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[OUR TAKE]

In J&K, peace in the crosshairs

The Ganderbal attack is aimed at spoiling the atmosphere of hope in Kashmir and derailing a return to normalcy for the region

The gruesome terrorist attack in Ganderbal district on Sunday in which seven civilians, among them a Kashmiri doctor, died is a grim reminder that peace in Jammu and Kashmir is fragile. The incident is both a wake-up call to the administration and a pointer to the challenges the Omar Abdullah government, which was sworn in just last week, will face as it seeks to pivot the Union territory (UT) to a new future.

Clearly, the attack, the first on a major infrastructure project, was to spoil the emerging atmosphere of hope in the UT. The attackers seem to have chosen a soft target — unarmed migrant workers at a construction site at Gagangar who were involved in the building of a tunnel on the Srinagar-Sonamarg route — to make the point that the successful conduct of the assembly polls, which saw a large turnout and the involvement of parties across the ideological divide, does not suggest the end of militancy.

The attack came against the backdrop of external affairs minister S Jaishankar's visit to Islamabad, the first by an Indian minister in nine years, to attend the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation meeting. The optics of that visit hinted at a thaw in India-Pakistan ties which have been frozen since the 2019 abrogation of Article 370.

Mass support for separatism may be over, but a small section continues to invest in militancy and wants to rock the peace boat. Sunday's incident is the fourth attack on civilians in Kashmir this year — four people had died in the previous three incidents, including a person in Shopian on Friday. The last major attack was reported from Reasi, Jammu in June when nine persons were killed after militants targeted a bus carrying pilgrims. A majority of the recent incidents have been on military installations and convoys, and mostly in the Jammu region.

The lesson from Sunday's attack is that the revival of electoral democracy is not enough to guarantee peace. Security measures will have to be in place so that attempts to disrupt peace are defeated. Policing and intelligence will have to improve so that the security establishment is not taken by surprise. Both the Centre and the state will have to work together to build on the gains the return to an elected government promises.

North-South politics in population debate

The chief ministers of two southern states — N Chandrababu Naidu of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu's MK Stalin — have exhorted the people of their states to have more children. While the first worries about the greying South, the second's concerns seem more political than demographic. Fertility rates in the southern states are significantly lower than most in the North, but it's worth noting that India's overall fertility rate has been falling and is now estimated to be below the replacement rate of 2.1.

Top on the minds of leaders such as Stalin is the very real fear of representation in Parliament shrinking when delimitation is carried out. Delimitation is the resizing of constituencies and the creation of new ones to account for the rise in the national population in a manner that the strength of each constituency remains roughly equal. The southern states, having done better at population control, are expected to see fewer new constituencies than the northern states. So, the worry over diminishing political clout is understandable — especially since these states will effectively be penalised for doing well. But incentivising more births — Naidu even mentioned the prospect of legal measures to prohibit those with two or fewer children from contesting local body elections — is no solution.

First, incentives to boost fertility have failed in most geographies, including South Korea, Denmark, and lately, China. Second, there is individual biology involved (infertility, consequences for maternal health), and legal measures such as a threshold number of children for poll aspirants do not recognise the complexities involved in family size decisions. Third, these policies contain an element of coercion, which erodes women's power in childbearing decisions and seems to suggest that conception and birth are subject to the State's will.

But the comments are a reminder that delimitation could exacerbate existing fault lines between the northern and southern states. A rational debate on the real issue may be needed.

A 'talk-fight' policy to guide Indo-Pak ties

This strategy helped Vietnam and the US conclude a peace treaty in the seventies. It may work in the subcontinent

Predictably, external affairs minister S Jaishankar had declared before he visited Islamabad for the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) meeting that since this was a multilateral event, he would not be discussing bilateral ties with Pakistan. In his opening address at the meeting, Jaishankar enumerated the key challenges that the SCO was committed to combating: "One, terrorism; two, separatism; and three, extremism," a list that has a direct bearing on the distal state of the India-Pakistan relationship. Complete stasis has prevailed in bilateral relations since the failed 2015 attempt to restart a "comprehensive bilateral dialogue". In the aftermath of the 2019 Pulwama attack and reorganisation of the erstwhile Jammu and Kashmir state, India and Pakistan snapped trade ties and travel links and recalled their respective high commissioners.

The uneventful completion of the first visit by an Indian foreign minister to Pakistan after a prolonged hiatus has been viewed as a positive step in New Delhi, which has also noted Pakistan Prime Minister (PM) Shehbaz Sharif's forbearance in not raising bilateral issues in his remarks at the SCO summit.

host. The elder Sharif sibling (and three times PM) has also made some conciliatory noises regarding Indo-Pak relations. While it would be naive to read too much from these scanty "tea leaves", it is, perhaps, time to start thinking about initiating a thaw in the deep-frozen Indo-Pak relationship.

If one were to take a huge leap of faith and look beyond the current state of historical rancour, political hostility, and military confrontation, it is possible to imagine a situation in which India and Pakistan find a modus vivendi of living peacefully like any two normal neighbours? And if so, what would be the gains?

The resumption of Indo-Pak diplomatic relations and people-to-people contacts would reduce tensions and the risk of conflict, thereby contributing to regional stability. Restoration of trade would bring significant economic benefits for both countries in terms of job creation in manufacturing and services. The 77-year-long quarrel with its western neighbour has been an albatross around India's neck, impacting its international standing and prestige. The normalisation of Indo-Pak bilateral ties would immensely enhance India's image as *vishvavrut* and lend impetus to its quest for global power status.

In the national security context, normal relations could lead to reduced military deployments and lower defence spending. But this is secondary to a key security issue: the threat of a two-front war; a Damocles sword that

hangs over our defence planners. The frequent warnings sounded by our military leadership in this regard are rooted in history, which shows that rarely has a nation successfully defended itself against adversaries attacking on two distinct fronts. Given the geographic separation between our western and northern/northeastern borders, collusive military action by the China-Pakistan axis would pose a huge challenge to the Indian military.

However, the harsh reality is that, so far, every single effort at normalisation of Indo-Pak relations has been systematically sabotaged by Pakistan's deep State, comprising its army and the Inter-Services Intelligence, because any signs of normalcy in Indo-Pak relations threaten its very *raison d'être*. The two most egregious examples of its machinations were the 1999 Kargil infiltration and the 2016 Pathankot terror strike, which followed PM Modi's impromptu visit to Lahore. The recent Ganderbal terror attack is a pointer to the deep State's worry.

Knowing that it cannot win a direct military confrontation, the Pakistani army has nurtured dozens of Islamic militant groups to deploy against India. In fact, starting with the mobilisation of tribal *lashkars* for its 1947 invasion of Kashmir, it has formalised a strategy of proxy war to be waged by *jihadi* organisations using hit-and-run guerrilla tactics. Pakistan's subsequent nuclearisation

was dovetailed into this strategy to provide an umbrella for a continuation of this proxy war against India. When considering Pakistan's deceitful campaign aimed at bleeding India through a "war of a thousand cuts", it is important to note the motivations that underpin the country's revisionist approach. Firstly, Pakistan's State ideology is based on Islam and the two-nation theory with the army as its avowed guarantor. Secondly, there is a pervasive belief that "Hindu India" is opposed to the two-nation theory and wishes to undo it. Thirdly, Pakistan considers Kashmir an unfinished agenda of the Indo-Pak partition, and having lost all the wars initiated against India, it has taken recourse to a campaign of cross-border terrorism. Finally, since hostility against India provides the lifeblood that sustains the Pakistan deep State, it fiercely opposes all attempts at rapprochement.

