Coke (a popular drink then). An officer from the medical corps intervened: "What did you ask for, young man?" Smilingly, I replied, "Rum and Coke, Sir!"

"No way. No booze for a minimum three days!" he said. He then gave me my first lesson of this posting. "In the land of Lama, don't be Gama," referring to the champion wrestler. The lesson hit home and there I sat through three evenings, sipping insipid, pure Coke!

Over time, I learnt many lessons which held me in good stead, and I never hesitated to pass these on during my service or even later in life. A few months back, during a morning walk, my ears caught the sound of a trumpet; the same note was being repeated. I spotted a boy, his legs akimbo, on the first floor of an incomplete building. Intrigued, I walked up to him and asked him his name and whether he was practising all by himself? He replied, "Uncleji, I am Rahul. I am learning the trumpet from an untal, who has told me to master one note at a time before he tells me about the next to ensure that I become an efficient trumpeter; then, I can join a band!" Weeks went by. My ears stood up as I heard him progressing. Soon, it was the complete "Sa Re Ga Ma..." one way and then in the reverse order! I decided to motivate him. I downloaded a short clip of renowned trumpeter and vocalist Louis Armstrong and played it for him. I told him that he should aim to become like the legend. Now, whenever I interact with him, he says, "Armstrong ban-na hai!" Pray he does.

Another morning, I observed a woman shuffling along a field collecting wheat grains that routinely dropped off in the fields during harvesting; a girl was skipping behind her. Suddenly, a red-wattled lapwing flew off, evidently disturbed. The bird's call was clearly angry; top it in Dr Salim Ali's words. Did he do it? Pity to do it. The girl must have observed the lapwing take off; she rushed to her mother, picked a handful from the laboriously collected grains and rushed to place them near the bird's nest. The surprised mother smiled and patted her child. Here was humanity at its best, despite their poverty. Their largesse for the lapwing flowed me. It was another lesson to learn. I wonder how many of us would make a similar gesture to a fellow human, leave aside birds?

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Overcoming research barriers

With reference to the article 'Unease of doing research in India', it highlights the severe financial and bureaucratic challenges facing the country's leading research institutions. Rising costs and inadequate funding are increasingly impeding scientific progress. Policy changes, including GST hikes, bureaucratic delays and tax complications, are hindering research, potentially stalling an already underfunded research environment. It not only slows down scientific advancement but also drives talented researchers to seek opportunities abroad, worsening the brain drain. With countries like China significantly surpassing us in R&D investment, these challenges jeopardise our ambition to become a global innovation hub.

K KUMAR, PANCHKULA

Punishment after 32 years

Apropos of the editorial '32 years later', the Aimer rape case happened in 1992 and the court decision was delivered in 2024. The question is what is the meaning of the punishment after 32 years have elapsed since the crime was committed. When more than half of the lives of the offenders have passed, many girls have died by suicide. Is the legal system of India so weak that it took three decades to give justice to the victims who underwent pain and mental trauma all these years. Will it take a similar amount of time for the family of the Kolkata rape-murder victim to get justice?

RAMANDEEP, JALANDHAR

Make legal process time-bound

Refer to the editorial '32 years later'; it is the need of the hour to make the legal process and procedure time-bound. Sometimes, the trial courts dispose of such cases expeditiously, but the appellate courts remain sitting on the appeals for years together. In some cases, even after the top court confirms the death sentence, it takes years and years for the President to dispose of mercy petitions. Needless to say, the prompt execution of a death sentence in gruesome cases of rape and murder can be a game-changer to curb the burgeoning menace.

MD SHARMA, SHIMLA

Safety of industrial workers

With reference to the news report '13 killed, 33 injured in reactor blast at Andhra Pharma unit', it has once again brought into focus the safety of industrial workers. It appears the officials of the Factories Department and AP Pollution Control Board were not conducting regular inspections to ensure the implementation of safety parameters. The management of the factories must not compromise the safety of workers and must follow all guidelines and procedures to run high-risk equipment. The concerned government departments must ensure that factories adopt all the norms in earnest.

SANJAY CHOPRA, MOHALI

Prevent loopholes in system

Apropos of the news report 'Doctors move Supreme Court, want advisory role in NTF', before formulating protocols for all hospitals by the National Task Force, no stone should be left unturned to prevent any loophole in the system that the violators can use to their advantage. The Federation of All India Medical Association approaching the SC for including recommendations of young doctors in formulating guidelines for their protection is the correct plea as it would depict real-time problems with suggested solutions coming directly from the horse's mouth. Safe working conditions and wellbeing of medical professionals need an overhaul with the use of modern technology like CCTV cameras, gated entrances to girls' hostels, proper lighting in lonely places, clean and separate washrooms, etc.

COL RS NARULA (RETD), PATIALA

Tackling food adulteration

Refer to the editorial 'Milk alarm'; weak enforcement and a low conviction rate are emboldening offenders to perpetrate food adulteration. Moreover, while many Indian consumers are increasingly aware of food safety issues, some still view adulteration as inevitable. There must be a concerted effort to bolster regulatory frameworks, increase inspections and increase public awareness. Educational campaigns and stricter penalties for violators are essential to ensure food safety and safeguard public health in India.

AMARJEET MANN, UNA



# Need to look beyond identities to remove inequalities



**SURINDER S JODHKA**  
PROFESSOR, CENTRE FOR  
STUDY OF SOCIAL SYSTEMS, JNU

THE Supreme Court judgment validating the sub-classification of Scheduled Castes (SCs) for reservation has touched upon many contentious issues. Besides creating a ground for significant shifts in the reservation policy, it raises questions about the changing nature of caste and how the state policy should deal with it. As expected, the judgment has divided Dalit activists and political parties. The relatively more vocal and visible sections among the SCs have come out in opposition to the judgment.

Those from smaller and more marginalised sections, who have been seeking sub-classification, have been less visible in the media space.

The judgment has come at a time when a section of the mainstream political class is aggressively campaigning for the need to enumerate the caste-wise socio-economic status of the Indian population. This, they are arguing, would help the country generate data on the levels of 'backwardness' among the less privileged social groups/castes. If the data shows that large sections of the people (read caste

communities) are not represented in the political system, or institutions such as the bureaucracy and the media, policies could be made to make the country a more equal and representative society.

While the enumeration narrative mostly targets the OBCs (other backward classes), the apex court judgment raises questions about the category of SCs, the need to recognise internal differences among them and classify them into sub-categories for a more just distribution of the existing quotas for them. The judgment has also underlined the critical need for empirically verifiable data on the current nature of the socio-economic status of communities within the SC category. It is only after ascertaining such facts through hard data that the state can introduce quotas within quotas.

Interestingly, many of those who oppose the SC sub-classification judgment have been supporters of a caste-based census for ascertaining the status of OBCs. The case of SC reservations, they would argue, is different from that of OBCs. The OBCs have not been victims of untouchability and absolute exclusion. The economically well-off among them do not experience the kind of prejudice that a mobile SC is likely to encounter even after achieving a significant degree of economic success. The SCs, they would argue, were put together and classified as



UPROAR: The relatively more vocal SC groups have opposed the Supreme Court judgment. PH

such because of their shared experience of having been treated as untouchables by mainstream Hindu society. Their inclusion in the SC list thus makes them a 'homogeneous class'. Such a position has also been ascertained by earlier court judgments on sub-classification.

The history of SC enumeration and the provision for earmarking quotas for them goes back to the early years of the 20th century. The introduction of a population census by the British rulers in the latter half of the 19th century was an important turning point in the history of the Indian caste system. It changed the way caste had been imagined. From a local system of jatis and their sub-units, it became possible to speak of caste communities at the pan-Indian level. This also paved a way for the identification of the most marginalised among them and their classification into a separate category of 'depressed classes'. Being classified so also made a case for giving them special attention.

The SC judgment has underlined the critical need for empirically verifiable data based on which states can introduce quotas within quotas.

Some native rulers, too, played an active role in these welfare policies. The reservation policy was introduced by Shahu Maharaj, the ruler of Kolhapur, in 1902. The process continued to gain momentum and by the time India achieved Independence, there was a near consensus that the country needed to make special provisions for the uplift of those who had suffered untouchability and exclusion

for centuries. BR Ambedkar's presence in the Constituent Assembly as the Chair of the drafting committee ensured that they got a fair deal in the form of reservations.

India's reservation policy has been one of the most successful state programmes of affirmative action in the modern world. It enabled the untouchables to go to schools, colleges and universities for education and get employed in the state sector at all levels. It also made it possible for them to get members of their caste elected to state assemblies and Parliament. Over the years, it also produced a Dalit middle class, which articulates their anxieties and aspirations, from within.

Being together in the SC list, they also gained in numerical strength. As SCs they made up for a substantial proportion; in some states even more than a quarter of the total population. Numbers matter a great deal in electoral democracy. Leaders like Kanshi Ram were successful only because they were able to make their constituents realise the value of their working together as a political bloc. However, their being together in the SC list has not resulted in a melting of their jati identities. Categories like Dalit have acquired a national-level resonance, but in their everyday life, they remain divided. Their kinships are strictly limited to their jati-bhavadari.

Every state of the Indian Union has a separate set of communities listed as SCs. It is likely that their sub-classification into separate blocks could weaken their political strength and ability to lobby with the state in support of the reservation action. It is also true that the mobility experienced by an individual from an SC caste through the quota system does not end social prejudice against the community of the beneficiary. It is in this context that it makes no sense to invoke the idea of a 'creamy layer' in the case of the SCs, and should not be considered for state policy.

However, we must also recognise that the demand for sub-classification has been raised from within, by those sections of the SC communities who have not been fairly represented in the quota jobs. There is a good amount of empirical evidence to support such a claim, making their demand appear legitimate.

Though a part of the Constitution, the SCs have not been a fixed or closed category. Many communities have been added to the list over the years. For example, in 1961, Punjab had 27 castes listed as SCs. Currently, their number is 39. The same is the case with many other states, and even with the lists of Scheduled Tribes.

If justice and *ahimsa* *daridrah* are the objectives of the reservation system, the sub-classification proposal cannot be denied. If the objective is to make citizens out of those caught in entrenched inequalities, the policies of a democratic/welfare state ought to be driven by data and evidence, and not by identities alone.

# Why delivery of justice is difficult in India



**BIL VOHRA**  
FORMER DGP, MANIPUR  
AND TRIPURA

THE rape-murder of a young trainee doctor at RG Kar Medical College and Hospital in Kolkata has led to a justified hue and cry not just in West Bengal but across the nation. The ruling party in the state and the police are being blamed for not acting fast enough in investigating this horrific crime. The ruling dispensation at the Centre is blaming the state government and vice-versa. A political blame game is going on in which the police are being treated like a football. And now that the case has been transferred to the CBI under considerable public pressure, the ruling party in the state is demanding the conclusion of the investigation within a matter of days. In a bid to save the party from political harm, its members took to the streets to demand death penalty for the accused.

The Supreme Court has made scathing observations after taking suo motu cognisance of the Kolkata rape-murder case. It has sent a notice to the state government, set up a task force for recommending security at hospitals and suggested some other measures.

Kolkata witnessed more trouble on Sunday after a Durand Cup football match between Mohun Bagan and East Bengal at Salt Lake Stadium was cancelled due to the non-availability of police personnel in view of the serious law and order situation elsewhere in the city. This led to protests by the young crowd. A lathi-charge ensued and many protesters were arrested.

The molestation of two schoolgirls at Badlapur in Maharashtra has added to the nationwide disgust. Appalling crimes and political mudslinging are nothing new in our country. These have been happening for years and will continue to happen, as nobody wants to cure the disease, but only treating the symptoms. The disease is that in the states, the police have become the private army of the political party in power as they are accountable to the executive under the Police Act, 1861 — that



SUBSERVIENT FORCE: The police have become the private army of the political party in power. PH

means being accountable to the leaders of the ruling party. It goes without saying that all political parties are more than happy exercising this control over the police. This is true of all states and of all parties in India across the board. That's why there is no justice for the ordinary citizen as the police mostly act as per the directions of the party, especially when it comes to high-profile crimes. Action is taken depending upon the interests of the ruling party. Of course, the police lead-

The new criminal laws have many lacunae. The sad part is that police officers, lawyers and judges who deal with criminal cases have not been consulted.

ership is also to be blamed for not doing its job efficiently and quite a bit of it is also compromised unfortunately due to corruption and career interests, due to which many policemen join hands with politicians, primarily because the latter can reward and harm them in many ways.

We are still stuck with the 1861 Act. Once the police are made accountable to the law and Parliament, the situation will improve drastically. The force will function independently in accordance with the law without any

fear, as in many other countries. Though the Model Police Act was framed many years ago by the Soli Sorabjee Committee, nobody wants to follow it, not even the Central Government.

Curiously, the Supreme Court, which gave a historic judgment in 2006 on police reforms, is not even keen to issue a contempt notice to state governments for not acting on its directions in letter and spirit. States have merely done an eyewash on those directions. Look at the British who gave us these laws and the procedures for the police. They are nimble-footed and change fast according to the need of the hour, with the political parties being apolitical in this matter, delivering speedy justice. In the recent riots in the UK, a few accused were sent to prison for 20 months within days of the crime having been committed with no political interference. Can you imagine this happening in India?

Another problem is the pitiable conditions of the police force in the country. The police are mostly ill-equipped in many respects to handle serious crime. The force is short of manpower. There are about five lakh vacancies to meet challenges like cyber-crime, besides infrastruc-

tural shortcomings with regard to buildings, vehicles, equipment, etc., the list is endless.

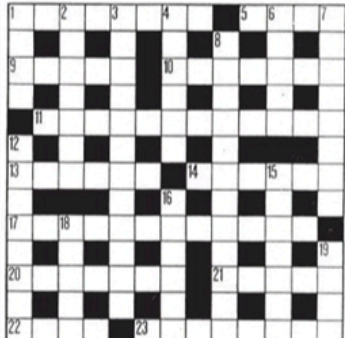
The old-fashioned laws and procedures are another impediment to justice delivery. The new criminal laws that have recently come into force have many lacunae, and the sad part is that police officers, lawyers and judges who deal everyday with criminal cases have not been consulted while framing these laws.

Furthermore, over the years, the state police forces have been neglected at the cost of the Central police forces; the responsibility lies partly with the state governments as the police is a state subject.

Everyone who matters has also been talking of judicial reforms, meaning quick justice, like the British, but nothing is happening on the ground. With about five crore cases pending in judicial courts and increasing by the day, there is no hope for the common citizen. Nobody is doing anything in this regard.

So, justice in India for the common man is difficult to get unless the needful is done fast enough. Given our track record, this is not likely to happen anytime soon.

QUICK CROSSWORD



ACROSS


1 Kindly feeling (8)  
2 Little known (4)  
9 Overtune (5)  
10 Identifying flag (7)  
11 Seemingly from nowhere (3,2,4,3)  
13 Rough (6)  
14 Awkward predicament (6)  
17 In an irresponsible way (4,3,5)  
20 Capital of Sri Lanka (7)  
21 Severe (5)  
22 Extinct flightless bird (4)  
23 Partial (3-5)

Yesterday's solution

Across: 1 Armistice, 8 Grave, 9 Fissure, 10 Behind, 11 Felled, 12 Outsmart, 15 Tanzania, 18 Impost, 20 Outcry, 21 Madeira, 22 Stays, 23 Hands down.

Down: 2 Raise, 3 Insult, 4 Turn down, 5 Egress, 6 Radical, 7 Head start, 11 Footloose, 13 Thailand, 14 Instead, 16 Afresh, 17 Append, 19 Straw.

SU DO KU



HARD

FORECAST

CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	36	27
New Delhi	35	27
Amritsar	34	27
Bathinda	33	25
Jalandhar	33	27
Ludhiana	33	27
Bhivani	33	26
Hisar	34	26
Sirsa	35	29
Dharamsala	30	19
Manali	27	19
Shimla	26	16
Srinagar	28	18
Jammu	33	24
Kargil	35	15
Leh	31	12
Dehradun	32	23
Mussoorie	23	17



## RBI's caution is justified

But banks now have experience in project lending

N Sundar

Globally, project financing is treated as "sans recourse" financing — i.e. the project repayment is expected to happen from the standalone cash flows of the project without any external support or comfort.

However, no lender is willing to look at project financing as was originally intended and insists on an additional comfort as a measure of precaution rather than diligence, lest, the project economics goes haywire.

It is natural that lenders and the RBI view this area with caution. While the RBI has been fine-tuning its instructions on identification of problem assets over the last four or five years, the draft guidelines tightening the norms for project lending calling for increased provisioning has attracted comments from all stakeholders.

### WHY THE CHANGES

Banks have strengthened their underwriting standards in the area of commercial advances and with the "twin balance sheet" problem being more or less addressed, lending to corporates is gaining traction as can be seen by the guidance given by the major banks for FY25.

Given this backdrop, it is only prudent for the regulator to anticipate the growth in lending especially on the infrastructure side and initiate steps for a guided and controlled growth. Lenders and corporates have, however, sought a relaxation in the additional provisioning norms.

### FEARS AND MITIGANTS

An article carried in *businessline* (May 31) raises two points on the impact of the draft guidelines:

(i) Will the cashflows of the existing projects be sufficient to service the additional cost arising as a result of this provisioning? The author also spoke of the stress tests (simulated scenarios) a project is subjected to, before the decision to sanction a loan or not is taken.

(ii) Interest rate sensitivity is an integral part of project assessment and ongoing projects should be subjected to a quick analysis to see if the additional cost devolving on the project can be met or not, by the estimated cash flows.

While projects close to attaining maturity (as the provisioning increment would be lower) and those sanctioned but not disbursed (as a quick



INFRASTRUCTURE. Lending norms

reappraisal of the project can be done and safeguards built in) are not such a worry, it is the projects under implementation which need greater attention.

### COMPLEX DIRECTIVES

While the concerns over the loopholes — be it in the form of padded up costs to avail cost overrun funding, inflation of project costs to secure a higher standby facility and tendency to avail a longer moratorium — are not unfounded, certain mitigants are also available to prevent this.

Infrastructure financing in India has now evolved and lenders have learned valuable lessons over the last two decades.

Widely accepted thumb rules like cost per MW and debt per MW (for power projects), cost of construction per km in the case of roads (for both for normal terrain and hilly/difficult terrain) arrived through close comparison of the various projects financed by lenders, have become the norm over the years.

Comparing the project costs with these "thumb rules" will give an indication if the costs are inflated or padded up. A similar approach is used for cases seeking extended moratorium.

If infrastructure lending is expected to grow, the recent observations by the Finance Minister, that the recently established NABFID should focus on this aspect and that commercial banks should only do routine banking is not the right prescription.

At this juncture, NABFID as an organisation is evolving and will definitely take some more time to mature.

That apart, banks such as SBI, IDBI and ICICI have a wealth of experience in the area of project finance and allowing that to remain unutilised and gradually wither away would be a gross injustice.

The writer is former Deputy Managing Director, State Bank of India



ADITYA CHUNEKAR  
ABHIRAM SAHASRABUDHE

Air-conditioners flew off the shelves in India this summer. Sales were reported to be up by 30-35 per cent compared to the last year, driven by the scorching summer which saw the longest heat wave in India on record. There is a general consensus that India will experience more frequent, intense, and prolonged heat waves in the future. Only a tenth of the households in India own air-conditioners. Many more are expected to buy ACs to seek relief from the relentless heat. While ACs provide comfort, they also consume a lot of electricity shooting up electricity bills.

Most of the electricity currently comes from coal in India, which contributes to the global climate change.

Additionally, when many people use their ACs at the same time, it leads to high peak demand, straining the electricity grid and increasing the chances of power cuts.

One way to mitigate these issues is to ensure that ACs are energy efficient, meaning they consume less electricity for the same cooling effect. Similar to emission norms for vehicles, ACs have standards for energy efficiency regulated by the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE).

### STAR RATINGS

BEE stipulates the minimum energy performance standards for ACs and rates them from 1-star to 5-star with higher ratings indicating better efficiency. Manufacturers are prohibited from selling an AC with energy efficiency less than a 1-star rating, eliminating electricity guzzling models out of the market.

At the same time, a 5-star rating encourages sales of highly efficient models by distinguishing them clearly. The combined effect is to push up the average efficiency of the ACs sold in the Indian market. BEE regularly updates the standards to encourage manufacturers to innovate and improve efficiency, which has led to considerable improvement in energy efficiency of ACs over the last decade.

AC standards were expected to be revised from January 2025. However, the BEE has recently postponed the revision to January 2026. This revision would involve tightening the standards by one notch, meaning the current 5-star models will get a 4-star rating and the existing 1-star models will be out of the market. The postponement and marginal revision could considerably



## Subject ACs to strict standards

**POWER PLAY.** The current norms don't go far enough. For efficient energy consumption, star ratings should be stringent

slow down India's trend of energy efficiency improvement of ACs.

India's minimum energy performance standards with a 1-star rating are relatively lenient compared to other countries like China, where air conditioners need to be about 50 per cent more efficient than India to be qualified to be sold in its market.

As a result, these standards are being easily met. So, a marginal improvement in the 1-star rating standard effectively does not change much.

Moreover, the 5-star rating standard is lower than the efficiency of some of the most energy efficient models available today in India. Manufacturers will have little incentive to innovate further since their models will still qualify as a 5-star model up to 2028 without much improvement.

Our estimates show that the lax revision of the standards could lead to a cumulative loss of ₹80,000 crore in electricity bills to consumers and an

additional 80 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions over the lifetime of the ACs sold in next four years.