In India, on the other hand, there is a righteous outrage against Pakistan for its unrelenting hostility, manifested in sustained *jihadi* terrorism as well as in support rendered to separatist entities like pro-Khalistan groups. Consequently, New Delhi has stood firm against offering any trade or diplomatic concessions to Pakistan unless it renounces its hostile approach. While this stance is unexceptionable, should it



Arun Prakash



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preclude the initiation of bilateral dialogue and an endeavour to knock sense into the deep State? Here, we may take cue from a policy dubbed *Talk-Fight* adopted by North Vietnam during its prolonged conflict with the United States (US). Even as bitter fighting went on, regular "unofficial" talks between North Vietnamese and US diplomats were held in Paris over five years resulting in a negotiated peace agreement, signed in 1973.

Today, Pakistan faces a dire financial situation, which is aggravated by the halting progress of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and mounting indebtedness to China. Grave domestic instability is being aggravated by Baloch separatism and civil-military political tensions. In such a scenario, the initiation of a diplomatic dialogue between India and Pakistan would be a welcome development. If signs of a nascent Indo-Pak rapprochement serve to drive a wedge between China and Pakistan, or between Pakistan's civil and military establishments, so much the better.

Ergo, while maintaining its alert military posture on the Line of Control and the western border, should India not try out a talk-fight policy with Pakistan?

Arun Prakash is a former chief of Naval Staff of India. The views expressed are personal

Many benefits of snow leopard conservation

Known as the ghost of the mountains, snow leopards symbolise the untamed beauty of India's rugged mountainous habitats. Sadly, despite their ecological importance and magnificence, their numbers are declining fast. To arrest this trend, International Snow Leopard Day is marked on October 23 to promote conservation efforts for the species.

Snow leopards inhabit some of the most arid and inhospitable areas on the earth, spanning about 1.8 million sq km landscape across 12 countries, including India. Despite their vast range, snow leopards are considered vulnerable on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, with an estimated wild population of between 4,000 and 6,500. With a population of 718 individuals distributed over about 75,000 square kilometres in the states and Union territories (UTs) of Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, and Arunachal Pradesh, India ranks third in snow leopard numbers among the range countries.

The snow leopard, like all big cats, is listed in Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES), which makes the trade of body parts illegal in signatory countries. In India, the snow leopard is listed under Schedule-I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, providing it the highest protection status.

Snow leopard-occupied areas also support diverse ecosystems and are vital for the livelihoods of indigenous communities through multiple ecosystem services. Snow leopard habitats are often headwaters for major rivers, and their conservation supports the preservation of these freshwater sources, ensuring clean water flow downstream for drinking, irrigation, and agriculture. Additionally, by protecting the landscapes where snow leopards thrive, conservation efforts safeguard biodiversity and ecosystem services like carbon sequestration, which is vital in the age of the climate crisis.

Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi has ensured wildlife policies make conservation a participatory process. So, snow leopard protection programmes in India strengthen the integrity of entire mountain ecosystems, benefiting both wildlife and indigenous communities.

These habitats are also repositories for rich biodiversity, supporting many rare, endangered, and threatened (RED) species. Snow leopards, being an umbrella species, protect a wide range of other flora and fauna that share their habitat.

However, snow leopard landscapes are under increasing pressure due to the climate crisis, unsustainable land use practices, and other anthropogenic threats. These pressures are leading to habitat degradation, loss of biodiversity, and increased human-wildlife conflict.

Facilitating collaborative conservation, the Global Snow Leopard & Ecosystem Protection Program (GSLEP) is a beacon of hope for the animal. The GSLEP brings together the 12 snow leopard range countries to safeguard the future of this species. The GSLEP's 2020 resolution set to motion a comprehensive strategy, focusing on resource mobilisation, inclusive economic development, animal-human health care, and disease surveillance.

ance as priority areas, India has been actively involved in the animal's conservation, recognising it as the high-altitude Himalayas' flagship species.

Project Snow Leopard (PSL) is one of the key conservation initiatives, highlighting participatory conservation projects focused on traditional knowledge sharing and landscape management, with active involvement of the local communities.

As part of the National Snow Leopard Ecosystem Protection (NSLEP) priorities, the government is committed to habitat restoration, livelihood improvement, mitigation of wildlife crime and illegal trade in wildlife, human-wildlife conflict mitigation strategies, and improving awareness and communication strategies.

The Centre pioneered the Snow Leopard Population Assessment in India (SPAI), which covered over 70% of the potential snow leopard range in the country. We have also emphasised landscape restoration for habitat conservation and participatory landscape-based management plans. To increase Jan Bhagidari in wildlife protection, Himal Sanraksh has been engaged by local communities, tourists, and the Indian Army, for snow leopard protection.

The government has also implemented the SECURE Himalaya Project as a multi-focal project under the Global Environment Facility (GEF). The project promoted sustainable management of alpine pastures and forests in the high-range Himalayan ecosystems to secure the conservation of globally significant wildlife and to ensure sustainable livelihoods and socio-economic benefits for local communities. This helped build capacity among more than 2,000 frontline forest guards and community members on wildlife and habitat monitoring.

India has also undertaken several ex-situ conservation initiatives to protect and conserve the snow leopard, complementing its in-situ efforts. One of the key ex-situ efforts is the establishment of the conservation breeding facilities for snow leopards at Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park in Darjeeling, West Bengal. The zoo has successfully bred multiple snow leopards, contributing to the animal's global genetic pool.

The International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA) launched by PM Modi brings together a range of countries of not just snow leopards but all big cats. The alliance will safeguard the species through knowledge exchange, support for recovery efforts in natural habitats, and promoting the best practices among range countries.

India is trying to not only protect a flagship species but also create sustainable economic opportunities for communities in some of the remotest areas of the country. The snow leopard is an indicator of the health of the high-altitude habitat and an important symbol of the impacts of the climate crisis on mountain environments. If snow leopards thrive, so will countless other species, along with the largest freshwater reservoirs on the planet.

Bhupender Yadav is Union minister of environment, forests, and climate change. The views expressed are personal



Bhupender Yadav

[GEN. UPENDRA DWIVEDI] CHIEF OF ARMY STAFF

We want to go back to the status quo of April 2020. Thereafter, we will be looking at disengagement, de-escalation and management of the Line of Actual Control. As of now, we are trying to restore the trust

On the India-China border talks

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Delhi and Buenos Aires: The road to prosperity

Even as 30 countries confirmed their participation at the BRICS summit in Kazan, Russia, one country made headlines for declining a formal invitation to join the grouping — Argentina. Argentine foreign minister Diana Mondino had said so much when she was visiting India between October 5-9. Mondino's statement should not come as a surprise. Even before taking office as foreign minister in December 2023, Mondino had asserted that the incoming government would not join the BRICS, and Argentina's President Javier Milei made multiple remarks to the same effect. The reasoning behind the incumbent Argentine government's decision is simple. While Milei may seem more ideologically aligned to the West, India remains a valuable economic ally for Argentina. The India-Argentina relationship enjoys bipartisan support, regardless of which party is in power in either country — though it certainly helps when governments on both sides see eye-to-eye on many issues. Both countries have seen a spate of interactions at the levels of heads of government and through multilateral groupings like the G20. Still, the India-Argentina relationship is driven by economic diplomacy, where food and energy security form the main pillars of engagement.