### REVISING STANDARDS

A more effective and also feasible revision would have been to revise the standards by two notches starting January 2025, meaning the current 5-star models will get a 3-star rating after January 2025 and the existing models with 1-star and 2-star ratings will be out of the market. Such a revision would also be consistent with India's G20 commitment of doubling the rate of energy efficiency improvement by 2030.

Manufacturers have expressed concerns that stricter energy efficiency standards will raise prices and reduce the sales of ACs. However, data from other countries show that higher efficiency standards often lead to lower real-time prices over time.

Currently, about 50 per cent of the AC models available in the Indian market are 3-star models whereas about 21 per cent are 5-star models. Our analysis of the AC models available in the Indian market indicate that while 5-star models are more expensive than 3-star models, energy efficiency is only one of the factors contributing to the price difference.

Prices vary substantially even within a rating with a few 5-star models being

comparable to the price of a 3-star model. Manufacturers typically market 5-star models as premium models making them more expensive than necessary due to energy efficiency alone. Hence, right pricing and focus on energy efficiency can attract buyers to 5-star models.

Furthermore, the AC sector has received substantial policy support. It has been identified as a champion sector by the government and has an ongoing Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme. The Finance Ministry has issued a notification that government agencies should procure 5-star ACs in most cases. Public sector companies like Energy Efficiency Services Ltd. are conducting bulk procurement of 5-star ACs providing a further fillip to the demand. A stricter energy efficiency rating system would be an effective complement to this.

With substantial policy support, India has the potential to become a global hub for highly efficient air-conditioners, in addition to helping consumers save significantly on their electricity bills. As summers are expected to get hotter and more air conditioners are expected to be sold, it is critical to ensure that they are energy efficient.

Chunekar is Fellow, and Sahasrabudhe is Senior Research Associate, Prayas (Energy Group)

## thehindubusinessline.

### TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

August 23, 2004

#### RBI torpedoes SIDBI plan to become bank

The Reserve Bank of India has waved the red flag to the Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) forcing it to bring to a halt its plan to convert into a full-fledged commercial bank. The central bank has said that since it is currently categorised as a financial institution, an amendment to the SIDBI Act would be required to enable it to function as a commercial bank.

#### Truckers offer to end strike

The transporters on Sunday offered to withdraw their two-day-old indefinite strike if they are not made the "collecting agency" for service tax. "Instead of making transporters the collecting agency, the Government can utilise the Sales Tax/Excise Department as collecting agencies by adding the 10.2 per cent service tax to the sales tax or excise duty," said Mr. J.M. Sakseena, Secretary General, AIMTC.

#### PNB plans to cut Govt stake

Punjab National Bank said it plans to sell shares to boost capital and reduce the government's 80 per cent stake. The bank's board of directors approved the share-sale plan at a meeting on Saturday, according to a statement to the BSE.

Sehaj Singh  
Anmol Rattan Singh

Punjab, which is currently ranked as the 5th urbanised State after Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Karnataka, has fallen prey to its lack of industrialisation efforts. The Smart City Mission selected only three cities from Punjab — Ludhiana, Amritsar, and Jalandhar, with the Ease of Living Index positioning them at 35th, 76th, and 77th rank respectively. Punjab is indeed mired in an urban policy gridlock.

Though urbanisation in Punjab witnessed an upward trajectory since the Green Revolution, the compound annual growth rate (CAGR) dwindled in decades following 1971. At present, it stands at 37.5 per cent (Census 2011), and is projected to grow to 46.6 per cent by 2036. Urban Punjab is expected to expand to 1.57 crore in demographic size by 2036 from 1.2 crore in 2021.

However, a vast majority of this growth is concentrated in just three cities — Ludhiana, Jalandhar, and Amritsar, as only 34 per cent of the

State's urban population lives in small and mid-sized towns.

### WHAT NEEDS TO BE FIXED

Firstly, both quantitative and qualitative shortages in housing hit 99 per cent of the Low Income Group (LIG) and Economically Weaker Sections (EWS). Cities like Amritsar, Ludhiana, and Jalandhar exemplify this crisis, with many housing structures in these cities being pre-partition constructions that are now dilapidated. Planning agencies in Amritsar, for instance, have collectively supplied less than 5 per cent of the developed land needed for these segments.

As a result, 30-40 per cent of the population of Ludhiana, Amritsar, and Jalandhar are in slums. Secondly, the employment scenario in Punjab's urban areas is complex. The Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) and Worker-Population Ratio (WPR) are cumulatively low, with urban unemployment rates fluctuating between 9.0 and 7.7 per cent, compared to all-India average of 6 per cent.

While Amritsar, Jalandhar, and



PUNJAB. Urban woes

Ludhiana have high employment potential, the quality and quantum of employment in these districts vary significantly. Even the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) has failed to address the employment challenges effectively. In response to a Lok Sabha question from MP Raveet Singh Bittu the government revealed a troubling statistic: over the five-year period (2018-2023), only 21 per cent of individuals trained under PMKVY got jobs secured employment in Punjab.

Lastly, on account of municipal finances, a per Capita Audit report 2021, a shortfall of 99% was also noted in terms of the finances that was sanctioned by the State Finance Commission compared to what was

released. This shortfall has deprived the municipalities of the required funds to keep up the basic institutional facilities at the local level

### HOW TO FIX IT

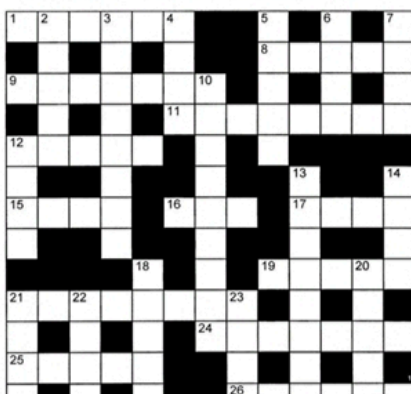
Each city in Punjab should initially develop a strategic functional plan aligned with its resource capacities.

The CAG 2021 report highlights the limited involvement of Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) in executing projects under the Smart City Mission, primarily managed by three Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs) in Amritsar, Jalandhar, and Ludhiana.

Punjab's growth prospects will be hit without empowering its Class VI towns (populations under 5,000), which have recently emerged as hubs of population growth. The State's urban story will see a new sunrise if adequate administrative structures are provided to these new centres of growth.

Sehaj Singh is a Policy Researcher and Co-Founder of PANU Foundation. Anmol Rattan Singh is PhD Scholar at Punjab University, Chandigarh and Co-Founder of PANU Foundation

## BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2510



### EASY

#### ACROSS

1. Fly grub (6)
08. Paramour (5)
09. Naval vessel (7)
11. N American team game (8)
12. Follows (mus) (5)
15. Stake put down before deal (4)
16. Turkish commander, chief officer (3)
17. Female relative (4)
19. Thespian (5)
21. Schoolmasterly, fussy as to speech (8)
24. Domestic fowl (7)
25. Not so elevated (5)
26. Tall upright rock (6)

#### DOWN

02. Swiftly (5)
03. Made hand movements (8)
04. Labour hard (4)
05. Writer, account-keeper (5)
06. Birds as a class of vertebrates (4)
07. Gratis (4)
10. Eulogy, laudation (9)
12. Mount high in the air (4)
13. Ludicrous, ridiculous (8)
14. Heavenly body (4)
18. Quick drink; sound through the nose (5)
20. Last Greek letter (5)
21. Front of hand (4)
22. First light (4)
23. Skin fissure caused by cold (4)

### NOT SO EASY

#### ACROSS

01. Grub mother prepared included egg finally (6)
08. He has a mistress of fifty and above (5)
09. Fighting craft whips are endlessly used for (7)
11. Game, like this clue, among the French (8)
12. It follows on some of those guests in music (5)
15. The stake put up coming back from volcano (4)
16. Turkish commander needs to get in once more (3)
17. Didn't start the pleasure-trip with parent's sister (4)
19. One taking the part of Croat perhaps (5)
21. Schoolmasterly pen, and cad it converted (8)
24. To be so faint-hearted sounds foul (7)
25. In both sides, to be in debt will let one down (5)
26. Column with a box for posters (6)

#### DOWN

02. Take a step - quickly! (5)
03. Made signs that urged set to change (8)
04. To the Italian it may be hard work (4)
05. He's an office worker, unless he's a priest (5)
06. To save the first to the last is for the birds (4)
07. Professional charge is about right if it's for nothing (4)
10. Eulogy written for a peer crying out for revision (9)
12. Sound angry to be a high-flier (4)
13. Going round half of California with car is ludicrous (8)
14. Top 19 indicated by an asterisk (4)
18. Inhale cocaine of the kind that includes nitrogen (5)
20. Give me a go at this character in Greek (5)
21. Token of victory to secrete in one's hand (4)
22. It will suddenly occur to one at daybreak (4)
23. A fellow to give one a bit of cheek (4)

### SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2509

ACROSS: 1. Pigas 4. Horatio 8. In the mean time 10. Evade 11. Name 12. Omen 16. Overt 17. Eats humble pie 19. Steered 20. Night

DOWN: 1. Delusion 2. Piss 3. Piss 4. Piss 5. Piss 6. Piss 7. Piss 8. Piss 9. Piss 10. Piss 11. Piss 12. Piss 13. Piss 14. Piss 15. Piss 16. Piss 17. Piss 18. Piss 19. Piss 20. Piss 21. Piss 22. Piss 23. Piss 24. Piss 25. Piss 26. Piss



## FIRST COLUMN

THAW IN  
INDO-MALDIVES TIES

The Maldives after a break is now trying to mend fences with India



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

India's recent outreach to Maldives, with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar visiting the island nation, a couple of weeks back signifies a reset in the currently stressed bilateral relationship between the neighbours. After new President Mohammed Muizzu took charge, there has been a spate of anti-India voices, which has derailed decades of carefully curated strategic defence partnerships. Mr Muizzu's PNC-PPM coalition came to power last year, largely driven by India's campaign. Soon after Indian defence forces manning some critical equipment for the Maldives, were given marching orders and it seemed relations with India's nearest maritime neighbour were on a downward spiral without any checks. However, things began to change somewhere towards the beginning of this year and President Muizzu was invited to PM Modi's third swearing-in ceremony in June.

In his speech at the inauguration of the India-assisted projects to hand over water and sewerage projects across 28 islands of the Maldives President was all praise for the Indian PM. He said "The Government and people of Maldives extend our deep gratitude to Prime Minister of India, His Excellency Narendra Modi, the Government, and the friendly people of India for their generous and continued assistance to the Maldives and discuss strengthening our bilateral relations."

The speech highlighted a rethink regarding India relations and perhaps a silent acknowledgement that the Maldives needs India, to come out of financial stress. Maldives needs nearly millions of dollars in budgetary support for which the President has already reached out to China, Turkey



and some Middle Eastern nations. However, any bailout by the lending countries has stiff collaterals attached, which could have risky consequences in future. Meanwhile India despite getting a bloodied nose, has been committed to rolling over nearly \$100 million in payments due from the Maldives, to ease off its financial burden. Maldives has also realised that beyond the India Out rhetoric, a recalibration of the bilateral in terms of economic and security ties would be a great midway for a stronger partnership with India. It was no coincidence that several critical India-assisted infrastructure projects inaugurated pre-President Muizzu's tenure were an important peg during S Jaishankar's visit to Male.

The press release issued by the ministry highlighted "EAM visited the India-assisted Greater Male Connectivity Project (GMCP) site and jointly reviewed the progress of this flagship development project that will connect Male with the adjoining islands of Villingili, Gulhifalhu and Thilafushi... EAM also visited Addu city on 11 August 2024, during which he, along with Foreign Minister and Minister of Construction and Infrastructure, jointly inaugurated the Addu Reclamation and Shore Protection Project and Addu Detour Link Bridge Project. The visit highlights the importance of Maldives, India's maritime neighbour, as a key partner in the 'Neighbourhood First' policy and India's Vision 'SAGAR' i.e. Security and Growth for All in the Region.

Maldives remains an important partner of India in maintaining peace, stability and prosperity in the Indian Ocean region. "India and Maldives are dependent on each other for their respective economic, security and climate change-related issues. However, the resentment in the Maldives relationship is also a greater message to the new government in Bangladesh, which in the past has not been a great sympathiser with India's concerns. While the interim government in Bangladesh has so far maintained a moderate line of continuity on India bilateral, the political parties in power may not be too kind in future. Like many of India's neighbours, Bangladesh too is under severe economic crisis, and sooner or later the realisation would dawn that the best bet for the country is to have a good neighbour.

(The writer is a policy analyst; views are personal)

# Monsoon mayhem: Tackling urban flooding



B K SINGH

There is urgent need for comprehensive disaster management and infrastructure reforms to protect lives and property from future monsoon fury



In the warming world Sea surface temperature is rising followed by excessive evaporation and deposition of moisture laden vapours in the form of clouds. When conditions are favourable, incessant rainfall occurs. Many times, half the annual rainfall occurs in 24 to 48 hours. Urban infrastructures are unable to take the challenge; flooding on roads, public places, ground floors and the basement of buildings is quite common leading to disruption of rail, road and air traffic as well as businesses. Rural areas face the brunt of the mayhem; loss of crops, landslides, and landslides in hilly terrain can claim lives and livelihoods and can throw the economy out of gear.

It can put additional stress on the budget as the public fund (taxpayers' money) has to be diverted for the reconstruction of damaged infrastructures and also for compensating the losses for the private properties. The disaster that hit Wayanad on 30th July claimed more than 400 human lives and injured an equal number has been one of the worst of its kind in living memory.

Big boulders and stones from an 8.26 ha (82600 sq meter) area on the top of the hill located at 1550 meters above the mean Sea level have rolled for 7 km on a downward slope and smashed buildings, damaged roads and bridges etc in three-four villages at 650 meters above the mean Sea level. One ton boulder has attained the energy of 9 mega Joule, which is enough to destabilize and knock down an RCC building in a rural area. Monsoon mayhem has caused damage in many other places in Western Ghats as well as in the Himalayas. Landslides and damage to roads and bridges have posed a challenge to people and tourists in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

In this column let me confine to the issues faced by metropolitan cities and make some suggestions to deal with it. The death of three civil service aspirants in the basement flooding of Rau's coaching centre in Rajendranagar Delhi last month and also another aspirant dying



MANY TIMES, HALF THE ANNUAL RAINFALL OCCURS IN 24 TO 48 HOURS. URBAN INFRASTRUCTURE S ARE UNABLE TO TAKE THE CHALLENGE: FLOODING ON ROADS, PUBLIC PLACES, GROUND FLOORS AND THE BASEMENT OF BUILDINGS IS QUITE COMMON LEADING TO DISRUPTION OF RAIL, ROAD AND AIR TRAFFIC AS WELL AS BUSINESSES

of electrocution are chilling reminders of the apathy of the civic body. We must know the precautions that must be undertaken by the agencies and the building occupants to make sure that such incidents are not repeated. Civic Body of Mumbai had earlier designed stormwater drains and related infrastructure to take care of 25 mm of rain in an hour.

Severe flooding repeatedly occurring during the past several years has forced them to remodel their drainage system to take care of more intense rains up to 50 mm per hour. However, in places like Mumbai, Ratnagiri, Satara, Mahabaleswar and many other locations 80 to 100 mm of rain per hour has been recorded. Similarly, places in some other regions of the country are also experiencing frequent cloud bursts resulting in 80 to 100 mm of rainfall per hour for three to four hours. Wayanad tragedy was the result of 570 mm of rain in 48 hours.

All Civic authorities in cities like Mumbai, Chennai, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Delhi, Gurugram etc should remodel the drainage system to take care of at least 100 mm of rain per hour. The encroachments on storm water drains as well as on lake beds should be removed. Further, the drains should be regularly de-silted and cleaned up so that plastics, polythene bags silt etc are removed and disposed at far-off places. The lakes in the cities are balancing reservoirs where the water level should be regulated by opening the sluice gates. De-weeding and de-siltation of lakes are also required to be done periodically to ensure that the water reservoirs are kept clean up to maximum flood level. All the inlets of the lakes are

monitored to ensure that none carry untreated sewage into them. There is the possibility that lake water may enter people's houses at the time of flash floods; it must be ensured that sewage water does not enter houses. Stormwater drains in metropolitan cities are often found partly encroached and occupied for living by erecting small huts. Such occupants must be rehabilitated elsewhere and drains must be fully opened for flow of water. Let us not forget that the existing stormwater drain is insufficient to take the load of more than 25 mm of rainfall per hour.

Beds of many urban lakes have also been encroached. Lake beds up to high flood levels are meant for storage of water. The reduction in volume for storage indicates that the water flows in the basement and ground floor of the buildings, causing undue hardship for the people. Incessant rains in November 2015 (approximately 483 mm in 24 hours) led to one of the biggest catastrophes in Chennai. 500 people were killed and nearly 10 lakh houses were submerged resulting in the displacement of 1.8 million people. Two reasons were attributed to the disaster.

One was the encroachments on lake beds in Chennai and the other was the delay in regulating the water level in the Chembaram Bakkam reservoir. The situation came under control only when 1.5 lakh cusecs water from this reservoir was released into the Adyar river. Many wetlands in Chennai have been occupied by communities. Pallikarnai wetland used to have an extent of over 5000 ha has shrunk to 10% and only 500 ha is remaining as wetland at present. Unless the encroachments are cleared, we are likely to face

a similar tragedy in future. Civic bodies while working on drainage systems for stormwater as well as sewer lines must take enough precautions and keep the drains and man-hole covered, so that no person accidentally falls into them and perishes.

When the road is flooded and becomes a flowing river, uncovered drains and sewer lines can not be identified by people wading through. People in Mumbai, Delhi, Gurugram and many other metropolitan cities find flood water trapped in the basements of their houses. Often they resort to pumping it out, which requires time and energy. It is advisable to construct a sump underneath so that the rainwater can be effectively harvested and later used for various purposes.

If the basement is kept clean, then flood water collected would be of drinkable quality. Several Civic Bodies mandate water harvesting structures along with new constructions while approving Plans. At the implementation stage, however, such structures generally take care of harvesting water from the rooftop and ignore basements, prone to flooding during cloud bursts.

Water harvesting for basements should be made compulsory and must be seriously implemented. Building by-laws if necessary be amended by respective civic agencies to make sure that the basement of the buildings is used for parking vehicles, storing unserviceable items and water harvesting/ storage only. In no circumstances should people be permitted to use it for housing, hotels and businesses.

(The writer is retired principal chief conservator of forests, Head of forest force, Karnataka; views are personal)

## Prime Minister Modi's Ukraine visit: A strategic balancing act

PM's visit underscores India's evolving role on the world stage, where it seeks to navigate complex alliances and assert its national interests

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Kyiv marks a significant moment in international diplomacy, reflecting India's strategic balancing act between Russia and the West amid the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. As the first leader from a nation that maintains strong relations with both Russia and Western countries, Modi's visit sends a nuanced message to global powers, particularly Russia. While some observers suggest that Modi's visit is intended to placate Western disappointment following his two recent visits to Russia, the reality appears more complex. Modi's trip to Ukraine serves primarily as a subtle signal to Moscow that India can engage with Ukraine as well. This visit



AKHILESH SUMAN

comes at a critical time, coinciding with Ukraine's recent military successes against Russian forces, adding weight to the message Modi intends to deliver.

India's historical relationship with Ukraine has been far from warm, yet the scale of suffering in Ukraine has stirred sympathy within India. This sentiment is reflected in Modi's earlier statements, emphasizing that this is not an era of war

and advocating for peaceful resolutions. Despite this, India has refrained from condemning Russia's actions, continuing to purchase oil from Moscow, which has been crucial for Russia during the conflict.

However, Russia's increasingly close ties with China have become a point of concern for India, particularly regarding China's aggressive behavior along the Indian border. The 2020 Galwan Valley clash and subsequent military tensions have strained India-China relations, making Russia's perceived indifference to India's security concerns troubling. The frequent meetings between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping have heightened these concerns,

prompting India to reassess its foreign policy strategy.

Modi's visit to Ukraine can be seen as a diplomatic effort to subtly pressure Russia into reconsidering its relationship with China. By engaging with Ukraine, India signals to Moscow that its close ties with Beijing cannot be taken for granted without potential consequences. Historically, India has enjoyed a strong relationship with Russia, but the evolving geopolitical landscape requires India to prioritize its national interests. Modi's visit also underscores India's independent foreign policy, a principle that has guided the country since the Cold War era. India has long prided itself on its non-aligned stance, making decisions based



on strategic interests rather than aligning with any particular bloc. This approach remains relevant in the 21st century, as India navigates the complexities of global politics. India's refusal to outright condemn Russia at the United Nations has caused friction with Western allies. However, Modi's visit to Ukraine demonstrates that India's neutrality does not imply inaction or tacit approval of Russian aggression.

Instead, it reflects a nuanced approach, balancing relationships and interests while encouraging Russia to reconsider its military strategy.

As India seeks to strengthen its ties with Western nations, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region where China's assertiveness is a growing concern, Modi's visit to Ukraine reaffirms India's commitment to a multipolar world. India values its strategic autonomy, making decisions based on its national interests—a stance that has occasionally drawn criticism from its allies. Another important aspect of Modi's visit is India's interest in contributing to Ukraine's reconstruction efforts. The war has left Ukraine in ruins, and India sees an opportunity to play a role in its rebuild-

ing process. This involvement would not only be a humanitarian gesture but also a strategic investment that could benefit the Indian economy. India has already provided humanitarian aid to Ukraine, and Modi's visit could pave the way for more substantial support, including infrastructure projects and logistical assistance, which would also benefit related Indian industries.