An analysis of trade data from the past decade, from 2014 to 2023, shows that India is Argentina's fifth largest export destination, excluding Argentina's neighbours, the country exports more only to the US and China. India is, by far, Argentina's largest export destination for soybean and sunflower oil, accounting for 42% of the country's total exports of these products over the past decade. More recently, Argentina has increased its exports of gold, timber, leather, barley and legumes to India — albeit in small quantities. On the other hand, India exports mostly finished products to Argentina, such as motorcycles, diesel and agrochemicals. Perhaps the most valuable is the Indian investment in Argentina, which includes tech companies like TCS, Infosys, and Mahindra Corvia, as well as automotive ones like Bajaj, TVS and Royal Enfield. The Indian pharmaceutical company Glenmark installed a 30,000 sq ft manufacturing unit in Buenos

Aires in 2011 to produce two million vials of oncology injectables per year. More recently, Argentina's health ministry has confirmed that Indian pharmaceutical products with European or American certifications can enter the Argentine market without any barriers. This move will likely boost pharmaceutical exports from India to Argentina while reducing the cost of public health care in the country.

While trade and investment form the base of the bilateral relationship, politicians and diplomats on both sides under the fray by including elements of nuclear power, defence cooperation and, most recently, critical minerals like lithium. India's government-owned KABIL has begun leasing five lithium blocks in Argentina's Catamarca province, and Hindustan Aeronautics Limited will also be supplying helicopter spares and providing maintenance for Argentina's Air Force. The engagement on critical minerals like lithium will expand in the coming years as India prepares to participate in the global lithium and battery value chains, assisted by the fact that Argentina remains home to about 15% of the world's lithium reserves.

Despite these advances in bilateral ties, India and Argentina remain pre-

occupied by more consequential issues at home. Both countries share developmental challenges. While India's developmental issues have historic roots, Argentina's are more recent (in 1913, Argentina was richer than Germany or France). According to Argentina's statistics agency, 52.9% of people in the country fall under the poverty line; inflation in September 2024 stood at 207%, and yearly inflation for 2024 is expected to slow marginally to 124%, still amongst the highest in the world.

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Opinion

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Tangoing with the dragon

Prospects of greater cooperation are brighter with a narrower economic power differential

A FEELING OF déjà vu is unmistakable in the remarks of Justin Yifu Lin, professor of economics at Peking University, on Sino-Indian relations. Echoing former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's views more than a couple of decades ago, Lin stated in a recent media interview that "we are neighbours and we will be good neighbours, no matter whether we like it or not. So, it is better to be good neighbours." India's policy choices in this regard are no doubt complicated by the continuing face-off on the Sino-Indian border since April 2020. It is not business as usual for the bilateral relationship but the good news of late is the arrangement for patrolling by both sides on the border. This augurs well for further negotiations to resolve the territorial dispute.

According to Lin, "we have many complementarities, so, it's better to join hands to grow together." This again is reminiscent of former PM Manmohan Singh's views in his visit to Beijing 16 years ago when he stated that the coming together of two great neighbours represents an international public good; that it is a historical necessity to work together; that as fast-growing countries, both have a role in contributing to global growth.

The welcome developments on the Sino-Indian border is being taken forward by PM Narendra Modi and China's President Xi Jinping agreeing to meet on the sidelines of the ongoing BRICS summit in Kazan. On the complementarities front, China no doubt has vast amounts of capital that can help realise India's ambitions to become a more prosperous nation by investing in its \$1.4-trillion national infrastructure pipeline. The dragon has dominance over global supply chains. If India can plug into these chains with its advantages of an abundant supply of young labour at highly competitive wage rates, it can export more and grow faster over the medium term. However, such possibilities of cooperation that Lin advocates exist only if the two great neighbours perceive themselves as equals, which they are not. The economic power differential has further widened from when Manmohan Singh outlined his bold vision. India is the world's fastest-growing economy but China's per capita income is five times larger. China sees India only as a weaker neighbour, not as one with whom it can define the Asian century.

But all of this should not preclude India's efforts to promote good neighbourliness. Besides the dragon, India has a major challenge with its western neighbour, Pakistan. Bilateral relations have been in a deep freeze due to cross-border terrorism. India's external affairs minister S Jaishankar, in his recent address to the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation council of heads of government in Islamabad, noted that if friendship has fallen short and good neighbourliness is missing, there are surely reasons to introspect and causes to address. But the fact of his visit itself offers an opening to resume engagement in the spirit of Vajpayee's oft-quoted remarks that friends can be changed but not neighbours; that we either live as friends or we keep fighting. Peace and tranquility on the border is to the advantage of Pakistan, India, and China. As the most powerful economy in South Asia, India cannot address the unfinished agenda of integration without Pakistan. The upshot is that India will be better off extending friendship to the extent possible with its neighbours.

CVS shows women are hired to do impossible jobs

AS RECENTLY AS last year, pharmacy chains were a bright spot for female leaders — one of the few sectors in corporate America where women could make it to the very top. Rosalind Brewer was CEO of Walgreens Boots Alliance Inc. and, at the time of her appointment, the only Black woman leading a Fortune 500 company. Karen Lynch was running CVS Health Corp., the biggest public company ever helmed by a woman. Heyward Donigan at Rite Aid Corp. rounded out the trio.

Today, all three are gone. Donigan and Brewer were both shown the door in 2023, and Lynch was ousted last week, when CVS announced that the board had unanimously decided to dismiss her after a string of disappointing earnings, repeatedly downgraded forecasts, and pressure from investors.

In the aftermath of their collective departures, what's now become apparent is that their rise had little to do with the pharmacy industry being particularly inclusive or intentional about fostering and promoting female talent. Instead, each company had an impossible job that needed to be done. And impossible jobs often go to women.

It's a classic glass cliff scenario. A variation of the glass ceiling, this theory holds that women are likely to be hired to do a job when a company is in crisis or turnaround. In such cases, corporate boards are more willing to try a new kind of leader because the one they have (typically a white man) isn't working out, or because likely male candidates see the job as a minefield they don't want to touch. Women take the job because they know it may very well be their only chance to run a company. When they struggle or fail, boards then have an excuse to return to the leadership status quo (again: white men).

Despite the scale of what Lynch, Brewer, and Donigan were expected to do — transform struggling businesses operating in the deeply broken health-care sector — they were not given much time to do it. All three lasted less than four years in the job, even shorter than the average 4.5-year tenure for female Fortune 500 CEOs, according to research firm Equilar. Meanwhile, the average male Fortune 500 CEO lasts 7.2 years. "There's not a lot of margin for failure for women CEOs," Marianne Cooper, a sociologist at the Stanford University's VMware Women's Leadership Innovation Lab, once told me.

At Walgreens, Brewer wasn't given the full authority to turn around the struggling chain. She and her predecessor, Stefano Pessina, seemed to disagree on strategy, which wouldn't have been as big a deal had he not remained executive chairman and one of the company's largest individual shareholders. He wanted the company to expand through partnerships, but the acquisitions that Brewer sought. At the time of her departure, Pessina said the company was looking for a replacement with "deep health-care experience." But he knew that wasn't Brewer's biggest strength when he touted her digital and retail business files at the time of her hiring.

Over at CVS, Lynch is out for the failure of a plan that was hatched before her arrival. Her predecessor, Larry Merlo, started CVS' attempted transformation from struggling retailer into a health-care industry juggernaut with his nearly \$70-billion acquisition of Aetna, where Lynch was then president.