Furthermore, India's involvement in Ukraine's reconstruction could serve as a counterbalance to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). By offering an alternative model of development cooperation that respects the sovereignty of partner countries, India positions itself as a more favorable partner for nations in need. This approach aligns with

India's broader goal of positioning itself as a global leader and a moral force in international diplomacy.

As the world closely watches Modi's visit to Ukraine, the potential outcomes could have far-reaching implications for global power dynamics. Should Modi's diplomacy contribute to a ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine, India could emerge as a significant peacemaker and problem solver on the world stage. This would enhance India's reputation as a nation capable of navigating complex geopolitical landscapes while maintaining its principles and strategic autonomy.

(The writer is a senior journalist who has been covering foreign affairs for many years; views are personal)







# THE IDEAS PAGE

## When Modi meets Zelenskyy

To move forward, India and Ukraine will have to let go of past hurts.  
A historic opportunity awaits the two new global players in Kyiv



ANASTASIA PILIAVSKY

THE HISTORIC, FIRST-EVER visit of an Indian head of state to Ukraine is taking place as Ukraine celebrates its Independence. The timing is not accidental. It's part of a tightrope balancing act, which India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been walking between Russia and Ukraine, and between China and the US.

Modi's recent sojourn to Moscow left India's Western allies unimpressed, and Ukrainians deeply hurt. Just as a Russian missile hit a Ukrainian hospital in Kyiv, Modi was shown embracing Vladimir Putin, who called him a "dearest friend". The timing of the attack coincided with a message: For all its rhetoric of pacifist non-alignment, India remains Russia's steadfast ally, unwilling to condemn its most heinous war crimes. Russia's refusal to repatriate 69 Indian citizens who have been duped into fighting its war—even after Modi's visit—is another attempt to throw India strategically off-kilter.

The cordial visit to China's closest ally and the world's biggest aggressor-state troubled Washington, which made deepening trade and defence cooperation with India a cornerstone of foreign policy.

Modi's visit to Ukraine, following a day in Poland, Kyiv's key ally, is an opportunity to swing back to balance, to restore India's reputation as a peaceable yet principled global player, and to reassure Euro-American allies, who are by far its most important economic and strategic partners.

Don't be fooled by rumours that Modi is carrying Putin's peace message to Kyiv. That is but another one of Kremlin's information stunts, meant to paint Putin as a peace-seeker. Modi will no doubt call President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to peace dialogue, but he has repeatedly refused to act as mediator in Russia's war against Ukraine.

In Kyiv, Modi will be pursuing other aims. For India, the visit presents an opportunity to review and re-launch its relations with Europe's largest, resource-rich state. Before Russia's full-scale invasion, Ukraine exported vast quantities of agricultural, machine-building and military goods to India. Russia's shelling has damaged these industries, but the war also created new opportunities for Indo-Ukrainian co-operation: Economic, military and political.

To move forward with these, India and Ukraine will have to let go of past hurts. Yes, 25 years ago, a newly independent Ukraine, having just given up its own nuclear arsenal, the world's third largest, criticised India's nuclear tests. Contrary to common rumour, however, Ukraine never voted against them in the UN Security Council, of which it was not a member. It also opposed nuclear tests in Pakistan. Ukraine has been critical of India's Kashmir policy, but so have most of India's key Euro-American partners. While many in India believe that Russia stood by India during the 1971 war with Pakistan, few realise that it was actually the Soviet Union



C R Saisukumar

under the Ukrainian-born Leonid Brezhnev who supported the country. Fewer still know that the slogan Hindi-Rusi bhai-bhai was coined by USSR's Ukrainian leader, Nikita Khrushchev, who did the most to advance Indo-Soviet relations.

In the late 1990s, Ukraine did sell 320 T-80UD tanks to Pakistan in a deal that saved the Kharkiv Tank Factory from going bankrupt. But Ukraine has always exported more military equipment to India than Pakistan. And between 2018 and 2022, Ukraine's arms deliveries to India doubled, while sales to Pakistan dropped by a third.

The real skeleton in history's closet here is Russia's. Since the embargo on arms sales to Pakistan was lifted 10 years ago, Russia rushed to military cooperation with Islamabad, helping it to acquire large Mi-26 transport helicopters, precision-guided munitions, artillery, air defence, and long-range missiles. Military exports to Pakistan are in fact part of Russia's regional strategy: A sale of aircraft to India is always "balanced" by a sale of anti-aircraft systems to Pakistan.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian Zorya gas turbines do not only propel Indian battleships and submarines, they also enabled the Chandrayaan moon landing. On the eve of Russia's full-scale invasion, India signed a 100-million-dollar deal with Ukraine's Zorya-Mashproekt to develop gas turbine power plants. The Zorya-Mashproekt is in a city which, had been under Russian shelling. While Russia keeps waging war, Ukraine will need new production sites, which India can offer, while also creating thousands of jobs. With Bharat Forge acquiring half of the company's stakes last year, gas turbine production will be at the top of Modi's agenda.

Russia's war has ironically generated ideal circumstances for Indo-Ukrainian military trade. Experts agree that this is the last war for older Soviet tanks and other military equipment. Ukraine's urgent need for weapons required to defend itself creates an opportunity for India to shed the virtually obsolete Soviet arms. As India pivots away from Soviet and Russian weapons to NATO systems, it can swap Soviet hardware and ammunition for Western counterparts, in the way that Poland updated its arsenal in the past two years. No doubt Modi discussed this experience in Poland.

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Congress were also awarded lateral entry positions. Sam Pitroda was the Chairman of the Telecom Commission in 1989 and again appointed as the advisor to the Prime Minister in 2009. All appointments to the National Advisory Council under the UPA, which actively interfered with the business of the legislature, were done on an ad hoc basis and without consistency with the principles of social justice.

Congress's history of discrimination against the SCs, STs, and OBCs is not restricted to lateral entry alone. The letter from Jawaharlal Nehru to his chief ministers, stating his views on reservation, is well known. He termed the inclusion of the backward castes as encouraging the second-rate. Congress continued its discriminatory policies by designating many government-aided institutions, like Jamia Millia Islamia and Aligarh Muslim University, as minority institutions. By giving minority status to Jamia Millia Islamia in 2011, under UPA rule, Congress deprived thousands of deserving backward students. In Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, Congress has pursued religion-based reservation by diluting the rights of OBCs. The Opposition alliance is quick to hand over the rights of marginalised groups to other religious communities. It has staked the interests of the backward groups at the altar of appeasement politics. The affidavit submitted by the West Bengal government, currently facing criticism for the reported

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Ukraine's maritime victory against Russia's vastly superior Black Sea Fleet, which was achieved with innovative waterborne drone technology, has placed Ukraine at the vanguard of modern, low-cost defence developments. Military cooperation with Ukraine could be a strategic game-changer for India, especially in the Indian Ocean, where it faces a neighbour with a military budget nearly four times the size of its own.

Weapons will not be the only matters in focus. While Ukraine's future reconstruction will offer huge opportunities for India's strained labour market, both countries are leaders in digital statehood, a key site of potential cooperation. Indian electronic voting machines could prove invaluable to wartime Ukraine, while Ukraine's ground-breaking DILA app, which places government documents and services securely in one's smart phone, could revolutionise Indian governance.

The conversations in Kyiv will not doubt be, as Modi considers India's relations with Russia and China, its other major trade partners, and Zelenskyy struggles with grievances over Modi's neutral position. Ukraine's Independence Day, which follows on India's, offers a vivid symbolic occasion to launch a partnership between states that have now emerged from colonial shadows to become major new players in the wider world.

The writer teaches anthropology at King's College London

## WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Instead of banning student politics altogether, university administrations should ban party-based politics on campus, activate and empower student unions to better protect student interests, and ensure academic and intellectual freedoms so that they can grow to be the leaders we need." —THE DAILY STAR, BANGLADESH

## A giant, creaky system

R G Kar case, NEET paper leak row, deaths of UPSC aspirants raise the question: What does it mean to be educated and professional in this world?



SAITAK MAJUMDAR

I GREW UP about a 15 minutes' walk from the R G Kar Medical College and Hospital in Kolkata. I remember a couple of visits to its men's hostel, where a school friend was studying to be a doctor, and even an overnight stay in their room. I was too young to realise what a uniquely male privilege this was, to hang out in a friend's hostel and spend nights there. When I heard about the horrifying violation and death of the medical trainee at this hospital, the grimy and crumbling walls of its corridors and washrooms came back to haunt me. I spoke to one of the R G Kar students I used to hang out with back then, now a reputed physician in the city. The infrastructure was just as shoddy and broken back then, but there was a sense of trust and community among the students that he said in deep dismay, had completely shattered these past few years under the current administration of the hospital.

There is something soul-destroying about this deeply gendered violation and death of an ambitious, educated young person at the start of an important career. No one would ever claim that the value of an educated professional life is higher than one which hasn't received such empowerment. I mean quite the opposite. If an educated, ambitious woman meets such a fate during her professional duty, what does it even mean to be educated and professional in this world? And what does it mean for the vast majority who cannot even aspire to her position?

But it has been a dark year for ambitious and aspirational youth in India, just about a month ago, three young people — two women and a man — drowned in a private coaching centre for UPSC examinations in Delhi's Rajinder Nagar. They were aspirants to the Indian Administrative Service — which draws hundreds of thousands of graduates to the country's premier examination of coaching in Delhi. Education, with its unique promise of upward socio-economic mobility, generates a mushroom cloud of anxiety across social classes in India, and there is no death of people vulturing on the vulnerable to fear and aspiration into profit. It has been almost a decade since an IT-Bombay alum, Anshu Jain, wrote about his suicidally depressing days in a dark and clammy room in Rajasthani's Koda, the national capital of private coaching for engineering entrance tests — and the spine-chilling graffiti he met on its walls, carved by a previous occupant: "I spent my worst years in this room. It's your turn now."

Claustrophobia turned real for these IAS aspirants when the water flooded the base of the library of their coaching centre. As one survivor reportedly said, in spite of charging

a fee of Rs 2 lakh, the coaching centres had no safety standards in spaces where the youth studied and spent time. Poor drainage, even electrocution deaths, were common in these streets, and Delhi's unexpected monsoon momentum did the rest.

I can't imagine that it feels very cheery to be an educated, ambitious, young person in India right now. And herein lies a frightening irony. With ageing populations all across the post-industrial world — even with a now-stalled population growth in China — the population dividend has been one of India's unique strengths, be it in the size and independence of the domestic market or the momentum of its educated workforce. As someone with a global career in higher education who's been involved in the young life of a new Indian institution of higher education, I've witnessed this tremendous educational energy first-hand — as well as the aspirations and anxieties around it. But the news from the wider sphere of state education and competitive exams for government positions has riddled with shocks that have reminded us that we have not fixed any of our old problems. Unchecked, they have caused greater havoc on lives. The claustrophobia of mental health has turned into death by water and violence. Is this the system and the atmosphere that we have ready for our future doctors, engineers and civil servants? Or to leave a rubble of bodies is the inescapable fate of education and competition in India?

At a time when the mental-health crisis among college-going students is a pandemic, the system of merit in education revealed its terrifying crack in the fissure over the question leads in the NEET examinations — the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test for nationwide entrance to medical degree programmes — still a poorly resolved controversy. It was an inevitable meeting of ill-fated forces — the sheer desperation for a seat, greed and corruption in local administration, and a giant, creaky, unstable system perpetually waiting for disaster.

Cliches are true. In a country with a magnitude and diversity like India, polar opposites don't nullify each other. Higher education and professional training are beacons of hopes for millions of young Indians. Netflix shows around aspirants bear testimony to that as much as the endless queues for admissions to college and professional programmes. But what is the safety around these queues? What is the safety even after you've made it to the training? The horrifying immediacy of the R G Kar murder should not distract us from the vast and chilling network of medical corruption to which it points. If we cannot ensure safe spaces around our student aspirants and young professionals — if a trainee doctor cannot catch her rest between duty hours without the fear of being violated and murdered, what is exactly that higher education and training brings for people? What should have been an obvious answer now lies strained.

The writer is professor of English & Creative Writing at Anglia University. Views are personal



HITESH JAIN

## Bringing in talent, not loyalists

Unlike under Congress, lateral entry in government is for public interest

A SERIES OF motivated and spurious arguments have been advanced in various forums alleging that the Modi government in 2018 aimed to institutionalise lateral entries to undermine reservation in appointments. These assertions misrepresent the true intent of lateral entry and conveniently ignore the ad-hoc appointments made during the Congress regime, as well as how the institutionalisation of lateral appointments was a crucial step in addressing historical discrimination.

Continuing its disruptive agenda, the Congress has now launched another campaign against lateral entries, rife with misinformation.

The Modi government institutionalised the process of lateral entries in 2018. The Prime Minister cited the intricacies of an evolving economy and the requirement of specialists from industry in the bureaucracy. In principle, the government has not gone back on its promise of allowing lateral entrants into the executive. However, it wants to ensure that the principles of social justice are adhered to and historical wrongs are corrected. It is in this context that one must analyse the directive from the PM to the Department of Personnel and Training. Interpreting the directive as a reversal on lateral entries is not only incorrect but also overlooks the problematic arrangements that have persisted since independence, beginning with an ambassador who was also the sister of India's first Prime Minister.

In reality, the Congress campaign against lateral entries is a shallow attempt to cover up its past faults, when lateral entries had more to do with the whims of the party or a family. Interestingly, India's former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh started out as a lateral entrant in 1972, as the Chief Economic Advisor. Montek Singh Ahluwalia, a key figure during the UPA government, started out as special secretary to the Prime Minister in 1988, moving on to the position of Commerce Secretary in 1990. Other names include Vijay L. Kelkar, who joined as a Secretary in the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas in 1994; Bimal Jalan who joined as the Chief Economic Advisor in 1981, Prakash Tandon, who was the Head of State Trading Corporation, K.P. Nambiar, Secretary in the Department of Electronics, Sumant Dubey, press advisor in the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

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arbitrary inclusion of 77 communities, 75 of which are Muslim, in the OBC list, has also raised eyebrows.

Rahul Gandhi's statement on Agniveers, in his capacity as the Leader of the Opposition, was corrected by the Defence Minister in the Lok Sabha. Regarding NEET, the Supreme Court has clearly directed against re-examination, much to the dismay of Congress. Dubious activists and short-seller misadventures have found no takers in the Indian markets, thus leaving many wondering if the subject of lateral entries is the new hope for the grand old party to latch on to.

Today, when the institutionalisation of lateral entry is imminent, a historical wrong is being reversed for good. While adhering to the cause of social justice, the government is ensuring people with the right expertise and experience contribute to the cause of nation-building. As they did on several other issues in the past, Congress wants to use lateral entries as a tool to generate political momentum ahead of the upcoming elections, following their third consecutive defeat in the Lok Sabha polls. Therefore, Rahul Gandhi, who advocated for the idea of lateral entries in 2019, is now using the subject as another launchpad for his divisive pitch. However, today's theatrics do not erase the mistakes of the past.

The writer is an advocate and Vice President, Mumbai BJP

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### BALANCING ACT

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'The Kyiv opportunity' (IE, August 22). PM Modi's Ukraine visit comes amid reports of the death of a man from Kerala in a Ukrainian attack on a Russian military camp. The Indian fatalities — around 10 so far in the nearly 30-month-old war — are a pressing reason why the PM is likely to let Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy what he told Russian President Vladimir Putin last month: Moscow and Kyiv should resolve their conflict through dialogue and diplomacy. Zelenskyy had not missed words when he described PM Modi's July visit to Russia as a "huge disappointment and a devastating blow to peace efforts". Even as Russia closely observes the PM's upcoming meeting with Zelenskyy, India also has to tread warily so as not to antagonise its all-weather friend.

Kholkan Das, Kolkata

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'The Kyiv opportunity' (IE, August 22). Indian diplomatic thinking must unyoke itself from socialist-era romanticism and learn to treat Russia as any other European power. It must also plan for a post-Putin scenario and a Europe that is supported by a strong nationalist fervour. Ukraine, besides grain, has a lot to offer on the technological front as well. India must leverage its rising international profile in politics and economy to count in the European theatre as a player with serious potential.

Shubhash D, via email

### A DUBIOUS PRACTICE

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Another glass ceiling' (IE, August 22). There is mention of the widespread "Not Found Suitable" (NFS) syndrome as an unchallenged and dubious strategy to deny reservation to SC and OBC candidates. It presents an intriguing paradox because it is usually aimed at an eligible candidate who has the requisite educational qualifications and experience. The fundamental question is: How can the alumnus of a recognised institution not found suitable? There is no excuse for this.

I R Murmu, New Delhi

### SIMPLIFYING TAXES

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'Enforcement action should be a last resort': Sitharaman to taxpayers' (IE, August 22). It is heartening that the government — buoyed by a consistent improvement in tax compliance — has now realised the significance of treating taxpayers with dignity and fairness. The finance minister has correctly advised tax officials to avoid using hackneyed or threatening language and technical jargon while communicating with them. The promise of unveiling a new and simplified law or tax code, however, has been unfilled for a long time. Though many tax simplification proposals have already been embraced in recent years, a comprehensive tax code is still required for harmonising our tax laws with international best practices and ensuring their stability to enhance economic growth.

Kamal Lodha, Bengaluru



# 10 EXPLAINED



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## Europe push, India's agency: why Modi visit to Kyiv is significant

**EXPERT EXPLAINS**

C. RAJA MOHAN

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi will hold talks with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Kyiv on Friday. Modi will be the first Indian prime minister to visit Ukraine after diplomatic relations were established in 1992. On July 6, Modi met Russia's President Vladimir Putin in Moscow — a visit that both Zelenskyy and the United States had criticised.

**Does Prime Minister Modi's visit signal a break from India's traditional foreign policy stance on Ukraine?**

This is certainly not a continuation of India's traditional foreign policy stance. India was close to the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Ukraine was born after the fall of the USSR in 1991. But India's affection for the Soviet Union, and later Russia, did not extend to Ukraine. This is not dissimilar to India's relations with Poland, the country the prime minister

visited on Wednesday and Thursday. During the Cold War, when Poland was a Warsaw Pact member, three Indian PMs visited the country — Jawaharlal Nehru in 1955, Indira Gandhi in 1967, and Morarji Desai in 1979. But after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, and with Poland moving away from post-Soviet Russia and closer to the West, India has not found much time for the country.

Both Poland and Ukraine are important countries in Europe, but India's bias towards Russia, in retrospect, likely prevented New Delhi from going full steam on its engagement with central and eastern Europe. This is why the prime minister's ongoing visit marks a significant departure.

**What has led India to depart from its older foreign policy stance towards Ukraine?**

Bilateral relations took a hit after the Russia-Ukraine war began in February 2022 — the volume of India-Ukraine trade dropped from \$3.39 billion in 2021-22 to \$0.78 billion and \$0.71 billion in 2022-23 and 2023-24 respectively, according to Ministry of Commerce data.

But the war has also created a new opportunity for New Delhi to engage with Kyiv. While India has maintained a strategic balance on the conflict itself, over the past two years, the highest levels of the Indian lead-



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Poland's President Andrzej Duda in Warsaw on Thursday. PTI

ership have engaged directly with Ukraine.

Modi has met and spoken with Zelenskyy at several multilateral forums, including the G-7 summit held in Italy last year. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and National Security Advisor Ajit Doval have been in touch with their counterparts in Ukraine. Indian officials have participated in various peace meetings.

On March 29, Jaishankar hosted Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba in New Delhi. The two ministers agreed to restore bilateral cooperation to the level that had existed before the war.

New Delhi has framed Prime Minister Modi's visit to Kyiv as a part of a progression

of improving relations. The possibility of post-war reconstruction in Ukraine offers various opportunities for India. More immediately, there is room for defence industrial cooperation. Ukraine's strength as one of the world's agrarian powers will add to its strategic salience in the years ahead. Pre-war Ukraine was among the biggest sources of sunflower oil for India.

**Could Modi's visit to Ukraine impact India's relations with Russia in any way?**

There is no reason for that to happen. India-Russia relations are in no way linked to India's engagement with Ukraine. The dis-

course both in India and in the West that forces this connection does not take into account the fact that India is a confident, powerful nation with significant capacity to act on its own in the international sphere. Framing the prime minister's visit either in terms of India "abandoning Russia" or as Modi's "redemption tour" following his visit to Moscow, is blind to India's agency.

This is not how international politics works. For instance, Russia and India continue to share a strong relationship. India has been key to keeping Russia's economy afloat by helping it bypass Western sanctions, and India continues to use Russian military hardware in addition to cooperating on a range of other issues — however, all this does not stop Russia from engaging with China, which is India's biggest geopolitical rival, on the basis of the common interests of those two countries.

At the end of the day, common interests are the driving force in international relations. As Russia's engagement with China does not impact its relationship with India, Indian engagement with Ukraine will not change its equations with Russia.

Moreover, if New Delhi wants to play peacemaker — PM Modi said in Warsaw on Thursday that India supports "dialogue and diplomacy for the early restoration of peace

and stability" and "is ready to provide all possible support" to this end — it has to engage with the "other side".

**In sum, what is the significance of the PM's ongoing visit?**

For decades after Independence, Europe remained a relatively low priority for Indian foreign policy beyond the narrow focus on relations with Europe's big four — Russia, Germany, France, and Britain. This has changed under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi over the last decade. His visit to Ukraine (and Poland) is part of India's larger Europe push.

Referring to India's policy of Non-Alignment on Wednesday, PM Modi said: "For decades, India's policy was to maintain equal distance from all countries. Today, India's policy is to maintain close ties with all countries."

This push to become "Vishwbandhu" includes a recognition of the opportunity that lies in forging deeper ties in central and eastern Europe, and disentangling New Delhi's engagement with the region from its relationship with Russia.

C. Raja Mohan is visiting professor at the Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore and contributing editor on international affairs for The Indian Express. He spoke to Arjun Sengupta.

### THIS WORD MEANS

#### GLASS CEILING

A metaphor for the invisible barriers against women reaching senior career positions

RISHIKA SINGH  
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 22

FORMER US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said in her speech at the Democratic National Convention on Monday that Vice President Kamala Harris' confirmation as the party's presidential candidate will help break the "highest, hardest glass ceiling".

Clinton also used this term after she lost the 2016 presidential election to Donald Trump. "To all the women... I know we have still not shattered that highest and hardest glass ceiling, but someday, someone will and hopefully sooner than we might think..." she said.

**What does 'glass ceiling' mean?**

A glass ceiling refers to not-so-obvious barriers that may keep someone from progressing professionally beyond a certain level, despite being qualified to do so. The term is mainly used in context of women.

According to the Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity and Society (2008), "...Ceiling implies that there is a limit to how far someone can climb before he or she bumps up against a barrier... To say that the ceiling is glass suggests that, although it is very real, it is transparent and not obvious to the casual observer. It also implies that what is on the other side is both visible yet inaccessible to those facing it."

**Who coined the term?**

The late American management consultant Marilyn Loden is largely credited for coining the term. In an article for the BBC in 1977, she wrote about using it for the first time in 1978, at a panel discussion on women's careers.

Loden disagreed with other panelists who mentioned factors such as "deficiencies in women's socialisation... ways in which women behaved, and [their] poor self-image" as reasons behind women

not advancing in their careers. "I argued that the 'invisible glass ceiling' — the barriers to advancement that were cultural not personal — was doing the bulk of the damage to women's career aspirations and opportunities," she wrote.

**Why did the term become popular?**

The term gained currency in the 1980s, as more women entered male-dominated work spaces, and spoke about the challenges they faced.

In 1991, US President George H.W. Bush established a Glass Ceiling Commission to investigate these issues. It found that while women comprised nearly 46% of the workforce, 95% of senior-level managers were men. A 2018 working paper from economist Marianne Bertrand found that only 23.3% of board members of the largest publicly listed companies and only 5.1% of the CEOs were women, despite women accounting for 45% of the labour force.

The persistence of barriers to women's career advancement continues to drive the term's usage. However, has also been criticised for centring affluent women, and ignoring those who are unlikely to even get a foot in the door — like those from minority groups and backward castes.

**Why does the glass ceiling persist?**

Sheryl Sandberg, former COO of Facebook, argued in her 2013 book *Lean In* that women needed to have greater ambition and make other behavioural changes. Loden wrote a critical response in *The New York Times*, saying, "...tearing it in is no way for the gender bias, inflexible work schedules and pay inequities that many working women still face."

Economist Claudia Goldin has said that the real issue is how lucrative, senior-level jobs require substantial time commitments. As long as jobs remain inflexible and don't allow or normalise time-offs for men, the gendered difference in career progression will live on, she says.

SOHINI GHOSH

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 22

ALMOST A year after Chandrayaan 3 landed on the Moon, scientists in India have released the findings of studies carried out by one of the instruments on the rover module.

The findings comprise the first analysis of the composition of the topsoil in the Moon's southern latitudes, and support the widely-accepted hypothesis that the lunar surface in the immediate aftermath of the Moon's formation was covered by a sea of molten material.

The data collected by the Alpha Particle X-ray Spectrometer (APXS) also contain new information about the elemental composition of the lunar surface that can help to better understand the evolution of the Moon.

The findings were published in the journal *Nature* on Wednesday.

**What has the APXS found?**

Scientists have reported three key findings.

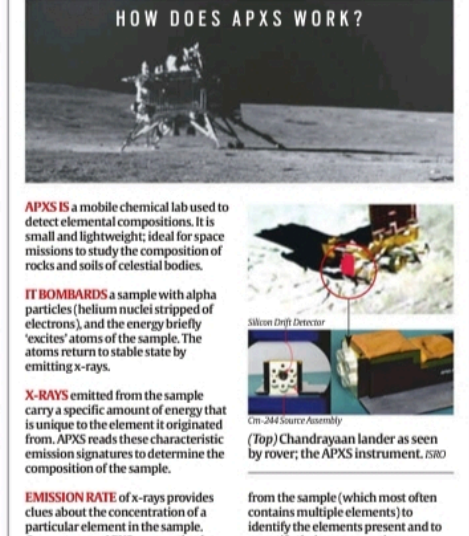
- The terrain around Chandrayaan 3's landing sight is fairly uniform;
- The Moon's crust was formed layer by layer, which adds weight to the lunar magma ocean (LMO) hypothesis; and
- The topsoil around the lunar south pole has a greater-than-expected sprinkling of minerals which compose the lower layers of the lunar crust.

**Taking forward LMO hypothesis**

The Moon is thought to have been formed after a large asteroid collided with Earth some 4.5 billion years ago. Scientists hypothesise that in its early life, the Moon's surface was made up entirely of an ocean of magma.

As this ocean cooled over millions of years, heavier silicon- and magnesium-rich minerals such as olivine and pyroxene sank to the lower levels of the lunar crust and its upper mantle (which is generally the larger layer inside a planetary body, bounded by the planet's core on the inside and the crust on the outside). Lighter minerals, composed of calcium- and sodium-based compounds, floated to the top and formed the upper crust.

The findings of Chandrayaan 3's APXS take this hypothesis a step further. They support a class of models under the umbrella of the LMO hypothesis which theorises a stratified lunar crust — where 80-90% of the upper crust is believed to be composed of iron, magnesium, and sodium-rich rocks, and the



lower crust of magnesium-rich rocks.

Among the different possible scenarios of lunar crust formation within the premise of LMO, the APXS measurements support the models indicating stratified crust formation," the study says.

**'Mixing' of crust's lower levels**

The third APXS finding is a new discovery — and suggests that some "mixing" of the various levels of the lunar crust might have taken place. The researchers have proposed that this "mixing" could have been caused by the asteroid impact that led to the formation of the South Pole Aitken (SPA) Basin, the largest and oldest basin on the Moon.

The SPA basin has a diameter of approximately 2,500 km — equivalent to the distance between Delhi and Kochi — and a depth of 6.2-8.2 km. It is believed to have been formed 4.2-4.3 billion years ago, when the asteroid hit near the lunar south pole.

The researchers theorise that this asteroid impact resulted in the excavation of magnesium-rich material from deeper layers of the Moon, out to the surface of the surrounding areas as ejecta. The Chandrayaan 3 landing site was just 350 km from the rim of the SPA basin.

**Significance of the findings**

While these findings more or less support what is already known via modelling,

imaging, and various hypotheses, they are novel nonetheless. This is primarily because Chandrayaan 3 is the first mission to the Moon's south pole, a first in lunar exploration.

While the composition of lunar topsoil near the equatorial and mid-latitude regions have previously been studied by earlier Moon missions sent by other countries, this is the first time that such measurements have been carried out near the Moon's poles. This makes Chandrayaan 3 the first to carry out in situ experiments of any kind at the poles.

The rover moved within a 50-metre radius of the landing site, and took readings on different kinds of surfaces, from relatively smooth ones to near the rims of small craters. The overall finding, which suggests that the topsoil near the landing site is fairly uniform, is novel. Notably, the uniformity of the surface is unlike that of Earth, where tectonic plate movements led to the creation of undulating surfaces.

With measurements taken at 23 spots along the rover's path, this is the first time that soil measurements on lunar highlands (light-colored, elevated basins on the Moon standing above dark-colored basins known as maria) have been taken with such high frequency. Other missions — such as the US's Apollo 16, Russia's Luna 20, and China's Chang'e 4 — have also sampled the lunar highlands, but sparsely. The total observation duration for the APXS measurements was about 31 hours, which were spread out over the mission period of 10 days.

**Impact on future missions**

If the mixing of the various layers of the lunar crust was propelled by the impact on the SPA basin and by further impacts subsequently in and around the basin, scientists believe that the APXS measurements will serve as the "first ground truth" in the south polar highlands and probably play a key role in the overall understanding of the origin and evolution of the Moon.

The uniform surface also implies that the region can be used as a calibration point for remote sensing operations, and can thus be used for planning future missions.

Future missions near the south pole can also evaluate for source-carrier pairing of lunar meteorites. Lunar meteorites are meteorites that originate from the Moon, ejected until after the Late Heavy Bombardment, or caught in the Earth's gravitational field, the lunar meteorites eventually end up on Earth.

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## Does your LMV licence allow you to drive a tractor as well? SC will decide

AJOY SINHA KARPURAM  
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 22

IF YOU have a licence to drive a car, could you possibly also drive a tractor — or perhaps a road roller? Yes, said the Supreme Court seven years ago — and the court is now ready to pronounce its verdict on a challenge to that ruling.

On August 21, a Bench led by Chief Justice of India (CJI) D.Y. Chandrachud indicated that it will no longer wait for the government to present its view on questions arising out of the challenge.

Nine months ago, on November 22, 2023, the Centre had informed the court that it would evaluate — and possibly recommend amendments to — Sections 2(21) and 10 of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988 (MVA), which deal with the definition of "light mo-

tor vehicle" (LMV) and the "form and contents of licences to drive" respectively.

**How the matter began**

In 2017, the Supreme Court was tasked with deciding if a person who held a licence to drive an LMV was required to obtain a separate licence to drive a transport vehicle. (Mukund Devangan v Oriental Insurance Company Limited)

Under MVA Section 10, every driving licence must identify the "classes" of vehicles that the holder is allowed to drive. The section identifies "light motor vehicle" and "transport vehicle" as two distinct classes.

The court held that anyone with a licence to drive an LMV can also drive road rollers, tractors, and "transport vehicles" (such as goods carriers or school) college buses) so long as the "unladen" weight of the (empty) vehicle is up to 7,500 kg.

Under MVA Section 2(21), an LMV is defined as "a transport vehicle or omnibus the gross vehicle weight of either of which or a motor car or tractor or road-roller the unladen weight of any of which, does not exceed 7500 kilograms".

The Bench of Justices Anur Mishra, Amitha Roy, and Sanjay Kumar Karand had been introduced as a class through a 1994 amendment to the MVA, replacing four older classes of passenger and goods vehicles that were classified as "medium" or "heavy".

However, the separate class of "transport vehicles" would not apply to vehicles falling within the definition of LMV, as it would have "absurd results", the Bench said.

"Every time an owner of a private car, who has a licence to drive a light motor vehicle, attaches a roof carrier to his car or a

trailer to his car and carries goods thereon, the light motor vehicle would become a transport vehicle and the owner would be deemed to have no licence to drive that vehicle," the court reasoned.

### EXPLAINED LAW

**Challenge to ruling**

In July 2011, the Motor Accident Claims Tribunal ordered Bajaj Allianz General Insurance to pay Rs 5,02,800 as compensation in an accident involving an auto-rickshaw.

On appeal, the Rajasthan High Court held in August 2017 that the insurer must pay the compensation as the auto-rickshaw was a light motor vehicle and a transport vehicle. In its ruling, the HC referred to the SC's decision in *Mukund Devangan*.

Bajaj Allianz moved the SC in 2018, and argued that *Mukund Devangan* had failed to consider multiple provisions under the MVA

that show the differences in requirements for operating an LMV and a transport vehicle.

In March 2022, the court held that "certain provisions were not noticed by this court in its decision in *Mukund Devangan*", and referred the case to a Constitution Bench.

**Before Constitution Bench**

In July 2023, the court asked the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways to present its position on the matter. On September 13, Attorney General for India R Venkataratnam told the court that the *Mukund Devangan* verdict "does not appear to be in accord with the legislative intent (of the MVA)". The AG also informed the court that the Centre was open to re-evaluating the legal position.

The court said "it would be appropriate if the entire matter is evaluated by the Government before this court embarks upon the interpretative exercise", and listed

the case for hearing on November 22. On that date, the AG said the Ministry had begun consultations on amending the MVA. The court then directed the Centre to submit a "road map" for the amendments.

On April 16, 2024, the AG informed the court that a proposed amendment was ready but asked for the proceedings to be deferred until after the Lok Sabha elections, as it could be placed before Parliament. However, when the case came up for hearing this month, the AG told the court that the amendment would be brought only in Parliament's Winter Session (which commences in December).

However, CJI Chandrachud retires on November 10, and if the matter is postponed beyond that date, a new Bench will have to be constituted and arguments will have to be heard anew. To avoid this situation, the Bench decided to conclude hearings and close the issue.





## Death at work

A safety audit is essential to prevent industrial accidents

**T**he blast at pharma company Escientia's plant in the Atchutapuram Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Anakapalli district, Andhra Pradesh, is the worst industrial accident in the region in recent times. Seventeen workers have died and many have been injured. On the same day, about 10 workers suffered injuries in a fire accident at a chemical factory in the same SEZ. Last year, on June 30, a massive explosion rocked a pharma plant, at the same SEZ, leading to deaths and injuries. The Atchutapuram SEZ, among the State's largest SEZs, is home to the factories of more than 100 companies. The rash of accidents revives memories of another deadly accident on May 7, 2020 – 12 people died after a styrene monomer vapour leak from a polymers unit at Venkatapuram village on the outskirts of Visakhapatnam. These accidents raise serious questions about the state of industrial safety in Andhra Pradesh, more specifically in the SEZ. State Home Minister V. Anitha has said that at Escientia, workers had tried to plug a solvent leak of the chemical solvent MTBE (Methyl tert-butyl ether). Before the leak could be plugged, it fell on an electrical panel, leading to a fire and blast, she said. Meanwhile, the typical safety data sheet of MTBE – that operating personnel should have been familiar with – says that it is highly flammable and its vapour can also cause skin and eye irritation. In case of accidental release, it specifically cautions against the serious risk of fire and explosion and lays down the use of explosion-proof electrical/ventilating/lighting equipment.

Trade unions and activists are calling for stringent punishment to lax managements. They also complain of abysmal safety standards. Their demand is for an immediate and thorough safety audit of all units at the SEZs and elsewhere in Andhra Pradesh. A key complaint is exemption from government inspection given to units in SEZs and Export Processing Zones in a 2016 order that brought into force the system of online inspections. This exemption will apparently apply to high-risk ones also, such as pharma and chemicals, in SEZs. Another is exemption from inspections given to medium-risk industries which can self-certify, based on third party audits, regarding compliance with safety norms. Such government moves are intended to facilitate ease-of-doing-business as frequent inspections by government staff may only lead to bribes and harassment without necessarily improving safety. While the intent is a well worked out practice across the world, the series of accidents calls for a broader probe including in SEZs in Andhra Pradesh so that any loopholes present can be fixed. Swift delivery of justice by punishing non-compliance of norms and the award of punitive damages will be a deterrent against ignoring safety.

## Intriguing silence

India should switch to inactivated polio vaccine

**T**he case of acute flaccid paralysis, likely due to polio, in a child from Tikkirika in Meghalaya, and in the media spotlight, was reported by the State government on August 14. In April 2022, a case of vaccine-derived poliovirus was detected from an environmental sample collected in Kolkata. After genetic sequencing, it was considered likely to be immunodeficiency-related vaccine-derived poliovirus (GVDPV), excreted by an immune-deficient individual. In the Meghalaya incident, even after the government confirmed the case, there is still no official report on whether it is vaccine-derived and not caused by wild poliovirus. With the global eradication of the wild poliovirus (WPV) type 2 in 2015 and the WPV type 3 in 2019, respectively, and no WPV type 1 found in environment samples in India for years, it is highly unlikely that it is due to the WPV type 1 unless it has been imported into India. As of August 13, Afghanistan and Pakistan have reported 14 WPV type 1 cases this year. If vaccine-derived, there is again no official confirmation on whether it is IDPV or from circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus (cVDPV). This information is key as cVDPV would mean that the virus is in circulation in the community, while IDPV is restricted to the single immunodeficient child. Also puzzling is the absence of any official report on whether the case has been caused by the type-1, type-2 or type-3 vaccine-derived virus. India made the globally synchronised switch in 2016 from trivalent to bivalent oral polio vaccine that has only live, attenuated type 1 and type 3 virus. So, while it is impossible that the child has the type 2 virus from the oral vaccine given in India, the chances of cVDPV type 2 virus imported into India cannot be ruled out. In 2024, 68 cVDPV2 and four cVDPV1 cases were recorded globally. Many countries have reported cVDPV in environment samples.

The long delay in confirming these crucial details is intriguing as samples from the child were sent to the ICMR-NIV Mumbai unit, which is a part of the WHO network of 146 accredited polio laboratories worldwide and conducts research on diseases caused by enteroviruses, especially paralytic poliomyelitis and acute flaccid paralysis. Unlike in the case of IPV, immunodeficient children are not supposed to be administered OPV. Since identifying such children prior to administering OPV is a challenge in India, India will continue to have such cases in the future. The Meghalaya case again brings into focus the urgent need for India to stop using OPV and switch over exclusively to IPV. Most developed countries switched to IPV decades ago. There is no reason why India should not switch to IPV at the earliest.

**T**he Waqf Bill 2024, or the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, has been referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) as the Narendra Modi government's own allies were not keen to get it passed immediately. Opposition parties were also critical of the Bill.

### The rationale of the family waqf

Some of their concerns are genuine as changes such as abolition of waqf by a user, and the granting of excess powers to the District Magistrate would lower the protection to waqf properties. Though there is hardly anything worthwhile in the Bill to effectively deal with the problem of the illegal encroachment of waqf properties, there are still some positive features such as a digitisation of waqfs and the inclusion of women and non-Muslims in family boards. Similarly, on the contentious issue of family waqf, the proposed reforms should be welcomed. Let us try to understand the rationale of the family waqf, how the colonial judiciary had responded to this unique kind of waqf, and the changes that have been made in the Muslim world.

Though the *Koran* does not specifically use the term waqf, there are some 20 verses that encourage people to do charity. Waqf is Islam's unique contribution to charity and is aimed at helping the poor and the underprivileged. Once a property becomes waqf, its corpus cannot be alienated, gifted or sold but its usufruct/usage alone can be utilised. There are various types of charities in Islam such as *sadaqah* (voluntary giving of cash); *zakat* (mandatory 2.5%) and waqf (voluntary and general though not confined to immovable properties). Waqfs are of three types: waqf khair (public waqf) totally devoted to welfare of humanity; waqf al-ahli or waqf al-aulad (family waqf) for the benefit of his family and al-waqf al-musharak (public and family waqf) for the combined benefit of both family and the larger society.

Family waqf is not only based on the English dictum of 'charity begins at home' but has theological sanction as family members must be given priority in charity. The *Koran* explicitly encourages the spending money on parents and relatives (2:215). The Prophet also said that, 'A dinar you spend in the path of Allah; a dinar you spend on a poor person; a dinar you spend on your family; greatest of them in reward is what you had spent on your family.'

Abu Talah 'Obid Allah was the first who created the family waqf with the concurrence of Prophet when after the revelation of the *Koran* verse – 'By no means shall ye attain righteousness unless ye give (freely of what ye love') (3:92), he endowed his garden called Biraah. The Prophet's wives such as 'Aisha,



**Faizan Mustafa**  
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Hafsa, Umm Salamah, Umm Habibah' created waqf for the benefit of their family members, and Safiyah created a family waqf for the benefit of her brother who was a Jew. Similarly, almost all the companions who had properties, created waqfs. Some like the first Caliph Abu Bakr, endowed his house to his children; the second Caliph 'Omar endowed his land at Thamgh to his children; Sa'd ibn Abu Waqqas too endowed his house in Egypt and Madina to his kith.

Family waqfs were used in addition to pious reasons to protect property, particularly agrarian, from fragmentation. It was supposed to lead to the growth of fixed assets and protect property from the prodigal children and eventually be used for public welfare.

Scholars such as Murat Cizakca, Jeffrey A. Schoenblum, Gregory C. Kozlowski, AAA Fayee, and Ronald K. Wilson were critical of family waqfs. Their argument was that the family waqf was developed as an institution to defeat the women's right to inheritance and for 'the aggrandisement of a family'. There may be some truth in this conclusion, but the waqf has been historically used to overcome other problems of Islamic law of inheritance such as the exclusion of orphaned grandchildren. Family waqf gave this opportunity to [the] grandfather to make a waqf of one third of his property in favour of orphaned grandchildren. It also helped the founder or waqf to provide for the special care of his aged parents, and minor and disabled children. In many cases, including in this writer's family, daughters were made primary beneficiaries. Of course, in some cases, males were made beneficiaries and daughters just had the right to residence and subsistence allowance. In many cases, women were excluded as well.

### Waqfs across the world

But under the Maliki law of the Sunni school, such endowments were null and void. Under the Shafi'i and Hanbali schools, the creator of waqf cannot reserve any benefit for himself. But the Hanafi and Hanbali schools considered them valid as a provision for reserving a part of the benefits for himself, which may encourage people to create waqfs.

The Privy Council in Abdul Fata (1894) invalidated the family waqf as it considered the benefit to the general public to be too remote. But in 1913, this decision was overturned by the British government. Scholars such as J.N. Anderson and J. Hamilton had criticised this judgment as 'wholly mistaken interpretation of Islamic law'. Under the influence of colonialism, which preferred free transfer of ownership, several Muslim countries even abolished family waqfs. Egypt, in 1946, first restricted it to two generations and finally abolished it in 1951. Syria

Some of the concerns expressed need to be acknowledged by the Joint Parliamentary Committee, but the positive features are what should be welcomed

# The Kursk gambit, Ukrainian tactics and battle realities

**T**he Ukrainians surprised Russia by launching an audacious attack into the Kursk region of the Russian Federation that also led to the capture of several hundred Russian soldiers. This bold, yet risky, gambit by the Volodymyr Zelenskyy-led regime, to employ thousands of its best fighting units to mount an incursion into Russian territory, was also a fitting one.