Lynch was also contending with an activist investor, who wanted to shake up management. This particular challenge is not at all unusual for female CEOs, who have a 50% higher likelihood of being targeted by activist investors than their male counterparts. They could be bigger targets because they're more likely to be running these struggling companies. Or perhaps it's because activists know boards are faster to fire a female CEO. Or maybe it's just because women face more scrutiny in general.

Case in point: While Lynch was ousted, CVS Chairman Roger Farah, who she said last week that it was "the right time to make a change," got promoted; he's now executive chairman and will have more of a hand in running the company. That's despite the fact that we can assume he and the rest of the board signed off on Lynch's hiring and strategy in the first place.

Lynch, of course, was not blameless in all of this. She made plenty of mistakes. But it's also important to acknowledge the things that were outside of her control — including the glass cliff she was facing.



BETH KOWITZ

Bloomerg

I NA CLEAR break from the past, Tata Trusts has reportedly decided to make the board members of two of its largest entities trustees for life. This means the trustees won't retire after three years unless reappointed, as was the practice earlier. That's not all. Unanimous consent of the board members is now necessary for appointment as a new trustee, according to a report this week. If these are correct, the two trusts would be prime examples of India's countless cosy old boys' clubs.

Conventional wisdom says this shouldn't matter as a philanthropic trust has every right to choose the how and why of running its operations. In any case, as public charitable trusts registered under the Maharashtra Public Trusts Act, Tata Trusts has every right to appoint trustees for life. But there is a catch here: Sir Dorabji Trust and Sir Ratan Tata Trust own over half of Tata Sons, the Tata group's holding company. And their sway over the appointment or removal of Tata Sons chairmen is too fresh in public memory.

Tata Sons houses the group's stakes in around 14 listed companies; it also owns unlisted businesses such as India and others that tap into India's high-tech manufacturing ambitions. The investors in at least the group's listed companies have the right to know the reasons for the two critical changes in the tenure of the trustees who appoint one-third of the directors to Tata Sons with veto power over board decisions.

Due to its charitable status, Tata Trusts earlier lacked direct voting rights and was overseen by the charity commissioner. However, in 2000, Ratan Tata successfully advocated for a government amendment that granted the trusts full voting control, a significant development that restored their influence over Tata Sons and the broader

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organisation. Before he retired in December 2012, Tata also ensured that the trusts had tightened their grip over Tata Sons. The Articles of Association relating to the appointment and removal of future chairpersons were revised, so that all appointments and removals of directors had to be cleared by the trusts.

It is by now well known that even after stepping down as Tata Sons chairman, Ratan Tata retained significant power through his chairmanship of the Tata Trusts. He remained in regular contact with his successor, who sought his input on significant decisions through emails, letters, and regular meetings at Bombay House. To Tata, Tata Sons' position as the controlling shareholder in all listed Tata groups meant that the holding company's board should be consulted on all key decisions — and that the Tata Trusts, in turn, should be kept in the know, given their status as the majority shareholder.

Nusli Wadia, once one of Ratan Tata's closest friends and who later had a fall-out with him over the removal of Cyrus Mistry, had once said that when Tata asked him for his views on choosing his successor, his cynical response was: "All you have done is move the power centre from the board to the trusts." This suggests that the Tata Trusts without a

doubt exert unparalleled power over Tata Sons' functions.

There is another important issue, which new chairman Noel Tata would do well to ponder over: Why trusts set up for charitable purposes and claiming tax exemption status should be allowed to control one of India's largest industrial empires? Observers have repeatedly questioned the present group structure, where charitable trusts hold controlling shares in the group holding company of the country's largest business house and, therefore, exercise effective control of all the operating companies. These, in turn, own shares in the holding company, with no apparent benefit for their shareholders. The opacity inherent in this, and the ensuing lack of accountability, has caused questions to be asked about why Tata Trusts should continue to enjoy unique privileges in terms of corporate ownership.

Charitable trusts were anyway prohibited from owning shares in companies several decades ago. However, an exemption was given to a few big trusts including the Tata and Birla trusts. Today the continuance of these exemptions makes no sense. So correcting the legal anomalies that gave a special status to the Tata Trusts by introducing a sunset clause is a necessary action.

The other issue that the new chairman should look at is whether it's a prudent decision to keep the status of Tata Sons as an unlisted entity. An opportunity came after the Reserve Bank of India categorised Tata Sons as an "upper layer" non-bank financial company. That effectively required it to list within three years — by September 2025. But Tata Sons has reportedly become a debt-free company to avoid listing. One potential concern apparently is that Tata Sons' listing will highlight the special treatment its owners — Tata Trusts — receive, and whether that is just deserved.

This may be sound legal advice, but Tata Sons, considered to be one of India's crown jewels as far as corporate transparency is concerned, should not be seen to be so desperate in trying to skirt the IPO route. Most importantly, Spark Private Wealth Management is absolutely correct in saying that listing of Tata Sons would help simplify the complicated group holding structure of the Tata group, increase investor transparency, and enable some of the listed holding companies to liquidate its holding within the giant parent conglomerate.

Cross-holdings have been a concern for investors for a while and a simplified structure enables Tata Sons to have better control over the promoter (controlling shareholder) votes on shareholder resolutions. Additionally, unwinding the cross-holdings will enable Tata companies to monetise some of their holdings in the group. A simpler structure would also be in synergy with Tata Sons' publicised mission of streamlining the group's complicated shareholding structure, hoping to unlock value at its subsidiaries.

Ratan Tata worked till the end to make the Tata group a transparent organisation. His successor bearing that famous surname would surely strive to take his half-brother's unfinished task forward.

NFRA's new standards for audit



MADHURI SHAHAPURE

Partner, Walker Chandick & Co

PRIOR TO the Companies Act, 2013, the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) issued auditing standards. The standard currently applicable in India is SA 600, issued in 1995 and last updated in 2002. However, even the 2002 version was not entirely in sync with the corresponding ISA 600 that was revised by the IAASB.

The National Financial Reporting Authority (NFRA)'s primary reason for proposing a revised standard for group audits is to help safeguard public interest and investor protection, and the need for a standards framework that is robust enough to meet the challenges posed by today's complex financial systems. The changes proposed indicate the reasons why the current standard simply does not aim at providing assurance to the extent needed on consolidated financial

statements, despite the principal auditor issuing a reasonable assurance report on the financial statements.

Who is accountable in case of reporting on consolidated financial statements? India decided to differ from the global standards to the extent that it allowed the group auditor (or principal auditor, the auditor of the parent company in a group) to rely on the work done by component auditors (auditors of subsidiaries or associates, and joint ventures within the group). There are limited procedures that the standard requires of the group auditor as it relates to assessing work of the component auditor; and whilst there are some exceptional circumstances where the group auditor needs to do some additional work, the standard is worded in way that is subject to wide interpretation, and so the group auditor typically will restrict work to the limited procedures. In India, when one reads the auditors' report on consolidated financial statements, one can find an innocuous paragraph which says they have not audited specific proportions of amounts relating to revenue, net assets, and cash flows that have been audited by component auditors. These, on many occasions, can be significantly material numbers. Compared to this, the international standard requires the

By aligning requirements with international standards, it is trying to ensure there is accountability for the reporting done for large and complex groups

group auditor to take entire responsibility for reporting on the consolidated financial statements. Now one could argue that it would not be as much of a problem as long as all auditors that audited the respective parent and component financial statements performed procedures and reported as mandated by the professional standards. This is where the second issue arises, as to whether all auditors do in fact perform work in a similar manner considering similar quality parameters. The international standard requires the group auditor to assess the competence of the component auditor before accepting an assignment where certain components are to be audited by another auditor. The Indian standard specifically states that as long as the component auditor is a chartered accountant registered

with the ICAI, there is no need for any further assessment of competence. This inherently limits the ability of the group auditor to assess how the work will be performed by the component auditor.

The international standard, besides requiring the group auditor to assess the competence of the component auditor, allows the former to assess working papers of component auditors, which helps them assess the nature, timing, extent of procedures as

well as the conclusions drawn from having performed those procedures. The Indian standard again restricts such access which brings us back to the concept of "reliance" on the component auditor.

By aligning these requirements with international standards, the NFRA is trying to ensure that there is accountability for the reporting done for large and complex groups. Typically, to comply with the requirement of the standard as it relates to evaluating sufficiency of their own participation in the audit to be able to opine on the consolidated financial statements. However, for the remaining portion that is not audited by them they simply have to rely on the component auditors. This will change significantly and make everyone in the chain accountable if the above changes are implemented. The group auditor will necessarily need to take entire responsibility for the audit and the component auditors will be subject to assessment of competence as well as the quality of work performed as demonstrated in their work papers, which the group auditor will now have access to.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Border woes

It is a major breakthrough that India and China have made significant progress in resolving their border disputes, agreeing to patrolling arrangements along the Line of Actual Control and the disengagement of the heavily stationed border troops. Increased "across the table negotiations" between the two must be continued to bring more positive results to mitigate the chronic border

friction and tension between the two. Yet, the major issue of growing militarisation of the border is unresolved. Despite these positive signs, India should always be vigilant of Chinese border moves. China's inclusion of Arunachal Pradesh in its map representation and opposing Indian leaders' visit to the Northeastern state shows its intention of augmenting border disputes with India.

—NR Nagarajan, Sivakasi

Combating bomb hoaxes

Apologies of "Trouble in the air" (FE, October 22), hoax bomb threats in India have been on the rise, causing widespread panic and unnecessary strain on law enforcement. To effectively combat this issue, a multi-faceted approach is necessary. Psychological profiling can be used to better understand the motivations and patterns of culprits. Social media regulation is also crucial, as these

platforms often serve as breeding grounds for such hoaxes. Stricter oversight, collaborating with fact-checking organisations, and holding platforms accountable can help curb the dissemination of harmful content. Enhancing crisis communication and management is essential to ensure accurate and timely dissemination of information in the face of hoax threats.

—Armajeet Kumar, Hazaribagh

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FDA approval for Cobenfy casts light on schizophrenia's wickedness

Cobenfy is the first antipsychotic drug to treat schizophrenia by targeting cholinergic receptors instead of dopamine receptors. Cobenfy is a combination of xanomeline and trospium chloride that has a novel mechanism of action that steers clear of older drugs' side effects, too. It has side effects of its own, though

Alok Kulkarni

Trigger warning: suicide

In September 26, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved a drug called Cobenfy to treat schizophrenia. Cobenfy is a combination of xanomeline and trospium chloride that has a novel mechanism of action that steers clear of older drugs' side effects, too. It has side effects of its own, of course.

Schizophrenia is one of the most serious of all psychiatric disorders. It has life-changing consequences, including social isolation, stigma, and diminished prospects of finding a partner. Persons with schizophrenia have a life expectancy lower by 13-15 years, with contributions from weight gain, poor dietary habits, smoking, and comorbid substance use. Five percent of people with schizophrenia die by suicide.

Schizophrenia affects one in a hundred people in their lifetime. Newer evidence has challenged the idea that it is equally prevalent in both sexes, finding it is slightly more common in men. It typically develops during late adolescence and early adulthood. In men, it peaks in the early 20s; new cases among women are also seen in the mid- to late 40s.

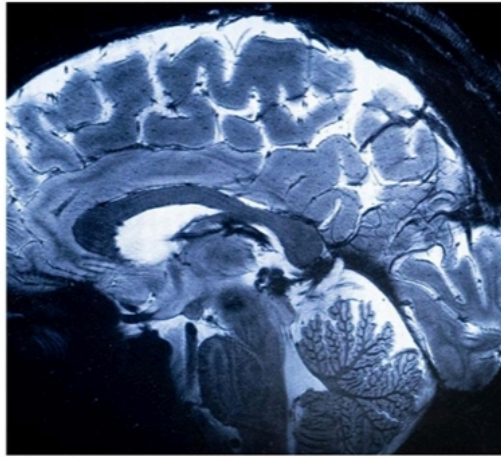
Appreciating Cobenfy's novelty and the difference it can make requires awareness of the various effects of schizophrenia, its diagnosis, and scientists' understanding of what causes it.

Clinical symptoms of schizophrenia

Most people who develop schizophrenia display prodromal symptoms. They last for a little under 12 months on average and may include unexplainable feelings of inner change, the development of novel spiritual and philosophical interests, anger, irritability, anxiety, depression, and social withdrawal.

The clinical phenotype of schizophrenia falls into three categories: reality distortion, disorganisation, and negative symptoms. The so-called positive symptoms are characterised by delusions, hallucinations, and a pattern of speech that is difficult to follow; the technical name for this is formal thought disorder.

The Swiss psychiatrist Paul E. Bleuler used the "four As" to characterise schizophrenia in 1911: affect, associations, ambivalence, and autism. Contemporary descriptions are richer and more sensitive to differences in symptoms. They include negative symptoms like reduction in the quantity of words spoken, reduced goal-directed activities, apathy or lack of motivation, anergia, reduced experience of pleasure, and reduced expression of emotions.



A picture of a human brain as revealed in an MRI. ALAN JOCARD/AP

Disorganisation symptoms include formal thought disorder (also considered a positive symptom), disorganised behaviour, and inappropriate affect. Another intriguing symptom that has today become more uncommon, especially in the economically developed world, is catatonia: characterised by a host of abnormal motor behaviours occurring alongside stupor or excitement. It is no longer considered characteristic of schizophrenia, as it is seen in other psychiatric disorders as well.

The German psychiatrist Kurt Schneider had described "first rank" symptoms previously considered to be pathognomonic of schizophrenia. These included auditory hallucinations referring to the patient in the third person, subjective changes in the ownership of thinking, and the experience that one's actions, bodily sensations, or emotions are controlled by external forces.

Cognitive impairment is ubiquitous in schizophrenia. Patients have shown impaired performance on various cognitive tests that measure judgement, attention, memory, and general intellectual functions.

What causes schizophrenia?

Schizophrenia is a multifactorial disorder. Viewing it through the lens of a single construct is futile. The role of genetics in the pathophysiology of schizophrenia cannot be

Most people who develop schizophrenia display prodromal symptoms, which last for a little under 12 months and include feelings of inner change, the development of spiritual and philosophical interests, anger, depression, and withdrawal

overemphasised. Genetic variants associated with risk play a direct role in the brain by changing gene expression that disrupt brain development and function.

A genome-wide association study in 2014 identified 108 genetic loci associated with schizophrenia. (Reminder: correlation does not imply causation.) Disorders like Huntington's disease, cystic fibrosis, hemochromatosis, and sickle cell anaemia are caused by mutations in a single gene. Unlike them, schizophrenia is polygenic, meaning it is the result of hundreds and possibly thousands of genes of small effect sizes. Rare genetic variants of moderate to large effect sizes have also been identified.