### The importance of Pokrovsk

Kyiv has been at the receiving end of Russia's ongoing offensive inside Ukraine, which shows no sign of weakening despite Ukrainian territorial gains in Kursk. Russian forces are also poised to capture the Ukrainian city of Pokrovsk in the Eastern Donetsk region in Ukraine. Pokrovsk is a vital logistics hub that gives Ukrainian forces considerably defensive strength, but it is currently under siege from rapidly advancing Russian forces. Ukrainian forces are now being ordered to withdraw from Pokrovsk, allowing Russian forces to make not just a significant breakthrough but also pave the way for them to capture the whole of the Donetsk region.

Yet, the Ukrainian offensive stands out and deserves and merits closer scrutiny, because no country since Hitler's Germany has ever invaded any part of Russia. Kyiv had been preparing for this offensive for several months, but concealed it from its western backers – albeit, some may conclude western powers tacitly acquiesced, by frequently drawing attention to a possible Russian attack against the Sumy region of Ukraine which borders Kursk and painting its preparation in the run-up to the offensive as primarily defensive.

This turned out to be a credible cover for the Ukrainians to launch and pursue their ongoing offensive inside Kursk, which, in any case, was weakly defended by Russian military conscripts. From a Ukrainian standpoint, it makes sense to



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Ukraine's bold move is intended to impress Kyiv's western arms patrons, which could pave the way for a settlement with Russia

carry out the attack inside the Kursk Oblast in Russia simply because it compels the Russians, even if it is not fully evident yet, to divert and redeploy their forces to areas that were weakly defended. The depletion of Russian forces is likely to limit the intensity of the Russian offensive inside Ukraine. However, it is unclear whether the Ukrainians have factored in the consequences of a concentrated Russian counter-attack to repel the Ukrainian invasion of the Kursk Oblast. Russia has mass and firepower that is by an order of magnitude significantly greater than what the Ukrainians possess, despite the resumption of weapons supplies and munition stocks by Kyiv's western allies, especially the United States. Kyiv has a choice to make – whether to drive deeper into Russian territory or consolidate existing gains.

Russia, for its part, is unlikely to relent in its ongoing offensive. In fact, there is no evidence to indicate that Moscow is relenting in its offensive to capture the whole of the Ukrainian region of Donetsk and more. It is possible that Moscow has gambled on making far greater and vital territorial gains while allowing some gains in Russia, as is visibly evident from its very probable capture of Pokrovsk – a key logistics centre for Kyiv.

### Moscow is not blinking

A Russian takeover of Pokrovsk would set the stage for an additional offensive inside Ukraine. While Kyiv's gains in Kursk have been impressive, with Ukrainian forces taking roughly 1,000 square kilometres of territory, Moscow remains largely unmoved to redeploy forces away from Eastern Ukraine where it has significant initiative and momentum and controls roughly 1,00,000 thousand square kilometres. The latter explains why Moscow is not blinking yet because it knows the balance of territorial control is in its favour

abolished it in 1949. Kuwait restricted it to two generations in 1951. Iraq permitted liquidation of the family waqf in 1954. Tunisia, Libya and the United Arab Emirates abolished the family waqf in 1954, 1973 and 1980, respectively. In countries such as India, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia, family waqfs, though permitted, were not given privileges of waqf properties. Thus, in India, as family waqfs were not treated as charitable, they have not been included in waqf surveys. There is no effective statutory supervision of family waqfs. Unlike charitable trusts, family waqfs are not entitled to exemptions or tax reliefs from capital gain tax, stamp duty and inheritance tax.

Though the Income-Tax Act, 1961 exempts religious and charitable waqfs, under Section 13, income tax is payable by the family waqf even in cases where income is to be used for family as well as religious or charitable purposes. Similarly, estate duty is applicable on the passing of property from one beneficiary to another through passing of property is alien to waqf jurisprudence. Many agrarian family waqfs were acquired by the government on nominal payments under land reform laws.

Section 20(D) of the Waqf Act 1995 does include family waqfs within the definition of waqf. It says that when the line of succession fails, the income of such a waqf shall be spent on education, development and welfare.

### A new section and impact

The newly proposed Section 3A(2) of 2024 Bill proposes a reform – that the family waqf shall not result in a denial of inheritance rights of heirs, including women heirs. The effect of this reform, which is welcome, is that a Muslim can now create a family waqf only in respect of a third of his property if he is excluding all his heirs; and, he cannot any more altogether exclude female heirs. But the problem with this provision is that if he gives even a token benefit to female heirs, i.e., much less than they are otherwise entitled to under Muslim law of inheritance, such a family waqf would remain valid.

The other problem is this: can we place similar restrictions on the testamentary powers of non-Muslims? A Hindu, for instance, under the Hindu Succession Act, 1956, can give away his entire property to a son to the exclusion of other heirs including female heirs. Hindu women's ownership of properties is nowhere near their legal entitlement under the 1956 Act.

Let the JPC improve this provision and bring in uniformity so that a Uniform Civil Code or Secular Civil Code, as and when it is enacted, incorporates it.

The views expressed are personal

and not Kyiv's. At the most, there is some evidence of Moscow diverting some of its irregular and regular units from Kharkiv for a counterattack against Ukrainian forces that are presently in occupation of a part of the Kursk Oblast.

The strength of Russia's response to Kyiv's surprise incursion may take time to crystallise with Moscow biding its time with the aim of consolidating its gains in Eastern Ukraine.

### Kyiv's messaging

Ukraine's battlefield tactics, through the incursion of its forces into Kursk, are as much demonstrative and performative as they are to compel a *quid pro quo* with Moscow. The incursion is also intended to signal to and impress Kyiv's western arms patrons, especially the U.S., that Ukrainian forces are more than capable of seizing the initiative and mounting well-crafted offensives inside Russian territory to blunt Russian territorial gains in Eastern Ukraine. This ensures continued and sustained support from the West on which Ukraine can count, because it could actually win and pave the way in the long run for an end to armed hostilities and a settlement between Moscow and Kyiv. Any end to actual combat is unlikely at least until the early months of next year.

Kyiv also runs two risks: first, moving too deep inside Russian territory, thereby overstressing its forces. And second, of Ukrainian forces currently occupying Kursk, which are among Kyiv's best trained combat units, facing the prospect of significant losses, and possibly a humiliating retreat, once Russia redeploy and concentrates its military strength against Ukrainian-occupied Kursk.

Whether Kyiv's incursion into Russian territory was worth the risk, will only be revealed with the passage of time.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Industrial safety

After every major accident (Page 1, "17 workers killed as fire breaks out at 'reactor blast' at A.P. pharma plant", August 22), there will be loud noises for an inquiry. But these will die down in due course without going into the recommendations made by safety committees. In most of these accidents, "gross human failure" and a lack of basic safety norms are the factors that are highlighted. The regulatory framework

on chemical safety is based on the Factories Act, 1948, Explosives Act, 1884; the Insecticides Act, 1968; the Petroleum Act, 1934, the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, Chemical Accidents (Emergency Planning, Preparedness, and Response) Rules, 1996, Manufacture, Storage and Import of Hazardous Chemicals Rules, 1989 and the Hazardous Wastes (Management, Handling and Transboundary Movement) Rules, 2008.

The Directorate, General Factory Advice Service and Labour Institutes amended the Factories Act, 1948, in 1987, notifying 29 types of industrial activities as hazardous processes and introduced special provisions for hazardous process industries in the Factories Act, First Schedule. A safety audit must be carried out every two years by law. The testing of on-site emergency plans every six months is a statutory requirement.

Management of medical emergencies should also be tested in drills every year. Disclosure of information to workers on chemical hazards by way of material safety data sheets is a statutory requirement. But in India, most workers are not taught about the chemicals they work with. Corporate and enforcement negligence leading to industrial disasters needs to be highlighted.

**A. Sathisvam,**  
Courtallam, Tamil Nadu

### State of the film world

The Justice K. Hema Committee report has highlighted the exploitation in the film industry. It is startling that predation and discrimination plague Malayalam cinema in a State famed for its progressivism and political consciousness. Mollywood must be freed from the stranglehold of such producers, directors and actors.

**Nagarajamani M.V.,**  
Hyderabad

### Madras and its history

The *Hindu* must be lauded for its wonderful coverage on Madras city, its history and culture. It is delightful that the city has many firsts to its credit. Chennai is perhaps the only city in the world where the sentiment is not "mine", but proudly "ours".

**R. Sivakumar,**  
Chennai

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address.



# 12 THE EDITORIAL PAGE

## WORDLY WISE

WE DON'T HAVE TIME TO SIT ON OUR HANDS AS OUR PLANET BURNS. FOR YOUNG PEOPLE, CLIMATE CHANGE IS... LIFE OR DEATH. — ALEXANDRIA OCASIO-CORTIZ

## The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY  
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

# Managing political risk

To insulate overseas investment, expertise in internal politics and policy of countries of interest is needed



SANJAYA BARU

THE POLITICAL CRISIS in Bangladesh and a renewed wave of anti-India sentiment sweeping across the neighbouring country have once again prompted analysts to examine the nature of political risk Indian companies face when they invest abroad. It is useful to remember that it is not so much in distant lands but, in fact, closer home in South Asia that Indian businesses have had more run-ins with political risk.

In 2004, a Tata group proposal to invest up to \$3 billion in Bangladesh's energy sector ran into political rough weather and was eventually abandoned. In 2009, products of the Dabur group came under what was perceived to be a politically-motivated consumer attack in Nepal. In 2013, a newly-elected government in the Maldives terminated an airport construction project awarded to the GMR group by a previous government. More recently, the Adani group has faced rough weather in Sri Lanka when functionalities of the government in Colombo alleged political pressure from India in the award of a contract.

It has been reported that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been encouraging Indian companies to invest overseas and emerge as global corporations. Even before securing any such official support, several major firms have been investing overseas partly to secure access to global markets and partly to de-risk the Indian environment. Few, however, have made any significant investment in assessing political risk, beyond hoping the home government would bail them out in difficult times.

Such dependence on the home government for dealing with overseas political risk itself constitutes a political risk. What happens when the political leader in government who guarantees protection overseas is himself replaced or no longer able to keep his word? Does a company board evaluate this risk when approving a proposal to venture out under such domestic political protection?

When a global company operating in India found itself exposed to a change in domestic laws, it chose to go to court. Some people advised the company's global boss to approach the newly-appointed minister responsible for the change of policy. Having that kind of information and knowing how to get to the person is also risk management. This, too, requires feel on the ground and eyes and ears where possible.

Those investing in developed economies

depend on the latter's more predictable policy environment, not worrying too much about political risk. Though, even there, Indian businesses have had to grapple with domestic politics. Lakshmi Mittal, for example, had to deal with European politics in his bid to take over the cement MNC Arcelor. Infosys has had to convince American politicians that it is creating wealth and employment even in the US and not just in India.

Political risk management by Indian firms has ranged from "playing golf" with "persons that matter" in the overseas investment destination, to securing "political protection" in that country or "consulting the Indian ambassador". Indian business leaders are quite adept at securing political protection overseas given the long years of experience at home. Diplomats have found an avenue for post-retirement employment, working for companies that have investments in countries where they have been posted. The lack of adequate demand for political risk insurance has not encouraged and developed this line of consulting adequately at home.

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In creating the geo-economics and strategy programme at the International Institute of Strategic Studies a decade ago, I tried to explore the Indian corporate market for overseas political risk assessment and discovered that most business leaders were satisfied investing in building personal relations with "those who matter" in the relevant country. Over the past decade, many Indian business groups have funded research institutions and think tanks that study the global economy and politics. However, their focus is mostly on national security, foreign policy and bilateral relations rather than country-specific economic and political risk.

They have much to say in their working papers and newspaper columns on what governments say and do, on what they should or should not do and very little on advice for CEOs and board rooms on country-specific risks to Indian business. The irony is that both in government and business, most believe they have little use for such "academic" research. There have been intermittent efforts at promoting area studies and country-specific expertise but few undertake country political risk.

An important institution that has often filled the information gap for corporates between what may be regarded as purely "academic" research and "agenda-based" advice from governmental functionaries has

been the media. Foreign correspondents are an excellent source of information that could feed into political risk assessment. There is, in fact, a long history of such a role being played by foreign correspondents with many distinguishing themselves as experts in area studies. This important source of overseas risk assessment is hardly available in India since few media companies invest in foreign correspondents.

In the past, when a few newspapers did appoint correspondents in neighbouring countries, some of the journalists became important sources of information on that country. What they could not or would not put on paper they would convey to diplomats and spooks. This has happened the world over, which is why foreign correspondents are sometimes viewed as quasi-spooks. No government likes such quasi-spooks but every government makes use of them.

Foreign governments and businesses dependent on mainstream Indian media's coverage of the general elections in India were less prepared for the final result than those who paid attention to what some foreign correspondents were writing. Here, too, the Union government's treatment of "difficult" foreign correspondents put many others on alert, limiting the freedom with which they could express their views on domestic politics, further contributing to the "surprise" downgrading of the BJP.

Given that both the government and individual firms are serious about overseas investment, they must facilitate the growth of area studies and expertise in the internal politics and policy of countries of interest and importance. It is not enough for think tanks to focus only on the foreign policy of other countries. They must also invest in developing local expertise in the domestic politics of countries where they intend to place their shareholders' money.

If the kind of reporting that has been done out of Dhaka over the past fortnight by Indian media was done in the fortnight preceding Sheikh Hasina's exit, many Indian firms, as well as the government in Delhi, would have been better prepared to deal with the sudden turn of events.

The writer was Member, National Security Advisory Board of India, 1999-2001 and media advisor to Prime Minister of India, 2004-08

## MARKET FACTS & FEARS

Claims of predatory pricing must be examined. Policy needs to ensure fair competition for e-commerce players, small retailers

ON WEDNESDAY, MINISTER of Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal raised the issue of "predatory pricing" by e-commerce platforms and the possibility of "social disruption" as their rapid growth could adversely impact millions of small retailers across the country. E-commerce platforms in India have been in the regulatory glare for some time now. In 2020, the Competition Commission of India (CCI) had initiated an investigation against Amazon and Flipkart over allegations of deep discounting and the practice of preferred sellers. Allegations of predatory pricing were also levied against e-commerce firm Shoppe and taxi aggregator Ola, subsequently dismissed by the Competition Commission.

Predatory pricing involves selling goods or services at a price lower than their cost of production. This is an anti-competitive practice that works to the disadvantage of the firm's existing competitors and also dissuades prospective new entrants in the market segment. Driving out competitors could result in the creation of a monopoly-like market structure. While consumers benefit in the short-term via lower prices, the long-term consequences are less market competition, less choice for buyers, and the possibility of the dominant firm later raising prices to the detriment of consumers. However, considering the dynamics of online pricing, the cost structures of these platforms and the advantages that economies of scale tend to offer, determining if a firm has engaged in predatory pricing is not a straightforward exercise. Moreover, even brick and mortar stores often offer huge discounts to clear their stock. The report by the Pabhe India Foundation, at the launch of which Goyal made the comments, presents data that counters some of the charges that have been levelled against such platforms. As per the report, while e-commerce is indeed growing at a fast pace, it comprised only 78 per cent of total retail sales in 2022. The report estimates that around 1.76 million retail enterprises take part in e-commerce activity in India, with the online vendors generating 15.8 million jobs, including 3.5 million for women. A significant share of e-commerce vendors surveyed in the report said that their sales and profits have increased after they started selling online. Integration with such platforms has, in fact, delivered benefits to vendors in smaller cities. Contrary to oft-repeated claims, the report finds that the growth of this segment is "not at the cost" of the traditional brick and mortar stores. Not only do consumers feel they have more choice, but they also feel that pricing is in their favour.

The e-commerce market in India is a fast growing segment. With more and more consumers and businesses onboarding such platforms, the Competition Commission should ensure that firms do not indulge in unfair practices, that there is fair play and a level playing field. There should be greater transparency in pricing and lesser information asymmetry. Policy should be guided by the objective of safeguarding competition.

## FIGHTING THE WATER

Tripura flood toll underlines that state governments cannot be left to their own devices in building climate resilience

AT LEAST 10 people have lost their lives in Agartala after unrelenting rainfall for four days caused floods in large parts of Tripura's capital. Rivers running in state have caused devastation in other parts of the state, especially its southern districts, and the authorities fear the toll could be higher. It's clear that "unprecedented rainfall" caught the state administration off-guard. Given that the IMD predicts that the downpour will continue for the next two days, the state government has done the right thing in according priority to "public safety" and "mitigating the impact of flooding". More than 50,000 people have been shifted to relief camps. The Centre has promised Tripura "all help" in dealing with the emergency. But Tripura, like most states, needs more central support in combating the vagaries of the elements. Reports indicate that the flash floods and landslides experienced by the northeastern state in the past three days have distinct similarities to the extreme weather-induced calamities in several parts of the country this season. The Centre will have to hand-hold states in building resilience against climate change.

Scientists in different parts of the country are working on mechanisms to alert people about landslides. IIT Mandi, for instance, has installed sensors to measure rainfall, soil moisture and humidity in Kinnara and Kangra districts of Himachal Pradesh. The data collected by these devices can help forecast landslides about three hours in advance. Administrators will need to sync this research with the observations of the weather bureau and coordinate with telecom operators to provide timely SMS warnings to people. But if the climate action plans of most state governments are any indication of ecological awareness, local agencies cannot be left to their own devices. Tripura's climate action plan, for instance, has only a few sentences on floods and landslides. It does refer to the imperative of desilting rivers and upscaling urban drainage systems. The destruction caused by the latest floods is proof that such measures have remained on paper.

The raging waters have submerged the fields of Tripura's paddy and jute farmers, most of whom are small agriculturalists. The state's farm sector is yet to recover from the damage caused by Cyclone Remal in May and another round of floods a month later. The Tripura government had then announced a financial assistance scheme for agriculturalists. But as with early warning systems or urban infrastructure, governments will need to find ways to shield the fields from the ravages of floods. These tasks cannot be postponed for long.

## LOVEBOMBER BABY

The heartbreak anthem of 2024 offers hope: One need not be Taylor Swift to make viral art out of a failed romance

GIVE DUE CREDIT to the internet: Without the virality algorithm that determines how most people discover new art and artists these days, the story of Gagni Porwal's broken heart would have remained a personal wound. Instead, "Lovebomber baby", recorded by the computer engineer as an attempt to get over the man who "lovebombed" and then "ghosted" her, has become the heartbreak anthem of 2024. Featuring a video with unabashed DIY aesthetics, in which Porwal can be seen dancing to her own choreography, what the song lacks in polish, it makes up for in sheer vim. It has shot the singer to global fame.

The consumption of "cringe" content — loosely defined as that which causes the viewer to feel embarrassed on behalf of the creator/performer — is a hallmark from the early years of social media. This was when the novelty of platforms like YouTube, combined with the rapidly expanding reach of the internet to populations that were not necessarily digital natives, resulted in a proliferation of raw, unfiltered content. Some of these attained viral fame of the so-bad-it's-good variety. Music, specifically, saw the birth of what became known as "cringe pop", beginning with the infamous Rebecca Black song "Friday" in 2011.

What is remarkable about Porwal's fame, however, is that the undertone of cruelty — delighting in the awkwardness of another human being — that marked the virality of Black's fame or that of Pakistani singer Taher Shah, is largely missing from people's embrace of "Lovebomber baby". The universality of her story may have something to do with it: Who, after all, hasn't wondered why the object of their affections has stopped texting them? Or it could be that she embodies an altogether different emotion: Hope. She has, after all, shown that one need not be a Taylor Swift to make viral art out of a failed romance.



PARTH SHARMA AND SMRITI RANA

A RECENT SUPREME Court judgment reveals the legal and ethical confusion around euthanasia in India. A Ryles tube is a device through which food can be passed through the nose into the stomach. Permission to remove the tube was denied to the parents of Harish Rana, a 32-year-old who has been in a vegetative state for the past 11 years with no chance of recovery. While withdrawal of life support in cases deemed terminal is allowed as per the SC's 2018 judgment, a bench headed by CJI D Y Chandrachud observed on August 20, "Ryles tube is not a life support system."

The term "passive euthanasia", adopted by the SC in 2018, refers to allowing natural death by withholding or withdrawing life-prolonging measures in terminal patients. This term is not ideal. Withholding of futile life-sustaining measures, or withdrawing them allows for natural death, while euthanasia implies an intent to kill. Ventilators, drugs that force the heart to beat and dialysis machines indisputably come under the category of life-prolonging measures. However, clinically-assisted nutrition and hydration — a term used to describe artificial feeding by any route other than the mouth, including the Ryles tube — is also a life-support measure that can be withdrawn in the terminally ill. Besides the judgment's medical validity, it is also crucial to question its ethical basis. Medical ethics has four broad pillars. "Beneficence", which makes it morally incumbent on the physician — or the bench, in this case — to act in the patient's benefit. "Non-maleficence" makes it obligatory for the decision-maker not to harm the patient. "Justice" demands that the rights of the patient not be exploited. "Autonomy" gives the patient the right to choose.

## FOR DIGNITY IN THE END

Supreme Court verdict adds to the legal confusion on euthanasia

It is hard to imagine what it must have taken Harish's ageing parents to move the court. The right to a dignified life and death has also been denied. The verdict, along with a similar judgment passed by the Delhi High Court in Harish's case, raises serious concerns. Why did the family have to go to court? Could the early involvement of palliative care physicians have prevented their suffering?

The SC decision also reflects the general fear and negative impression of death and dying in our culture. Death from "passive euthanasia" is interpreted as murder rather than liberation from prolonged suffering. As in many cultures, the act of feeding is not merely a function of survival but is conflated with caregiving, hospitality, and love. Denying this is taboo at a social and existential level. Let's try and understand the reality here, though.

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Living with a Ryles tube is painful. It is distressing to have it inserted, and it must be changed every two to three weeks. Multiply this by 11 years. Imagine the state of the parents who have not known where to draw the line between hope and wishful thinking. The SC parenthetically denied the permission to remove the Ryles tube with the idea that it would lead to death by starvation. We don't know if a person in a vegetative state would feel hunger in ways fully conscious people do, but we do know that extending life that is of such poor quality for both the patient and his caregivers is a travesty of medical ethics.

It is time there is legal clarity on the difference between euthanasia and withdrawal of futile life-sustaining interventions by involving medical and ethical experts. Till then, it is important to educate ourselves about our rights and the options available by means such as Advance Care Planning and Advance Medical Directives. A good quality of life and death are everyone's rights.

Sharma is a community physician. Rana heads the WHO Collaborating Centre for Training and Policy on Access to Pain Relief. Both are members of the Advance Care Planning Task Force under the Indian Association for Palliative Care



## AUGUST 23, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO

### OPPOSITION RALLY

OPPOSITION PARTY LEADERS at a public meeting at the Delhi Ramilla grounds unitedly pledged to fight the Congress onslaught on the Constitution and the erosion of democratic norms. Organised to protest against the "butchering" of democracy in Andhra Pradesh, the massive rally was addressed by major opposition party leaders.

### BHASKARA'S 95

THIRTY-SIX ANDHRA PRADESH MLAs who were claimed by Chief Minister Bhaskara Rao as having gone with him to Governor Ram Lal

in Hyderabad were in New Delhi at that time. This is conclusively proved by a group photograph of 35 of them with N T Rama Rao taken at a hotel in New Delhi where NTR supporters were put up. Who then are the 95 supporters which Bhaskara Rao has claimed to have presented to the Governor?

### VENKATARAMAN IS VP

CONGRESS (I) NOMINEE Venkataraman was elected the eighth Vice President of India when he defeated the combined Opposition candidate B C Kamble by a comfortable margin. Of the 545 votes polled, Venkataraman bagged 508 against 207 secured by Kamble.

There were 30 invalid votes, an unusually high number considering that the electoral college consists of members of the two Houses of Parliament.

### CENTRE'S PROPOSALS

TO DEFEAT the Andhra Pradesh crisis, the Centre is considering proposals short of conceding to the demands of the Telugu Desam Party. One of the proposals is to transfer the state Governor, Ram Lal. There were indications that some announcement concerning the developments in Andhra Pradesh would be made soon after the Prime Minister's meeting the President. But it has been delayed.



Opinion

FRIDAY, AUGUST 23, 2024

## Modi in Kyiv

A negotiated end to the Ukraine war is still elusive but the world economy has a huge stake in it

HERE WILL BE considerable international attention on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Kyiv today regarding the possibilities of an intervention to end Ukraine's two and a half years' war with Russia. He is the first Indian PM to visit Ukraine in more than 30 years. India, for its part, has consistently taken the position of not joining the chorus of western nations in condemning Moscow's invasion, while appealing for diplomacy and dialogue to end the conflict. Modi reiterated this theme in his address to the Indian community in Warsaw. Before embarking on his two-nation trip, Modi indicated that he hoped to share perspectives on the peaceful resolution of the conflict with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and for an early return of peace and stability in the region.

The visit will obviously build upon the high-level interactions between the two leaders who earlier met on the sidelines of G-7 summits in Apulia in June and in Hiroshima last year. They also met at the 2021 UN climate change conference in Glasgow. Modi's visit is perhaps an attempt at damage control as Zelenskyy expressed disappointment with his trip to Russia in July, which unfortunately coincided with a Russian missile strike on a children's hospital in Kyiv. It also represents a delicate balancing act in signalling to the West, especially the US, with whom India is getting increasingly aligned even as it bolsters a strategic relationship with Russia in a multi-polar world. But there are objective limits to what India can do to facilitate dialogue to end the war as it is not the principal channel of communication between Russia and Ukraine or for that matter between the US and Russia.

To be sure, India played a behind-the-scenes role a couple of years ago in de-risking the global economy from the Ukraine war that unleashed the spectre of a full-blown global food crisis by selling a proposal to Russia to allow grain shipments through the Black Sea. This deal was brokered by the UN and Türkiye. When Russian forces shelled the Zaporizhzhia nuclear facility, India told Russia to back off according to an article in the *New York Times*. Given India's help in pivotal moments like these, there are no prizes for guessing why there is interest on the outcome of Modi's visit to Kyiv. It is not as if India has not sought to play the role of a peacemaker. A couple of years ago, France's President Emmanuel Macron floated an idea to hold talks along with Modi but this did not materialise. In June, India participated in a peace summit in Switzerland and emphasised that it can be achieved through dialogue and diplomacy.

However, any initiatives in this regard will succeed only if both the parties feel the need to silence their guns as they cannot achieve their military objectives. Alas, this does not seem to be the case at present. Earlier this month, Ukraine launched a stunning push into Russia's Kursk region and seized 1,250 sq km of territory, more than Russia has in Ukraine all year. Russia is registering significant gains in Ukraine's eastern region. But all of this shouldn't deter Modi from sharing perspectives with Zelenskyy to end the conflict which the world economy has a huge stake in. By visiting Kyiv, Modi has sent a welcome signal that India is not leaning so close to Moscow that there is nothing to salvage with Kyiv.



## TAX MINUS JARGON

Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman

It would be better if the tax-related communication is simpler in language, becomes devoid of technical words and is not convoluted so that an average taxpayer understands what he/she needs to do or what the notice is about

## ● SKEWED REALITIES

IT IS IMPORTANT TO QUESTION NARRATIVE-MAKING DOMINATED BY A NORTH ATLANTIC CABAL

# Legitimacy of 'global rankings'

WE ARE ENTERING that time of year when a slew of Western think tanks and NGOs will issue various "global rankings" for 2024 on democracy, media freedom, happiness, and other assorted subjective issues. Almost certainly, most of these will show India at the bottom of the pile — unhappier than countries at war, less free than Afghanistan, and so on. In the last few years, several commentators, including this author, have exposed the ludicrous methodologies used to arrive at these rankings.

It is important readers recognise that these rankings are not harmless annoyances that can be ignored. They have real-world implications because they are hardwired into sovereign ratings and other decision-making processes. They are also used for a range of activities, from academic research to the manipulation of geopolitical narratives. Therefore, these rankings and indices cannot be casually ignored. They need to be actively deconstructed. Those interested in a critique of their methodologies may see EAC-PM working papers: *Reversing the Gaze* (March 2023) and *Why India Does Poorly on Global Perception Indices* (November 2022). However, this article will look at a somewhat different issue — the well-oiled institutional system that gives these indices and rankings their legitimacy.

An important route that gives these indices both legitimacy and influence is their inclusion in the *Worldwide Governance Indicators* (WGI) hosted on the World Bank's website ([bit.ly/4c8x2Df](http://bit.ly/4c8x2Df)). As stated on the website, WGI is "a global compilation of data capturing household business and citizen perceptions of the quality of governance in more than 200 countries". Thus, legitimised by the World Bank, these indicators are then used by investment managers, academia, credit ratings agencies, and so on.

## SANJEEV SANYAL

Member, EAC-PM

Therefore, it will come as a surprise to many commentators that WGI is not the property of the World Bank, but of two researchers — Daniel Kaufmann and Aart Kraay. The page mentions them in passing, and the wording gives the impression that they happen to be employees who are currently managing it on behalf of the World Bank. What is not made clear is that the two researchers own the space. Readers can verify this on the website and decide if it is misleading. Kaufmann, for instance, left the institution years ago and appears to be the semi-retired emeritus president of a think tank.

It is only when one gets to the small print at the bottom of the page that one realises the WGI is going "research" published to encourage academic debate and analysis. The views expressed in the research methodology do not necessarily represent the views of the World Bank, its Executive Board, or World Bank management. While it is not unusual for researchers to put out an idea as a paper for discussion, the WGI page is quite different, as it is a continuously updated curation of indicators that is permanently hosted on the website of the World Bank. Inclusion in the list clearly

lends a certain legitimacy derived from the multilateral agency. In fact, it is most commonly referred to as World Bank WGI. Yet, the institution takes no responsibility for it!

The way WGI is set up makes it so that it provides indicators for six categories: voice and accountability, political stability, governance effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, and control of corruption.

Rankings and indices from various think tanks are aggregated into these categories. The choice of these sources is entirely derived from the personal preferences of Kaufmann and Kraay — no justification is given for the choices. What is also striking is that most of the sources are derived from a few North Atlantic institutions. Surely, Worldwide Global Indicators hosted by the World Bank should reflect opinions from across the world.

In recent years, several country representatives at the World Bank have questioned the placing of WGI on the World Bank website. The matter has even been discussed at the board level, but somehow, WGI continues to be hosted by the multilateral agency. However, if anyone raises an objection about any of the curated indices, they are directed by World Bank

Once legitimised by the World Bank or a similar institution, the index or ranking finds its way into academia, media, and even government documents. The whole edifice may be based on a single point of legitimacy but the ordinary person will think 'surely they cannot all be wrong'

officials to the original sources. The origin think tanks and NGOs do not feel they owe anyone an explanation, as their place in the WGI is secure.

This problem was illustrated last year by the response of Staffan Lindberg, director of Sweden-based Varieties of Democracy Institute (V-Dem), to criticism of their annual global democracy rankings. Rather than explain the methodology, Lindberg condescendingly stated in an interview that V-Dem's rankings were based on complex mathematical computations by a supercomputer. In other words, there was no need to explain things to mere mortals. One wonders why V-Dem needs complex mathematics and a supercomputer to collate the views of some 30-40 unknown "experts".

Once legitimised by the World Bank or a similar institution, the index or ranking finds its way into academia, media, and even government documents. In turn, they amplify the narrative by quoting each other in circular references. These days they get further amplified by artificial intelligence algorithms and Wikipedia. Eventually, it ends up as received wisdom in college essays and everyday conversations that no longer look back at the primary evidence. The whole edifice may be based on a single point of legitimacy but the ordinary person will think "surely they cannot all be wrong".

As one can see, this is rather like a money laundering operation where the World Bank gives legitimacy to WGI but takes no responsibility, WGI then passes the buck to the source think tanks, and the think tanks blame it on supercomputers. This is why it is important to question this global narrative-making system as well as think of how institutions from outside the North Atlantic cabal can do global rankings and sovereign ratings.

Views are personal

## Sonos app issues leave it racing to save reputation

SONOS INC. HAS a loyal user base for its high-end audio speakers. Unfortunately, a disastrous software launch has angered customers and jeopardised the company's reputation, and the window to fix the problem is closing rapidly.

The release in May of a new app that controls the speakers was meant to have been the culmination of chief executive officer Patrick Spence's grand plan to refresh the company's infrastructure and expand into a greater share of the \$100 billion audio market, of which it estimates it controls less than 2%. The existing Sonos app was struggling to handle all the demands of the modern-day audiophile, who wants to listen to sound from various sources, both local and in the cloud, across multiple devices and rooms. Spence said "performance and reliability issues" had crept in over time.

It turns out the new app was flawed, though. There's not enough space in this column to list all of its shortcomings, but here's a few: Sound drops in and out. Volume blasts high and can't be adjusted. Devices "disappear" in the app, seemingly at random. The most basic features, like setting a sleep timer or alarm, are missing, according to tech site Engadget. "My push for speed backfired," Spence said.

In a business like specialist audio, trust can be extremely hard to win back. Now Spence, who has been in charge for some 12 years, most likely has just months to save the company's future.

On Tuesday, the former BlackBerry executive threw himself into the lion's den: an "ask me anything" session in the Sonos subreddit, where more than 250,000 Sonos owners gather. They are a loyal bunch, spending thousands of dollars to outfit their homes with the latest gear. They are power users and evangelists. Their patience is being severely tested.

Taking questions, Spence quickly put one issue to rest. The company wouldn't be reverting back to the old Sonos app while the new app was being straightened out. "After doing extensive testing we're reluctantly concluding that re-releasing S2 would make the problems worse, not better," he wrote. "I'm sure this is disappointing. It was disappointing to me."

Past the point of no return, the company has said the problem would take at least \$20 million to \$30 million to fix. The app debacle has meant slower sales of existing products, and two products that had been scheduled to launch imminently are being held back.

As a result, the company reduced its top-end revenue forecast for its fiscal year to \$1.5 billion from \$1.7 billion. It is laying off 100 people — around 6% of its staff.

Does it stop there? Since the new app was first launched, Sonos' stock has fallen more than 35%. Its market cap of about \$1.4 billion makes it a vulnerable minnow among those that seek to compete, like Alphabet Inc.'s Google, Amazon.com Inc., or Apple Inc., all of which have invested in smart speaker products. Bose Corp., another competitor, is privately held, and there are a few other smaller players.

What all of these competitors lack, experts say, is Sonos' expertise in multi-room setups, which is a deal-breaker for many consumers. This advantage, says Jeffries analyst Brent Thill, means that if the problems can be solved in the next couple of months, consumers will be forgiving and Sonos will be right back on track. Software meltdowns are not uncommon, Thill argues — just ask CrowdStrike Holdings Inc. or Delta Air Lines Inc. The question is how quickly Sonos can get it rectified.

Damning word of mouth is building fast, with powerful sites like the *New York Times* and Reuters recently withdrawing endorsements. Any conscientious buyer dipping into audio forums will be left in no doubt about the challenges Sonos is facing.

"We're doing everything we can to put all of these issues behind us in time for the important holiday season," Spence told investors, who so far haven't called for his head, though that won't last if he can't straighten things out. "Stubborn bugs" have been "identified" and there is an "action plan" to solve them, he said. That better happen quickly before users abandon Sonos for good.

## The dollar's limbo: How long can it go?



## JAMAL MECKLAI

CEO, Mecklai Financial  
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WHEN I WAS a young buck, there was a popular dancing song by Chubby Checker called Limbo Rock; two people would hold a rod across the dance floor and the dancers would have to bend backwards and slither under the rod, while everyone would shout: "How low can you go?" And with each turn, the rod would be pushed lower still — how low can you go?

Watching the dollar this past week took me back to that wild, back-breaking dance.

The dollar index has fallen by more than 11% in the past year, but in historic terms, DXY is still extremely strong. Since 2019, it has been higher than the current level (101.5) nearly 40% of the time; however, since 2015, it has been stronger just 23% of the time; and since 2002, DXY has been above 101.5 not even 15% of the time. In other words, its long-term average level (90.5 since 2002) is much lower than today's value. Perhaps more relevant in terms of timing, the accompanying graphic shows that DXY has fallen below a reasonably strong support and it would seem that it may well test (and possibly break) the 100 level, after which the next support is around 95-96.

While none of this definitively confirms that the dollar is going to continue to weaken (and stay weak) — markets never give you such easy signals — the reality is that there appears to be considerable "certainty" that US interest rates are going to fall, possibly quite rapidly. With US employment

looking a little shaky and inflation appearing to stabilise near acceptable levels, the market — always quick on the draw — is looking for as many as three cuts in the balance of 2024 and a total of 1.75-2% of cuts through 2025.

Contrariwise, the European Central Bank, while likely to cut rates at least once more this year, is nowhere near as enthusiastic, since growth in the Eurozone appears to be holding reasonably steady and inflation, too, appears to be in control. The Bank of Japan, on the other hand, has already raised rates once this year, which led to the dramatic unwinding of the yen carry trade and the nearly 5% decline in the DXY as a result. Thus, from an interest differential standpoint, the dollar appears to have nowhere to go but down.

Additionally, with the US presidential election heating up, it is becoming clear that both sides — Trump explicitly, Harris less so — would likely be happy with a weaker dollar and will design policies pushing in that direction. And, of course, in the (hopeful) event of a Harris victory, there is the real possibility that Trump's rabble may generate some chaos on the streets, which would take at least a few basis points off the dollar's vaunted safe haven status.

And finally, there is the elephant in the room — the US debt/GDP ratio, which is among the highest in the world, topped only by Japan, Lebanon, Singapore, and Sudan. Japan has been at the top in this regard for decades, but the fact that the vast majority of the debt is held onshore by citizens

who, as a friend who lived in Japan for 25 years described it, are members of Club Japan — members will never break the rules or do anything to destabilise the club. Singapore has a huge gross debt, but it has assets exceeding its debt and so remains rated AAA. Lebanon and Sudan are economic basket cases.

The US has, of course, always lived beyond its means, and has been using the credibility generated by its deep and liquid financial markets to sustain its lifestyle. And while this has worked thus far, the weaponising of the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication to implement sanctions against Russia has started to see more and more countries begin to put at least a few of their eggs in other baskets, including gold. Given that any new US administration would have huge difficulty in cutting spending right up front, this smouldering issue could add to the medium-term downward drift in the dollar.

Thus, a DXY range of 95-105 over the next six months in the event of a Democratic victory seems a reasonable bet.

On the other hand, however, if (heaven forbid) Trump were to win the election, it is possible that his radical and irresponsible ideas could trigger some real trauma in global investment markets, which could push the dollar lower still. I'd look for a much crazier DXY range of 85-95.

Time to practise limbo dancing.

## DXY SINCE JAN 2002



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### No rate cuts yet

The buzz around the financial market about rate cuts will continue until Consumer Price Index (CPI) remains under 4%, the target set by the regulator. On the back of sustained fiscal as well as monetary measures, CPI has been showing signs of easing. The inflation rate in July ebbed to 3.54%, marking the first time that the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) brought

down CPI below the set target since 2019. The RBI anticipates CPI will start moving up September onwards. At present, the economy is traversing through the right trajectory and any haphazard move may derail the engine. Waiting and watching is essential to buttress growth without losing sight of price stability. The market will have to wait some more to see the RBI turn dovish and cut rates. —Ashok Kumar Sahoo, Guwahati

### E-commerce not going anywhere

Union minister Piyush Goyal has come up with the most ridiculous argument to discourage e-commerce. The fear of becoming couch potatoes is very real, but it is not happening because of online purchases gaining popularity. The extinction of mom-and-pop stores has been offset by the 1.5 times more

jobs created by online vendors. Predatory pricing may be true but the consumers are not complaining. Nobody does business to do any favours. The sole reason is to make money. The minister is really worried about lack of exercise, how about giving the citizens good, safe and clean roads for them to walk? —Anthony Henriques, Maharashtra

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



# Do we need a Central law for protection of healthcare professionals?



**R.V. Asokan**  
is national president of the Indian Medical Association



**Shanthi Ravindranath**  
doctor-activist, is Secretary, Doctors' Association for Social Equality

## PARLEY

**F**ollowing the brutal rape and murder of a trainee doctor in Kolkata, the issue of violence against healthcare workers has come to the forefront, with medical professionals across India demanding the enactment of a Central law to protect healthcare workers. In 2019, a Bill on this issue was drafted by the Central government, but it never saw the light of day. Can a Central law ensure security for healthcare professionals at work? R.V. Asokan and Shanthi Ravindranath discuss the question in a conversation moderated by C. Maya. Edited excerpts:

**Why has violence against healthcare workers been increasing across India?**

**R.V. Asokan:** The violence that the postgraduate trainee doctor experienced (in Kolkata's R.G. Kar Medical College and Hospital) is obviously very different from what doctors normally face. Generally, when there is an unexpected death, relatives sometimes get violent (with doctors and nurses). We have been seeing such incidents of violence in the last two-three decades. In fact, 25 States have enacted laws (to protect medical professionals), but unfortunately, there are very few convictions. The violence is due to patients' expectations, high out-of-pocket expenditure, and the lack of proper communication between doctors and patients. It is a complex subject.

**Shanthi Ravindranath:** WHO (the World Health Organization) says every country should spend at least 6% of the GDP on health. But few countries are doing this (India spend less than 2%). People need free, easily accessible, proper, and complete treatment. When they reach the hospital, they get angry because they are in distress. Ideally, this anger should be directed against the system. But unfortunately, it is taken out on the doctor who provides the treatment, who is the face of the hospital at that point, and who is in the emergency room. WHO also says violence against healthcare workers at the global level is 8%-38%. We need to increase GDP spending on health and strengthen the public health system so that people are provided proper treatment when they go to a hospital. This will help check such cases of violence.

**Could better infrastructure and additional security measures in hospitals help?**

**SR:** Most hospitals, especially government ones and medical colleges, use interns, postgraduate medical students, and super speciality students to run the show. As the main healthcare force, these people are made to work continuously for long hours. They are emotionally exploited and verbally abused at work. So, we have to improve



Doctors protest against the rape and murder of a postgraduate trainee doctor of the Kolkata R.G. Kar Medical College and Hospital, in Prayagraj, Aug.

the healthcare system not just by improving infrastructure, but also by ensuring that doctors' working hours are restricted to eight hours a day. Postgraduate students are there to learn and work, not to replace doctors who should be treating the patients. Recently, NMC (National Medical Commission) published a study which said that a majority of postgraduate students are suffering from mental health issues. This point should also be considered.

**RVA:** The issues of patient-related violence can be brought down by improving communication (between doctors and patients), ensuring safety measures, and placing a security protocol in all hospitals, especially medical college hospitals. NMC has already come out with an advisory for medical colleges (emphasising the need for each medical college to develop and implement a comprehensive policy to enhance the safety of students and healthcare professionals within the campus and hospital premises). This can be really helpful.