According to neurodevelopmental theory, the causes include events in early life, at birth, or even in utero. Prenatal and perinatal complications represent the most common environmental risk factor for schizophrenia. The genetic risk for schizophrenia interacts with early life

complications and increases the risk probability up to fivefold when there are early-life complications.

The discovery of genes that confer risk and the neurodevelopmental origins of schizophrenia have expanded our understanding of disease pathophysiology.

Xanomeline and trospium

Dopamine and glutamate, two neurotransmitters, have been implicated in the genesis of schizophrenia. But studies investigating the neurochemical origins of the disorder have thrown up conflicting results.

Amphetamine abuse stimulates dopamine release and produces a clinical syndrome resembling schizophrenia. Antipsychotics act by blocking brain dopamine receptors. These two premises gave rise to the dopamine hypothesis. The initial version of the dopamine hypothesis now stands discredited in light of new evidence. Multiple studies have demonstrated people with established schizophrenia have an increased dopamine synthesis capacity, and so far only one replication effort has failed to reproduce their findings.

Cobenfy, the new drug that has just received the FDA's approval, "is the first antipsychotic drug approved to treat schizophrenia that targets cholinergic receptors as opposed to dopamine receptors, which has long been the standard of care," the FDA said in a statement.

According to a review of xanomeline and trospium chloride published in 2022, the early development of xanomeline as a drug candidate to treat Alzheimer's disease and schizophrenia was stopped due to the compound's adverse effects. It gained favour again after researchers considered using it with trospium. Xanomeline is an agonist of muscarinic receptors (i.e., of the parasympathetic nervous system) and "might lead to improvement in all symptom types of schizophrenia," while "trospium is expected to reduce the adverse effects of xanomeline" given "its role as an antimuscarinic agent."

The FDA said Cobenfy's most common side-effects include nausea, indigestion, hypertension, tachycardia, and dizziness. The drug belongs to Bristol Myers Squibb, which has priced it at \$1,850 a month.

(Assistance for overcoming suicidal thoughts is available via Tele-MANAS H416, Sneh's suicide prevention helpline 044-24640050, and Speak2Us mental health helpline 9375493754.)

(Alok Kulkarni is a senior interventional neuropsychiatrist at the Manas Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences at Hubli in Karnataka.alokkulkarni@gmail.com)

THE GIST

Schizophrenia has life-changing consequences. Persons with schizophrenia have a life expectancy lower by 13-15 years because of weight gain, poor diet, smoking, and comorbid substance use. Five percent die by suicide

Schizophrenia falls into three categories: reality distortion, disorganisation, and negative symptoms. The positive symptoms are characterised by delusions, hallucinations, and a pattern of speech that is difficult to follow

Genetic variants play a key role in schizophrenia by changing gene expression that disrupts brain function. This, combined with prenatal and perinatal complications, increases risk fivefold

BIG SHOT



This image shows an area of a mosaic released by the Euclid space telescope on October 15. This patch of the southern sky shows stars in the Milky Way, and many galaxies beyond. Red stars are colder, and white/blue stars are hotter. On the right of the image, galaxy cluster Abell 3381 is visible as a string of galaxies. EUCLID CONSORTIUM, ESA, NASA

QUESTION CORNER

Brown dwarfs: wannabe stars



Q. What is a brown dwarf?
A: In 1995, astronomers confirmed the discovery for the first time of

a brown dwarf, a body too small to be a star and too big to be a planet. They could be considered wannabe stars that, during their formative stages did not reach the mass necessary to ignite nuclear fusion at their core like a star. But they are more massive than the biggest planets.

"They are formally defined as objects that can burn a heavy form of hydrogen, called deuterium, but not the most common basic form of hydrogen," said Sam Whitebook, a graduate student in Caltech's division of physics, mathematics, and astronomy. Recently, researchers took a closer look at the first brown dwarf discovered and found that it's actually two brown dwarfs orbiting astonishingly close to each other while also circling a small star. The research papers were published in the *Astrophysical Journal Letters*.

These two brown dwarfs are gravitationally locked to each other in what is called a binary



An artist's concept of a brown dwarf. NASA/JPL-CALTECH

system, an arrangement commonly observed among stars but quite rare among brown dwarfs. So the brown dwarf that three decades ago was named Gliese 229B is now recognised as Gliese 229Ba, with a mass 38 times greater than Jupiter, and Gliese 229Bb, with a mass 34 times greater than Jupiter.

They are located 19 light-years from our solar system, rather close in cosmic terms, in the constellation Lepus. - Reuters

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

Editorial



Over the borderline

The agreement between India and China opens new opportunities

China's confirmation on Tuesday of an agreement to resolve its four-year military standoff with India, as announced by Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri on Monday, is welcome news, given the possibilities it opens up for bilateral ties. Since April 2020, when China suddenly transgressed along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), followed by India's counter-deployment, bilateral relations had ground to a halt. Anger in India, over the June 2020 Galwan clashes in which 20 Indian soldiers were killed, justifiably brimmed over, and despite steps to avoid further violence and disengagement at five friction points, mistrust over whether the PLA would revert to positions prior to 2020 or "status quo ante" remained. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's statement that China has agreed to restore troops to pre-2020 levels and positions must be verified, but it is indeed a positive move if true. The announcement of the agreement on "patrolling arrangements" came just ahead of the BRICS Summit in Russia which Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping are attending, setting the stage for a possible formal interaction for the first time since 2020. Prior to this, the leaders had close engagement in 18 one-on-one meetings from 2014-19 including two intense retreats in Wuhan and Mamallapuram. Since 2020 they have held informal chats, on summit sidelines. Though trade ties remained at record highs, relations in areas including investment, travel and visas were snapped. It remains to be seen whether these will recover.

The government must ensure that the "next steps" Mr. Misri referred to are carried out in as transparent a manner as possible so as to engender trust in the process. This is important as even though China insists that its troops are in its own territory and Mr. Modi has said that "no one has come in or taken Indian posts", the perception is that Chinese troops have in fact occupied more Indian land than before, and have denied Indian soldiers patrolling rights and villagers in Eastern Ladakh access to their grazing lands. The government's repeated refusal to fully bring Parliament or to allow media access to the forward areas has added to misgivings over the situation on the ground. It is necessary to demonstrate that the Chinese troops have indeed vacated the forward areas. Premature exclamations of success or the chest-thumping witnessed after the 2017 Doklam disengagement are best avoided, as China doubled down on its presence on the plateau subsequently. Proceeding with caution while learning from past lessons is the best way forward. The two sides will need to discuss whether the old framework of the 1993 Border Peace and Tranquillity Agreement and the 2013 Border Defence Cooperation Agreement still hold, or whether a new *modus vivendi* is needed to manage their differences over the border from this point on.

West versus the rest

The West must not tolerate terror threats in the name of free speech

Charges levelled against India by the United States and Canada regarding New Delhi's alleged covert operations targeted at individuals designated terrorists by it are doubtless embarrassing to India, its government and its people. No democracy that adheres to the rule of law at home and abroad can take such charges lightly. India has strongly denied any involvement and said that it is not its policy to indulge in such acts. The onus is on the U.S. and Canada to provide any evidence that suggests official Indian sanction to the alleged plots. Their double standard is, however, evident. Even a cursory overview of the U.S. conduct in countries hostile and friendly to it would reveal a long record of its interference in their domestic affairs. Covert operations have been a part of U.S. strategy in European countries that are treaty allies and friendly partners, not to mention countries that are its declared enemies. Considering this history, allegations by the U.S. and Canada are less about adherence to any universal standard of rule of law than a convenient political use of that argument against a fellow democracy. The motivations for such a move remain unclear and intriguing. India's enhanced engagement with its diaspora in the West and domestic political calculations in these countries could be among them.