**SR:** I also want to add that every hospital should have a hospital protection committee to check all aspects of hospital security. There should be CCTV cameras and security personnel, who should be accountable for the safety and security of all the people working in the hospital, especially healthcare workers.

**In 2019, the Centre had drafted a Bill titled 'The Healthcare Service Personnel and Clinical Establishments (Prohibition of violence and damage to property) Bill, 2019'. However, the Centre took the stand that existing State and Central laws provide adequate legal protection for our health workforce and that all that we require in addition is the beefing up of security in hospitals. Do we need a Central Act to protect healthcare workers from violence?**



In Kerala, since the law was made stringent following the murder of Vandana Das in 2023, the incidence of violence has come down. There were a few instances of violence where the State acted quickly.

**R.V. ASOKAN**

**RVA:** We don't understand what the Central government is trying to tell us, because it was the Ministry of Health which had signed the office memorandum with the IMA (Indian Medical Association) in 2017 saying it will explore the possibility of a Central Act (to protect healthcare workers from violence). Had the government not known then that health as well as law and order are State subjects? If yes, why did it sign this?

In 2019, under the same Health Minister, the three Ministries of Home, Law, and Health drafted this Bill. I was part of the committee which drafted it. A lot of consultations were held before the Bill was drafted, but the Bill did not go to the Cabinet. Why did they lead us down the garden path?

Now, the government is saying that it is not possible (to bring in legislation). During the COVID-19 pandemic, when there was large-scale violence against doctors in Hyderabad, the IMA had declared a 'white alert'. We said that we would protest by lighting candles. The next day, the Union Home Minister met with the IMA at 11 a.m. and by noon, the 'white alert' was withdrawn. At 4 p.m. the same day, the ordinance to bring amendments to the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897, was produced, which was subsequently ratified by Parliament. Why was that done? So, now, suddenly, how are they all saying a Central law is not possible?

**The Supreme Court has now set up a national task force to look into the issue of the safety of healthcare workers. How does the IMA view this development?**

**RVA:** We welcome it. The Supreme Court is the one institution acceptable across party lines, religious lines, and professions. It has got so much credibility and respect and we will work with the task force. But if you go through the Supreme Court order, it is all about the safety, security, and working conditions (of healthcare workers). It does not talk about a deterrent law. What if there is a violence? What will be the next step? Or are the existing laws adequate? Yes, there are 25 State laws, but where are the convictions? In my understanding, there was only one conviction last year in Tamil Nadu while there are hundreds of cases. In Kerala, since the law was made stringent following the

murder of Vandana Das in 2023, the incidence of violence has come down. There were a few instances of violence where the State acted quickly. Kerala has also enacted a Code of Grey Protocol. We have asked the government to adapt this Protocol of the Kerala government too.

**SR:** We need a Central Act but at the same time, a Central Act should not take away the rights of the State and that of the patients. A law can help in reducing the incidence of violence against healthcare workers, but policymakers should also examine why these incidents are happening. It is the responsibility of the government to see to it that the expectations of a poor patient who comes to the hospital, of free, fair, and total health care, are met. The public health system should be strengthened and out-of-pocket expenditure should be reduced.

**Why do you think the Centre went back on its earlier intent of enacting a Central law?**

**RVA:** The government seems to have a problem acknowledging that there is violence against healthcare professionals in India. But the reality is for everybody to see. If you look at the issue of violence, corporate hospitals are much safer because of the security arrangements. It is mainly government hospitals and small and medium hospitals in the private sector which are exposed to this violence.

**There is no dearth of laws in the country. Kerala framed legislation to prevent violence against healthcare workers in 2012, but it was not enough. While seeking a new law, what are the implementation challenges you expect?**

**RVA:** The 2012 Kerala law did not have teeth. The Rules were framed later. The law was not backed by the Indian Penal Code (now called the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita) or the Code of Criminal Procedure (now called the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita). The police had no idea that such a law had come into existence. We had to show them there was indeed an Act to take cognisance of the violence against hospitals and healthcare workers. The Vandana Das murder changed things. Today, Kerala has a very strong law. At least in four or five instances of violence, after this law was framed, the police acted swiftly. So, a deterrent law which is implemented by the police on the ground and is understood by the public is very useful.



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## NOTEBOOK

# The second-hand grief of an editor

Unlike reporters who feel the blast of a tragedy, editors face lashes of micro-grief

Sunilini Mathew

**L**ast week, a reporter in his 20s called to talk about a story. As we spoke, he said, despondently, "As prices of everything go up, the cost of human life comes down." He had just written about the horror of nine children dying in a wall collapse in a village in Madhya Pradesh. I thought to myself that someone so young should not have to engage with so much death as a matter of course, but that is the nature of our jobs.

As I edited his story, I wondered how the parents of the children who had died, most of them situated in a single lane in that village, were coping. It wasn't just the grief of losing their own child, but also the collective loss of friends' and neighbours' children. I wasn't there, but to tell the story to readers, I had detailed conversations with the reporter, forcing him to recall everything he had seen and heard, again. The reason is that editors must know all the details, and then craft communication. We learn to temper words, measuring them out so readers know the truth, so they are disturbed enough to call for action, to hold people in the administration accountable. But we try and make sure not to trigger trauma.

A reporter can spill their guts out onto the page, trying to exorcise some of the images that embed themselves into their minds and bodies. It is sometimes left for the editor to mop up the blood, to make sure the body of words is dressed (but not dressed up), so readers can cope with their own grief.

The day before my conversation with the young reporter, there had been mid-night protests across India's cities against the rape and murder of a doctor in a state-run hospital in Kolkata. I had not been able to go for them; work keeps us up most nights so the newspaper can come to your doorstep with your morning coffee. But I saw images and heard

from our reporters in Kolkata that they had not been able to sleep. One of them was witness to the violence that erupted at the hospital. Unlike reporters who feel the blast of a tragedy, editors face lashes of micro-grief. But these add up.

Grief, we are told by Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, in her book *On Death and Dying*, has five stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Most journalists can only afford time to feel anger and acceptance, both of which editors hold space for reporters to express — they have seen horrors we only look at in pictures and videos.

Editors must sometimes keep track of stories much more than reporters do. When a reporter is trying to figure out a way of getting through crumbling roads to cover a landslide that has killed many, they cannot check on what every other news organisation is reporting. This is often the job of the editor, who, seemingly coldly, will ask questions like, "So should we say 300 people or the official 200 people have died?"

"The desk" as we are called, provides the anchoring in the newsroom, asking the reporter questions that readers will want to know answers to, sometimes filling in the context of what is happening on ground, sourcing "library" information of other such events in the past.

As we prepared to edit a long-form story on the Kolkata doctor, an editor colleague and I spoke about the nuts and bolts of story structure and the use of other literary tools so we could try and ensure that the story travelled through space and time, to other places in the world, to future generations.

Second-hand grief is like second-hand smoke. The toxicity embeds itself in our bodies, shortening our sleep, forcing us into grieving, not just for victims and survivors, but also for reporters, for readers, and for the way the world is.

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## PICTURE OF THE WEEK

A performance to paint



A Kalamezhuthu workshop organised by the Malayalam Department at Maharaja's College, Kochi, Kerala. The art form Kalamezhuthu is an hours-long process. It involves drawing pictures on the floor with natural powders and is a performance in itself. A ritualistic tribal art that took shape in Kerala, it is traditionally performed in temples.

## FROM THE ARCHIVES The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO AUGUST 23, 1974

Giri defends his public utterances on Govt.

New Delhi, Aug. 22: The retiring President, Mr. V.V. Giri, said he had not permitted Constitutional niceties to come in the way of his free functioning in public, and that was why he had given frank expression so often to views concerning the administration. "I believe in self-criticism and a ruthless

exposure of faults when dealing with the affairs of the Government. A democratic Government can gain strength and vitality only by constant scrutiny, and by the genuine fear that it may be thrown out by a vigilant public opinion," Mr. Giri said, at a brief but touching farewell function organised by MPs in Parliament. These remarks were interpreted in the lobbies as an attempt by Mr. Giri to justify his recent press interview, particularly his advice to the Government on the reinstatement of railwaymen, which had caused considerable embarrassment to the Treasury Benches in Parliament.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO AUGUST 23, 1924

Burma Council

Rangoon, Aug. 22: The ballot for 20 resolutions admitted for discussion at the forthcoming meeting of the Legislative Council was held this afternoon. They include Mr. Narayan Rao's resolution on labour conditions, Ba Glap's recommendations not to grant monopoly to any firm or individual without the consent of the Legislature and without the consent of the Legislature and Ba Thein's recommendations to abolish opium licenses fixed for 25th.







# SCIENCE

## When sweltering heat turns public hospitals into potential 'death traps'

India's public health infrastructure is crumbling under the sheer volume of sick people and this might have unintended consequences for people in the current heatwave  
India is experiencing; this phenomenon disproportionately affects poor and marginalised communities who have no access to cooling devices

Christianez Ratna Kiruba

Come with me to a busy outpatient clinic at a public hospital in rural Andhra Pradesh. There is a sea of waiting patients. Some are on chairs, most on the floor, waiting to be called in by the doctor. People on the floor talk, eat, and some even nap as they wait. Oppressive heat, along with the smell and feel of sweat, pervade the atmosphere.

In a small consultation room two doctors attend to a patient. In the corner, another doctor treats a patient. Outside the door stand a multitude of patients. Every now and then someone peeks in and asks, "Doctor, when will my turn come?"

Looking around, we notice there are no windows. An old fan rattles overhead, recirculating the same overheated air. While the doctors can take breaks in their air-conditioned duty room, patients have no such respite.

A similar stifling environment is replicated in other places across the country, as Joseph can testify.

"I accompanied my relative to his appointment at the B. Baruah cancer centre in Guwahati," says Mr. Joseph (name changed). "The hospital waiting room was overcrowded and extremely humid because everybody there was sweating. Soon enough, I started having a headache and muscle cramps. My body temperature rose too. I had to go out to a different clinic to consult a doctor and they diagnosed me with heat exhaustion. I was admitted and given paracetamol along with saline injections. Only after some time did I feel better," he adds.

### Failing infrastructure

India's public health infrastructure is crumbling under the sheer volume of sick people and this might have unintended consequences for people in the current heatwave India is experiencing.

This year, India is experiencing its longest and deadliest heatwave in the past 15 years with some parts of North India hitting record-high temperatures. This heat wave disproportionately affects the poor and marginalised communities who have no access to cooling devices. While several forms of inequalities have been exposed by the current heatwave – such as occupational inequality and gender inequality, it is also important to talk about how economically weaker sections of the community who seek healthcare from the public sector are exposed to heat-related illnesses within the premises of these clinics and hospitals.

"My father was admitted to the general ward of a hospital because he had a fever and stomach pain sometime back," says



A motorcyclist on a hot summer evening in New Delhi. AFP

Muniamma, a daily wage labourer from Vellore, South India. "The doctors told me that he had a kidney infection and they were treating it with injections with which he was getting better. Suddenly his fever returned and he started speaking incoherently. Initially, the doctors did a lot of tests but then they realised that it was heat related as it was peak summer."

Ms. Muniamma's father, though he was admitted with a different ailment, developed a heat-related illness as he lay in the hospital bed in the overcrowded and poorly ventilated hospital ward. "The doctors tried their best," says Muniamma who had to then sit with her father day and night spraying cold water from a spray bottle onto every bit of exposed skin. "They gave him saline injections which were cooled in a refrigerator. They asked us to bring a few table fans which we placed around him. We also kept trying to cool him by placing ice cubes in his armpits and such. But he did not get better. His kidneys failed due to the heat and he died," she recounts sadly.

### Killer heat

Just like Muniamma, Kumari from Vellore too has lost an uncle to heat illness in a poorly ventilated ward. "He had some mental illness and would always be sad or crying, so we showed him to a psychiatrist and got him medicine. However, after a suicide attempt, we rushed him to a hospital where they put a tube in his nose and gave him injections and medications. He started gaining consciousness and was getting better when he started having a fever. The doctors initially said that he might have caught an infection from the other



They gave him saline cooled in a refrigerator. We brought table fans which we placed around him. We also kept trying to cool him by placing ice cubes in his armpits. But his kidneys failed due to the heat and he died.

patients. But all the tests were negative. That is when we realised that it might have been the heat, as it was scorching. He was treated for heat-related illness but he did not recover," she says. "I am truly sad that my uncle died of something that was not even his initial problem. But what can we do? We can only afford to come to a government hospital and we know how overcrowded and hot it can get," she adds.

While the news of heat-related deaths is making headlines daily, there is reason to believe that the numbers may be underreported due to several logistical reasons. Known reasons include decreased knowledge among healthcare professionals about when to report and inadequate autopsy services to prove heat-related deaths, patients developing heat-related illness after admission to a hospital for a different illness are lesser-known reasons for the underreporting. For instance, in the past two examples, cause of death may be mentioned as urinary tract infection and suicidal poisoning despite the reason being heat.

According to Anand Zachariah, consultant physician, CMC Vellore,

people who come to hospitals for certain illnesses are more vulnerable to heat-related illnesses. "Especially when someone has a fever due to any infection, it is very important for them to dissipate heat from their bodies via sweating. However, if the ambient heat in the hospital ward is high, they will not be able to do so. This puts them at a very high risk for developing heat exhaustion," he says. Alongside this, older individuals, individuals with any longstanding illnesses and skin conditions which cause issues with sweating may also be at risk according to a paper co-authored by Dr. Zachariah.

According to Aditi Dandawate, a paediatrician at Cooper Hospital, Mumbai, such issues can be very common in newborns and children admitted for other reasons. "Considering the high temperatures in Mumbai, we always keep our eyes peeled for dehydration in children. We advise mothers to dress their children in the bare minimum clothing. We also ensure adequate hydration," she adds.

### Improving amenities

While these are individual measures taken at the level of the treating doctors, it is not enough to combat the systemic failings of poor infrastructure of the healthcare system and the ever-looming problem of climate change at large. Hospitals, for one, need to have a strategy in place every year as to how they would deal with such occurrences. This year some hospitals including Tirunelveli Medical College, RML Hospital, Delhi, GRH Madurai etc. have started air-conditioned wards to admit and treat stroke patients, but these measures fall short on the prevention front. CMC Vellore has prepared a protocol for its doctors which disseminates information about how heat stroke can develop while in hospital. The document shows the signs the doctors must look out for and cautions them as to which kinds of patients are at risk for the same.

"On top of this, it is important to ensure further changes at the level of the hospital like providing shade for patients to wait, keeping pots of water or water dispensers in outpatient areas, measures to cut the time patients must stand in queues etc.," says Dr. Zachariah.

(Assistance for overcoming suicidal thoughts is available on the State's health helpline 104, Tele-MANAS 1446 and Sneha's suicide prevention helpline 044-24640050. Helplines across the country can be accessed here.)  
(Dr. Christianez Ratna Kiruba is an internal medicine doctor with a passion for patient rights advocacy. christianezdennis@gmail.com)

### THE GIST

Heat-related deaths are likely being underreported. Reasons include lack of knowledge among healthcare professionals and inadequate autopsy services. Also patients developing heat-related illness after admission for a different illness can cause underreporting.

People who come to hospitals for certain illnesses are more vulnerable to heat-related illnesses. If someone has a fever it is very important to dissipate heat from their bodies via sweating. However, if the ambient heat in the hospital ward is high, they will not be able to do so. This puts them at high risk of heat exhaustion.

Individual measures taken by doctors cannot cope with systemic failings of poor health infrastructure and the problem of climate change at large. Hospitals need to have a strategy in place every year to deal with such occurrences.

### BIG SHOT



A paramedic prepares an isolation ward set up as a preventative measure after Pakistan's health ministry confirmed a case of monkey pox in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, at a hospital in Karachi on Thursday. AP

## What is vaccine-derived polio?

Priyali Prakash

### EXPLAINER

**The story so far:** A two-year-old child in Tikrikilla, Meghalaya, has been infected with vaccine-derived polio. This is not a case of wild poliovirus, but an infection that presents in some people with low immunity, the Union Health Ministry said on Tuesday, August 20.

"The two-year-old child from Tikrikilla was found to have symptoms of poliomyelitis more than a week ago. The child was diagnosed with acute flaccid paralysis at a hospital in Assam's Goalpara," Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma said. Officials in the State's West Garo Hills district are on high alert following the confirmation of the case.

### Vaccine-derived polio

Vaccine-derived polio is a rare condition that occurs when the weakened (also called attenuated) strain of poliovirus used in the oral polio vaccine (OPV) mutates and regains the ability to cause paralysis.

OPV contains a live, attenuated virus that is used for immunisation against the disease. This weakened virus triggers an immune response when administered, thus protecting people from the disease. The attenuated virus replicates in the intestines for a limited period and is excreted in the stool. In rare cases, the virus can mutate enough to



Oral polio drops being administered. FILE PHOTO

cause the disease again and circulate in areas where either immunisation is low, where immunocompromised people reside, or where sanitation and hygiene are poor. This is how vaccine-derived poliovirus (VDPV) spreads. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the virus is classified as "circulating" (cVDPV2) if it is detected in at least two different sources, at least two months apart, that are genetically linked, showing evidence of transmission in the community.

### Types of poliovirus

Polioviruses are enteroviruses that are transmitted primarily by the faecal-oral route. Three types – wild poliovirus type 1 (WPV1), wild poliovirus type 2 (WPV2), and wild poliovirus type 3 (WPV3) – have been known to exist. Symptomatically, all these strains are identical.

### More about vaccines

The first successful polio vaccine for poliovirus was made by Jonas Salk in the early 1950s. Salk inactiv-

ated the virus using formaldehyde and injected it into the muscles of test subjects. This inactivated polio vaccine (IPV) induced systemic immunity (relating to the blood, brain, and all other organ systems) in the subjects.

After Salk, Albert Sabin developed another vaccine that contained live polio strains weakened by growing them serially in macaque cells, making them unfit for human infection. Since this vaccine contained the live virus, it had to be administered through its natural mode of infection – in this case, oral. This is what we today know as the OPV.

OPV is usually preferred over IPV because of its ease of administration – it does not require syringes or medical training and is inexpensive. However, the weakened virus in OPV can occasionally revert, causing the disease it is meant to prevent. IPV, on the other hand, is a less potent vaccine, but contains inactivated virus particles and hence has no risk of causing vaccine-associated paralytic poliomyelitis (VAPP) – a rare, adverse reaction to OPV. IPV is comparatively tougher to manufacture, too, as it contains a chemically inactivated virus.

On World Polio Day, October 24, 2019, the WHO declared that WPV3 has been eradicated worldwide. The last case was detected in Nigeria in 2012, the WHO said. WPV2 was officially declared eradicated in 2015. However, more than 90% of vaccine-derived polio-

virus outbreaks are due to the type 2 virus present in oral polio vaccines. VAPP constitutes 40% of cases caused by the type 2 oral polio vaccine. Many cases of VAPP from the type 3 virus also occur in countries using OPV.

The Indian government does not count VAPP as polio since these cases are sporadic and pose little or no threat to others, even though the number of VAPP-compatible cases showed a rising trend.

After the global switch from trivalent (containing all three variants) to bivalent (type 1 and type 3) oral polio vaccine in 2016 to prevent any more type 2 vaccine-derived polio, the number of vaccine-derived type 2 poliovirus outbreaks has only increased sharply.

The WHO authorised a genetically modified type 2 novel oral polio vaccine under Emergency Use Listing in November 2020, it was first used in the field in March 2021, and received WHO prequalification in December 2023. The vaccine is less likely to revert to neurovirulence unlike the Sabin vaccine and therefore cause less type 2 VDPV.

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## OUR VIEW



## Just outrage is useless to ensure women's safety

The Justice Hema Committee report on the status of women in cinema in Kerala reflects the systemic inequality and the institutionalized devaluing of women across the country

Sexual assault in India isn't just an act of gender-based violence; it is also one that reinforces caste and power equations and the structural biases inherent in society. As if to underscore this point comes the Justice Hema Committee report—heavily redacted and released this week, five years after it was submitted to the Kerala government following the abduction and sexual assault of a leading female actor. It details the ubiquitous prevalence of sexual harassment and exploitation in the Malayalam film industry. The problems range from the absence of toilets, safe transportation and legal work contracts to the existence of a small, powerful coterie of men that gets to decide who works and under what circumstances. Shocking as it may be, this isn't unexpected—and distressingly, similar problems prevail in almost every industry. They may not have been documented, except in whispers and warnings, and therefore, men and women choose not to see them or prefer to make compromises and work around them to keep their place. Silence is the most damaging aspect of rape, and safety in the workplace, irrespective of profession, is largely absent in India. Both are serious hurdles to economic development as well as social justice. The report observes in the context of lack of toilets that "this peculiar situation exists... because men do not understand or try to understand or pretend not to understand the basic needs of a woman," but replace the word 'needs' with 'rights' and this could apply to any aspect of workplace inequality in any profession.

The cascade of headlines lately about violent crimes against women has been accompanied, somewhat predictably, by strident calls for the harshest punishment for perpetrators and even

the death penalty. On social media and during protest marches demanding justice for the young Kolkata doctor, the demands are loud for capital punishment, new laws, central ordinances and other forms of instant retribution. India's laws are stringent enough; it is enforcement that is poor. This is compounded by a lack of will to ensure equal rights for all citizens, irrespective of gender, and an unwillingness to take a clear-eyed view of the real causes of the violence against women. Numerous studies have shown that in India and around the world, it is the most vulnerable who tend to attract the harshest sentences, indicating that power, position and money can influence application of the law. Punishment, therefore, is little deterrent to crimes against women when the root cause is a lack of equality, and systems that privilege those who identify as heterosexual and male.