The historic view of western conduct apart, the facts and the circumstances of the controversy are indicative of a continued western insensitivity towards India's security concerns. Open calls for violence against India, brazen threats to blow up aircraft, and public celebrations of past violence against India are being tolerated in the name of free speech. Indian missions have come under attack from Khalistan proponents in "Five Eyes" countries. While all this is defended as free speech, without irony, an official Canadian report has taken umbrage at Indian media reports that are critical of Khalistan propaganda, which anyway has little support in India. It is notable that all this is happening even as the West is debating whether free speech protections extend to hate speech. Most democracies face turmoil, which calls for new norms and standards, nationally and internationally. Indian immigrants form a considerable percentage of the new citizens in western countries, a trend that will hold for decades. This diaspora can contribute to the continuing vibrancy of western societies, but it also holds the risk of conflict. The India-West partnership is critical for democracy and progress in the current century. Mutual recognition of each other's concerns and priorities is essential for this.

Thou shalt not be a victim, thou shalt not be a perpetrator, but, above all, thou shalt not be a bystander." In suggesting this, Yehuda Bauer, Holocaust historian, rested his case wherein the "bystander" was brought centre-stage and held accountable alongside the perpetrator for crimes against humanity. The 'bystander' implies the collective conscience of the world which must work as the weapon of the powerless. So, while the United Nations through Chapter VI of its Charter is committed to the peaceful settlement of disputes, Chapter VII of the same Charter prescribes the use of armed force with the authorisation of the Security Council in cases of aggression and breaches of peace threatening international security. Chapter VII further exhorts member-states to make available such military or police forces as may be required to establish peace. In fact Chapter VIII goes further and prescribes robust "regional arrangement" in enforcing peace upon authorisation by the Security Council.

Hits and misses

Thus, one would be led to an erroneous belief that the UN has been everything in place – in its strongly worded Charter and over 1,00,000 peacekeepers on the ground – to eliminate wars and exploitation from the world. UN political diplomacy and peace operations have established peace in many theatres in seven decades of peacekeeping such as in Cambodia, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Angola, Timor Leste, Liberia and Kosovo, to name a few notably successful UN engagements. Yet, there have been glaring instances, such as in Rwanda (1994) and Bosnia (1995) where the UN was accused of being a bystander, unwilling or unable to protect non-combatants and vulnerable sections, especially women and children. That in subsequent missions, notably Sierra Leone (UNSMIL), Timor Leste (UNMIT), Darfur (UNAMID), South Sudan (UNMISS) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO), the UN brought the protection of civilians centrestage, thus restoring substantially, if not wholly, its commitment to its core values, is a tribute to its willingness to use institutional memory in improving peacekeeping to give primacy to protection of civilians.

Today the world is again on the brink of a much bigger war in Europe and West Asia precisely because, over the last three years, the UN has frittered away the dividends of its



Hermanprit Singh
A retired Indian Police Service officer with experience in United Nations peace operations as Acting Police Commissioner and Principal Officer in Timor Leste and in the Office of Operations at the UN headquarters

By being reduced to 'bystander' status in the ongoing and serious conflicts in the world, the United Nations is frittering away the dividends of its 'enforceable peacekeeping'

'enforceable peacekeeping' between 2006 and 2020. It has been reduced to a 'Bystander' status again in the ongoing conflict in West Asia and the war in Ukraine.

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the Hamas-led massacre of non-combatants in Israel, followed by an even larger offensive of Israel on hapless civilians in Gaza, the UN response in both theatres has failed to call out the perpetrator in no uncertain terms and take decisive action in protecting civilian lives. This has happened despite it having a 1,00,000-strong UN military and police forces at its disposal, as battle-ready infantry battalions and as 'standing capacity' at its logistics hub in Brindisi, Italy, that could have been deployed in robust numbers to contain a further loss of life and destruction of cities. There is little point in having such strong forces and yet be a bystander as both conflicts have widened, with the world continuing to witness unprecedented destruction. Even though 1,00,000 UN uniformed forces are deployed in many missions in Africa and elsewhere, it would have done no grave damage to the current missions were over half of them re-deployed in Ukraine, Gaza and West Bank, right between the warring forces, just as they continue to be in Cyprus between the Turks and Greeks or were deployed in Timor Leste, between Indonesian forces and the Timor Leste freedom fighters, the FRETILIN.

A lost chance to act with decision

Extraordinary situations demand extraordinary interventions. The fact that contributing member-countries have accepted these forces to not just maintain but also to enforce peace implies their consent to protect civilians regardless of the 'theatre'. Otherwise, these well-armed and well-provisioned troops are just biding their time till their rotation and pocketing the green books as a tribute. Blue helmets must act as blue helmets, impartially and decisively, as in Kosovo (UNMIK 1999-2008) and Timor Leste (UNTAET, UNMIT 1999-2008), with legitimacy to use reasonable force. It needed just over 6,000 UN uniformed personnel (typically, two infantry brigades) in Kosovo and 3,000 UN police personnel (including the lightly-armed formed police units) and an infantry brigade from Australia, under operational command of UN Mission (UNMIT) in Timor Leste to restore peace and bring back the rule of law and an elected government.

A deployment of similar numbers in a

similar-sized geographical area of Israel-Gaza-West Bank would have contained the colossal loss of lives that has followed and is making this theatre a killing field with mounting civilian casualties.

There is a need for UNSC reform

This also brings us to the subject of much-needed reform in the functioning of the Security Council. The veto power of the P5, the Permanent Security Council members, instead of being a rock of stability for the UN peace operations to stand on, has more often than not acted as a mill-stone around their neck. The world has repeatedly witnessed the negative power of veto precisely at a time when 'enforcing peace' has become an urgent necessity in the face of threats to civilian lives. Nearly a million Tutsi civilians were killed in the now infamous Rwanda genocide of 1994-95 even as the French continued to support the Rwandan Army, the main perpetrators of the genocide, and UN Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR) was a bystander.

The case for reform of the Security Council to obviate such genocides in future by swift deployment and having a decisive role for the blue helmets rests on a two-pronged approach. The first is for the expansion of Permanent membership of the Security Council to include India (by virtue of it being the most vibrant voice of the global South) and South Africa (for long overdue representation from Africa). The second is to bell the veto cat.

In an expanded Council of P7, rather than each member having veto power, contentious issues such as the use of force in West Asia to stop an expansionist Israel or in Ukraine to thwart the expansionist designs of Russia – which in the current scenario will be vetoed by the U.S. and Russia, respectively – should have a division of votes of a P7 to decide on UN intervention. Once such a division of votes is in favour of peace operations to thwart hostilities, the deployment of UN standing troops or shifting troops between 'missions' should be enabled under Chapters VII and VIII of the UN Charter, with full executive powers to the UN military and police commanders on the ground.

Ultimately, if the UN cannot stand on its own feet and enforce peace despite having standing uniformed forces of the size of a sovereign nation, then UN-led peace operations must close and the plush halls of the UN be used only for exalted deliberations by another international non-governmental organisation or a think-tank.