Sexual violence is also about reinforcing dominance in a world that is changing faster than one can fathom. The way ahead lies in understanding that there will be some temporary loss of control for those who currently wield power, but there will be other gains for everyone in a more equal world. Sexual threats are used to police women's behaviour—online trolls employ it to silence outspoken thinkers, writers and activists; families rely on it to manipulate women into doing their bidding; workplaces use it to deny women assignments that could advance their careers. Prevailing social attitudes, cultural norms and institutions protect perpetrators and demand that women make the effort to keep themselves safe while taking the lead in the transformation of society. This is both unreasonable and unfair. Without an understanding of real justice and change in ideas of what constitutes true equality, outrage is useless.

## THEIR VIEW

## The Treasury's sneaky stimulus is what's keeping US inflation up

Its high short-term issuances have lowered rates at the long end and juiced-up America's economy



**NOURIEL ROUBINI**  
is professor emeritus of economics at New York University's Stern School of Business and author of 'MegaTrends: Ten Dangerous Trends That Imperil Our Future, and How to Survive Them'

The US Federal Reserve has moved mountains to control inflation, which in July fell below 3% for the first time since 2021. Unfortunately, the Fed finds itself working at cross purposes with the US Treasury, whose debt-issuance strategy has been providing backdoor interest-rate cuts, keeping inflation above the Fed's target range.

By shortening its issuance profile to reduce long-term interest rates, the Treasury has delivered economic stimulus equivalent to a one-point cut in the Fed's policy rate. Moreover, forward guidance in the Treasury's latest quarterly refunding announcement indicates that this backdoor quantitative easing (QE) will continue to frustrate the Fed's own efforts.

Typically, the Treasury aims for 15-20% of outstanding debt to be in short-term bills, with the rest in intermediate- and long-term debt, called coupons. But this share has risen and remains well above any reasonable threshold: as much as 70% of new debt raised last year came from short-term bills, pushing the initial well above 20%.

Such an excessive reliance on short-term debt is generally reserved for times of war or recession, when markets are fragile and financing needs spike. Yet, the past year has been one of buoyant equity markets, above-target inflation and strong growth. Investors understandably have begun to question

whether the Treasury's issuance strategy is still "regular and predictable," and lawmakers have taken notice and begun to confront Treasury Secretary Janet L. Yellen over the issue.

In a recent Hudson Bay Capital research paper, we describe the current policy as a case of "Activist Treasury Issuance" (ATI) and consider its broader economic consequences. Like activist monetary policy, activist issuance deviates from the standard rules and influences the broader economy through its effect on interest rates. Not only does the ATI work through the same channels as the Fed's QE programs, but it was engineered in part by the former Fed officials who now run the Treasury.

Whereas bills are economically similar to the base money created by central banks, coupons bear significant interest-rate risk, and when investors must absorb more of this risk, they are less able to hold other risky assets like stocks. Thus, when the supply of bonds goes down, bond prices go up, and this pushes other asset market higher.

While QE hides bonds away on the Fed's balance sheet and gives investors money in their place, an ATI reduces the creation of bonds at the source, giving investors more "money-like bills" instead. The results are similar: lower yields and juiced-up asset prices stimulate the economy.

the economy.

We calculate that ATI has so far reduced coupon issuance by more than \$800 billion, delivering a degree of stimulus similar to that of a 100-basis-point reduction in the Fed's policy rate. Put another way, the Treasury has effectively offset all the Fed's 2023 interest-rate hikes. Not only that, but the ATI has been supplemented with forward guidance, indicating that it will persist for another few quarters, to the other side of this year's US election.

Combined with higher estimates of so-called neutral policy rates, the current issuance and interest-rate policies mean that there is little restriction on the economy. With the Treasury blocking the Fed's attempts to cool inflation and growth, it is little wonder that both metrics have remained persistently above target. If the ATI is not quickly reversed, it may become a permanent policy tool, because both parties will want to use it to stimulate the economy ahead of elections. We will have entered a world of politicized business cycles, where policy stimulus is synchronized with the polls. This prospect is disturbing for the same reasons that threats to central-bank independence are.

To unwind its ATI, the Treasury will need to retire \$1 trillion worth of excess bills. This would temporarily (for a few years) raise long-term yields by 0.5%, but these would ease to a permanent 0.3% rate, with an attendant repricing of risk assets. The cooling effect on the economy would be similar to that of a two-point hike in the Fed's policy rate.

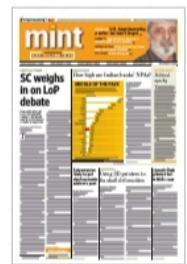
The Treasury's activist issuance strategies have stimulated the economy in the run-up to an election and has hardly been any political impediment to inflation. An ATI opens the door to political business cycles in which inflation and interest rates run permanently higher because the economy receives too much stimulus over time. The Treasury must return to regular and predictable issuance as quickly as possible. ©2024/PROJECT SYNDICATE

## QUICK READ

The American Treasury's excessive short-term issuances have cut coupon supplies and acted as stimulus similar to a 100 basis points reduction in the Federal Reserve's policy rate.

This strategy to lower long-term rates has blocked the Fed's efforts to cool inflation and risks opening the door to political business cycles where stimulus is synchronized with elections.

## 10 YEARS AGO



## JUST A THOUGHT

Safety and security don't just happen; they are the result of collective consensus and public investment.

NELSON MANDELA

## MY VIEW | FARM TRUTHS

## Can raising minimum wages ease the livelihood issue?

HIMANSHU



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The economic outlook in most of the developed capitalist world is very gloomy. High inflation and slower growth have pushed some countries into recession while many others are starting at stagnant growth. At the same time, there has been a concerted push in most developed countries to raise minimum wages. While President Joe Biden promised to double the minimum wages as part of his agenda for the upcoming elections, many states in the United States have already raised the minimum wages significantly in the last decade. There is also a push from many countries in the European Union for raising minimum wages where it is already at a high level.

Conventional wisdom from mainstream economics has always seen legislation on minimum wages as unnecessary regulation by the government in the labour market. The argument that a minimum wage increase may lead to a rise in unemployment as employers will try to reduce labour costs through retrenchment and increased capital

intensity has, however, not found empirical support. On the contrary, there are several studies that show that the impact on employment is not negative or at best is insignificant. In fact, the Nobel prize in economics for 2021 was given to David Card who along with fellow economist from Princeton Alan Krueger actually studied the impact of minimum wage increase in New Jersey. That increase, implemented at a time of recession, actually led to a rise in employment levels.

Unfortunately, minimum wages legislation has not been an issue of political debate in India. There is now a consensus that the single biggest problem for the economy is the lack of employment for the majority of the population, particularly the youth. The emphasis on job creation in the recent budget is a timely recognition of the gravity of the problem. But this is only a part of the problem. There is also the issue of meagre earnings from employment for those who have managed to find some job, either in paid employment or self-employment. There is now plethora of evidence to show that earnings of a significantly large majority of workers have stagnated in recent years. This obviously has implications for the economy, with low incomes leading to low

purchasing power among the workers and low demand in the economy.

Every year, the ministry of labour publishes the minimum wages for various occupations. These are published for three categories of towns and villages. The lowest minimum wages are for those categorized as area "C", which is the residual area excluding all major urban centres. This also includes the rural areas. The minimum wage for unskilled labour in agriculture in 2024 is ₹449 per day, according to the 2024 notification. A comparison with the actual wages

were ₹193 per day. The wages reported by the labour bureau for January 2014 were higher for every occupation in agriculture except animal husbandry for which they were ₹178 per day. While a decade back, the wages received by workers in agriculture were higher than the government-mandated minimum wages, they are now lower for every occupation, with some reporting actual wages 25-30% lower.

The worst case is for MGNREGA workers for whom even the officially notified wages for 2024-25 are only ₹289 per day, which is

less than two-thirds of the officially notified minimum wages by the ministry of labour. But even at this meagre wage, every year, 13-15 crore households are demanding employment under MGNREGA. That is 20-25% households in rural India are willing to work at wages that are much lower than market levels or minimum wages specified by the government. As successive

## QUICK READ

Conventional economic wisdom would advise against any such labour market interference for fear of job losses as employers try to cut costs but empirical evidence doesn't back that view.

While the benefits of raising minimum wages can be debated amid weak enforcement that has meant actual wages often are lower, it surely is in line with state obligation to offer a living wage.

employment surveys from the Periodic Labour Force Surveys (PLFS) and the enterprise surveys have shown, the urban wage workers or self-employed are not doing any better. In majority of the cases, their daily earnings are below the state-specified minimum wages.

Despite the precarious nature of employment and the meagre earnings from it, there has hardly been any political mobilisation or debate on raising minimum wages. Doing so is unlikely to be the magic wand for resolving the employment problem or the demand deficit in an economy where minimum wages are barely enforced. But even at the minimum basic level, raising wages in MGNREGA is likely to create demand in the rural economy. Raising minimum wages is not just about providing better earnings to those employed. There is ample evidence to suggest that such a move by the government leads to an overall increase in wages in the economy. Irrespective of the economic impact of it, it is also in line with the obligations of the state to provide a living wage to workers when government is the principal employer. Whether this is likely to solve the employment problem or help in reviving the economy are matters of debate and analysis. But it is certainly the right thing to do.





THEIR VIEW

MINT CURATOR

# We need to reduce government litigation to ease judicial delays

Litigation practices must improve to unclog the system of the many government suits that form a bulk of all cases in India



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inefficient judicial processes, epitomized by the "Tareekh pe Tareekh" movie dialogue, create prolonged uncertainties, foster corruption, and escalate litigation costs, significantly deterring investment and stifling business operations. Matthieu Chemin's research indicates that judicial reforms enhance firm productivity by 22%. However, while judicial reforms are critical, it is equally important for the government, as the largest litigator, to reduce unnecessary litigation and unclog the system.

Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer's remarks in *Dilbagh Rai Jaryis Union of India* (1973) highlighted the government's problematic litigation practices: "In this country, the State is the largest litigant to-day and the huge expenditure involved makes a big draft on the public exchequer." Things are same even in 2024.

The Tenth Law Commission's 100th report observed that "a pretty bulk of litigation in the courts, including, in particular, writ petitions in the Supreme Court and the high courts, consists of cases to which the government is a party." More recently, the Delhi high court emphasized the need to curb unnecessary and frivolous litigations involving government departments. Supreme Court's Justice B.R. Gavi also noted that "70% of government litigation is frivolous." Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy in 2019 cited a ministry of law document that 46% of all litigation in India involves the government. This excessive litigation clogs the judiciary, delays dispute resolution and diverts resources to unnecessary litigation.

However, devising an effective intervention to address excessive government litigation in India is challenging without a clear understanding of the problem's magnitude. The lack of comprehensive and transparent data on government litigation impedes efforts to identify and address the root causes of the high volume of cases. Article 12 of the Constitution broadly defines the "State" encompassing the Government and Parliament of India, state governments and legislatures, and all local or other authorities within Indian territory or control. This expansive definition, further interpreted by the judiciary to include entities exercising governmental or quasi-governmental functions, complicates the assessment of the true extent of government litigation. Entities such as public-sector undertakings (PSUs), nationalized banks, and cooperative societies fall under this definition, making the scope of government litigation vast and challenging to manage.

The Union government established the Legal Information Management and Briefing System (LIMBS) in 2016, with an updated version launched in 2019 to tackle this issue. LIMBS aims to serve as a unified platform for monitoring legal cases involv-



ing the Government of India across all ministries and departments. Data from LIMBS reveals that the ministry of finance leads with 188,994 cases, including over 32,000 pending cases over five years and 2,324 cases over 10 years. The railways follow with 114,387 cases, the defence ministry with 95,189, and the labour and employment ministry with 80,027 cases. There is an urgent need for a national-level portal to track litigation across all entities defined as "State". Without such comprehensive data, any intervention to reduce government litigation will remain inadequate.

The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) and the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) have issued directives to withdraw low-impact appeals and focus on significant cases. Both boards have raised the threshold monetary limits for appeals. In *Union Budget 2024-25*, the thresholds related to direct taxes, excise and service tax have been increased to ₹60 lakhs, ₹2 crores, and ₹5 crores, respectively, for tax tribunals, high courts, and the Supreme Court.

Yet, the persistently high volume of government litigation points to the entrenched bureaucratic hesitation to take decisive action. While the Union government has reduced its litigation, the same cannot be said about the states. There are instances when governments have appealed in cases where the amount involved is less than ₹1000.

There are several reasons why governments tend to litigate. Bureaucratic risk aversion is one. In his book, *Bureaucratic Structure and Personality*, Robert Merton elucidates the intrinsic risk aversion within bureaucratic systems, attributing it to their fundamental emphasis on predictability and strict adherence to established protocols. He posits that bureaucrats inherently aim

to minimize uncertainties and maintain operational stability, often at the expense of innovation and adaptability. This leads to what Merton terms as "trained incapacity," where members of the bureaucracy become so accustomed to following rules that their ability to respond effectively to new challenges is diminished. Merton articulates, "adherence to the rules, originally conceived as a means, becomes transformed into an end in itself."

To reduce this risk aversion, the Union and state governments should introduce enforceable litigation policies, which promote decision over litigation.

## QUICK READ

Much of the litigation in India involves government as bureaucratic hesitation to take decisive action leads to court cases, many of them frivolous. These have clogged the system.

India needs a comprehensive database for better estimation of government cases across the country and an enforceable litigation policy that promotes decision-making over litigation.

to avail grants, implementation was weak.

The Union government has also yet to come up with NLP. The Department of Legal Affairs suggested NLP 2015, but no substantial progress followed. The law minister's recent announcement of NLP 2024 in June 2024 is commendable, but its success hinges on overcoming past shortcomings and ensuring rigorous implementation. NLP 2024 must include robust implementation mechanisms, measurable targets, penalties for non-compliance, legal support for decision-makers, and strict limits on government appeals.

These are the author's personal views.

# Even Xi's panacea won't solve China's overcapacity problem

The issue is with private businesses to whom the state can't dictate



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Many are worried that China is making way more than the world needs. From electric vehicles to solar panels, plunging prices at home and abroad are igniting a new round of trade wars. Even Beijing is concerned: In a top-level meeting late last month, policymakers pledged to curb "vicious competition" among businesses.

Industrial overcapacity has flared up in recent months. There isn't enough global demand to absorb all the lithium batteries, solar modules or steel that Chinese factories can produce. But this is happening at the painful expense of corporate profits. More than half of industry supply in solar, EV, steel, and construction machinery isn't making money, a sharp deterioration from a year earlier, according to Goldman Sachs Group Inc. Even those producing consumer staples are not spared. Fresh milk, for instance, is caught in its lowest price slump in 14 years, exacerbating a deflationary gloom that's enveloping the economy.

We've been here before. China went through an extended producers' deflation between 2012 and 2016, caused by the same problem. As the economy slowed, the utilization rate in the steel and coal industries contracted from 79% and 90% in 2010 to 70% and 65% in 2015, according to the International Monetary Fund. Back then, excess capacity was also an international issue. About half of the anti-dumping and anti-subsidy investigations against China in 2016 were related to steel.

President Xi Jinping's solution then was a supply-side reform that aimed to rein in production. Starting in 2015, the government closed factories and deployed 100 billion yuan (\$14 billion) for severance pay to steel and coal workers. It was a success. By 2017, deflation was gone, and some big state-owned enterprises, such as Aluminum Corporation of China Ltd., swung to profit. So it's only natural that some industry insiders are urging the government to tackle supply again. But there are at least three reasons to believe why that won't work this time.

Firstly, the government has less sway in sectors where overcapacity is the most acute. If steel, coal and, to a lesser extent, aluminum were the big headaches a decade ago, the international focus this time is on lithium batteries, solar and EVs. Unfortunately, unlike steel, where roughly half of the producers are state-owned, these new economy sectors are largely dominated by private businesses. The government can't really tell entrepreneurs what to do, unless



Demand for the affected new-age businesses like EVs also lies overseas. AFP

Xi is prepared to return to the old days of command economy.

Secondly, some industry leaders might see overcapacity as an advantage, in that it will force weaker ones to exit more quickly, leaving the survivors with a brighter future and fatter profits. Take lithium batteries, for instance. Contemporary Amperex Technology Co. is the biggest manufacturer. Contrary to its peers, CATL's profit margin has been on the rise despite falling battery prices. Scale and good cost control are helping.

In EV production, BYD Co. is China's largest manufacturer. One may argue that price cuts jump-started its sales. In the second quarter, the company sold 426,000 units, putting it within striking distance of Tesla Inc., the world's biggest EV seller. "Competition is the rule of nature" that businesses must embrace, chairman Wang Chuan-Fu said in early June, when his peers complained bitterly about oversupply.

Thirdly, Xi's 2015 supply-side reform was a bit misleading in name because a major component ended up boosting demand—the other side of the equation. For the shantytown redevelopment program, the government bought old homes and relocated families, especially in smaller cities, and revamped these areas with new infrastructure spending. That explained 58% of improvement in steel prices, versus capacity cut's 42%, according to IMF estimates.

This time around, stimulating demand is a lot harder. Much of it is overseas. Last year, exports accounted for 37%, 42% and 19% of China's battery, solar and EV production, respectively, according to Goldman. To help its manufacturers, the government could only speed up EV adoption at home with more cash subsidies. Unfortunately, that incremental gain in the domestic market can be easily eroded by worsening geopolitical tensions between China and the West.

These factors perhaps explain why top policymakers have not come up with concrete actions even though they are clearly worried about the industrial oversupply and its impact on corporate profits as well as the broader economy. As such, China's excess capacity problem will have to fester until even its industry leaders call it quits. It may be some years away. **BLOOMBERG**

MY VIEW | PEN DRIVE

# Make 2024 the year of freedom for Indian education

ALAKH PANDEY



is an educator and founder of Physics Wallah.

As our athletes captured global attention at the Paris 2024 Olympics, back home, we celebrated 78 years of India's independence from British rule. This is a moment to reflect on how our nation has served the needs of its youth. Have we, as a society, created an enabling environment that fosters success? Has our government ensured that every individual, regardless of financial means or location, has access to quality education?

Recent paper leak controversies highlight significant flaws in our education system. These issues, alongside the alarming rise in student suicides, reflect a system that is failing to meet the needs of students, particularly those from lower-income families.

To address these flaws, we must first understand the reality of most Indian students, who are not from big cities but from economically struggling backgrounds. For them, the pursuit of education often involves immense financial sacrifice such as

delaying a parent's surgery or taking loans that push families to the brink of ruin.

I can relate to this struggle from my personal experience. As a 90s kid from Uttar Pradesh, my family faced severe hardships, even selling our home to survive. These struggles pushed me towards entrepreneurship. From class 9, I tutored younger students to support my family. While pursuing Mechanical Engineering, I realized the vast number of students who required coaching for entrance exams. This led to the launch of Physics Wallah in 2016.

While my story turned into a success, it is an exception. The need for such platforms highlights the unmet demand for quality, affordable education. As India celebrates its 78th year of independence, we must critically assess our education system's challenges and propose reforms.

Historically, India is the birthplace of scholarly texts on subjects ranging from arithmetic to astronomy. In ancient times, there were many accounts of scholars visiting India from overseas in pursuit of knowledge. India can and should regain its status as Vishwaguru.

The 1966 Kothari Commission Report aimed to achieve this by proposing a Com-

mon School System (CSS) in India. CSS was designed to provide equal educational opportunities by integrating public schools, government-aided schools and recognized private schools under a common standard. The goal was to eliminate the need for parents to seek education outside the system.

While educational institutions have multiplied fourfold in the last three decades, the high enrolment rates are only a fleeting success. Only 15% of school students reach high school, and just 7% make it to graduation. As much as 20% of India's population remains illiterate, revealing a failure to bridge the gap in access to education.

Currently, India's education system is the third-largest in the world, trailing only China and the US. The growth of educational institutions has been phenomenal. However, with the introduction of neo-liberal policies, most new higher education institutions do not

cater to the masses—a significant oversight.

What gives me hope is the National Education Policy 2020, which introduces reforms focusing on critical thinking, creativity, vocational training and multidisciplinary education. It aims to provide free education from pre-school to grade 12, increase the gross enrolment ratio in higher education to 50%, and emphasize teacher training and professional development.

While promising, the policy's progress could be hampered by a severe shortage of educators. In 2023, over 30% of teaching positions were vacant in 45 central universities across India. Many top educators are leaving for more rewarding opportunities in private or foreign universities. To address this, we must incentivize teaching as a profession.

Reforming India's education system will have far-reaching effects on the nation's development. Today, with the

world's largest youth population—68% of India's 1.4 billion people are between 15 and 64 years old—our median age is 28.4 years, younger than that of China or the US.

Yet, industries across India report acute shortages of skilled personnel in sectors like logistics, construction and manufacturing. The gap stems from inadequate education and training, despite efforts like those put in by the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), which aims to bridge this gap through public-private partnerships. Unfortunately, bureaucratic hurdles have stymied NSDC's effectiveness.

To bring meaningful change, we need an empowered organization led by educators, students and academia, with sufficient funding and autonomy to drive reform. Transforming India's education system must be a national priority. The challenges are immense, but so are the opportunities. Students and educators should contribute to this transformation. By leveraging our skills and resources, we can create the India we envision, where everyone thrives.

As we celebrate 78 years of independence, let's commit to building a brighter, more equitable future for all. Let's not just be catalysts for change—let's be the change.