Working toward a meaningful 'victims' register' in Bastar

In September 20, 2024, the Union Home Minister met 55 people affected by Naxalite violence from the left-wing extremist-hit areas of Chhattisgarh, as highlighted in a report in this daily, "Surrender arms and join mainstream, or face action, Amit Shah tells Naxals". The ground zero of the current phase of left-wing extremist activities, where most of the recent and successful tactical operations by security forces have been conducted, is the Bastar division of Chhattisgarh. It comprises the districts of Bastar, Narayanpur, Bijapur, Kondagaon, Sukma, Dantewada and Kanker.

An indication of the government's approach
The Home Minister's meeting with the victims is encouraging indeed when seen through the prism of successes of the security forces in counter-Maoist operations over the last six months or so. The initiative indicates the seriousness of the government to address the challenges in a manner that is beyond the realm of law and order. The government's declared approach to deal with left-wing extremism has been to address the challenge in a holistic manner, in the areas of security, development, ensuring the rights of local communities, and with improvements in governance and public perception management. However, the parameters of success and performance on the ground have continued to be contextualised by the security bias of the approach.

In the context of addressing the conditions of victims, it may be relevant to invoke recent public statements by the Deputy Chief Minister and Home Minister of Chhattisgarh, Vijay Sharma. In May this year, Mr. Sharma had said that the State was making efforts to bring in new features and have better implementation in maintaining the victims' register for people victimised due to



Shashank Ranjan
A retired Indian Police Service officer (colonel) with rich experience of serving in conflict zones. He teaches at the O.P. Jindal Global University, Sonapat, Haryana

Compilation of the 'register', which has been tried globally as a conflict resolution tool, would have to an exercise in the spirit of truth and reconciliation

violence in Bastar. An alignment in the thought processes of policymakers at the Centre and in the State bodies well for the resolution of the left-wing extremism challenge in the long run, wherein we move beyond our delusory race to kill the last Maoist.

Categories of those affected

However one needs to tread ahead with the policies and their implementation, with a caveat that victim identity is not a monolith in conflict zones – and Bastar is no different. Two main categories of victims among several, are, first the ones who have suffered at the hands of Maoists (and presumably these were the people who met the Home Minister). The second category of victims who cannot be ignored comprise those who have suffered at the hands of the state to include security forces and the criminal justice system; intentionally or otherwise.

Another agency that victimised the tribal community was the vigilante army called the Salwa Judum during the middle years of the first decade of this century. In this period, in addition to people who fled their villages to live in Salwa Judum camps (where they continue to live even after two decades), about 55,000 tribals fled Chhattisgarh to take shelter in then unified Andhra Pradesh. These internally displaced conflict victims yearn to return to Chhattisgarh but are yet to get redress from the respective State governments. In addition, there are numerous victims of structural violence churned up by the conflict since the 1980s, when Maoist cadres entered the forests of Dandakaranya, seeking safe haven. Dandakaranya covers an area of about 92,000 square kilometres and includes parts of Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra.

In fact the victimisation as a result of structural violence vis-à-vis tribal communities has been an

ongoing process since colonial times and through the post-independence era. The Maoists, after entering Dandakaranya, sought to champion the tribal cause that was a manifestation of centuries of victimisation. Absent governance resulting from the policy of exclusion of tribal belts, gave tremendous elbow room to the Maoists to fill in the gap left by the state.

Making it work

The initiative to identify victims and register the details in the victims' register – talked about by Mr. Sharma – has tremendous potential to alleviate the plight of tribal communities who find themselves sandwiched between the Maoists and the state. The victims' register, as an experiment, has been tried in more than a dozen countries as a conflict resolution or peacebuilding effort. Such an effort played a major role in resolving the deep-rooted left-wing extremism insurgency in Colombia.

However, the exercise of identifying victims shall have to be in the spirit of truth and reconciliation and agnostic to the nature of the perpetrators who carried out victimisation. If otherwise, such a well-intentioned exercise may end up creating divides in the society, as another version of the haves versus the have-nots conflict. As far as the rules of the victims' register experiment are concerned, victims and their families need to be given a benefit of doubt when they tell their stories, as many versions cannot be cross-checked in a tangible manner. The ground rules of the exercise shall have to be based on trust. The said measure shall be an impactful confidence-building measure and is bound to expand the support base of the state against the Maoists. The time is ripe to embark on a journey to address tribal aspirations. And pitfalls in the journey may well be afforded in times of the Maoists being at their lowest.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Breakthrough

The latest seems to have made giant strides in resolving with China the tensions at the Line of Actual Control (Page 1, October 22). That talks have been continuing shows the strong efforts put in by India in an effort to resolve the tensions along the LAC. From this point onwards, India needs to ensure that there is a strong commitment by China in honouring the deal.

Balasubramanian Pavan, Secunderabad

The agreement may be seen as a prelude to a détente between two giants in Asia. This assumes significance

for India as China and the United States seem to be in a race for global hegemony. Dharmarajan A.K., Thalassery, Kerala

The lead story should be welcomed for the simple fact that escalating tensions do not serve the people of either country. But how much one ceded ground in order to arrive at the deal should be made public. Eternal vigilance is warranted in dealings with China.

Jose Abraham, Valikom, Kottayam, Kerala

The agreement will certainly lead to a dialling down of

tensions, especially for people living near the border. M.S. Raghavan, Chennai

One admires the good sense displayed by both sides. Such a solution will serve as the lynchpin of regional security. Future diplomacy would be much simpler to conduct. The ideal situation would be one where neither side is in confrontation and both can progress on their respective pathways.

Mudgal Venkatesh, Kalaburagi, Karnataka

It augurs well that there is

an agreement. But, at the same time, it seems to be very vague on certain points. When there is agreement in patrolling arrangements, there is no clarity on whether the buffer zones would continue for patrolling purposes. All along, India has laid stress on disengagement and de-escalation in the remaining friction points. Here too there is no clarity. D. Sethuraman, Chennai

The unresolved border dispute from the time of independence is an issue which needs more serious

attention. The LAC, from Arunachal Pradesh to Ladakh, should be one of peace. The agreement, details of which are not fully disclosed, might help in easing tensions, but is not a permanent solution. China should not be allowed to have our support for its economic growth at the expense of being menacing at the border. B. Sundar Raman, Coimbatore

Penalty Declining TFR in the southern States seems to be the penalty they have paid for devolution of funds and

the impending delimitation exercise. The southern and progressive States have been successfully implementing the national developmental goals. The delimitation exercise is likely to, electorally and fiscally, further disempower developed States. It may not be surprising that governments in the southern States are beginning to 'wonder whether big families' are what is 'needed'.

H.N. Ramakrishna, Bengaluru
Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name.

CACHE



Green energy: The Three Mile Island Nuclear power plant is seen at sunrise in Middletown, Pennsylvania, U.S., on October 16. REUTERS

Why are Big Tech companies such as Google scouting for nuclear power?

Training AI models, ensuring that they remain always online and maintaining growing data centres are energy-hungry tasks. Google has held that nuclear energy is clean, available round-the-clock, and carbon-free. However, is green energy 'truly' clean?

Sahana Venugopal

The story so far: On October 14, Google announced the "first corporate agreement" to buy nuclear energy from multiple Small Modular Reactors (SMRs). These SMRs will be developed by Kairos Power. The initial phase of the work will bring up the first SMR by 2030, and subsequent deployments will continue through 2035. Per Google, this deal will provide 500 MW of carbon-free power to the U.S. electricity grid. They said this agreement will help in the development of AI technologies to power scientific advances.

Why nuclear energy? Training AI models, ensuring that they remain always online, and maintaining growing data centres are energy-hungry tasks. In a 2024 Environmental Report, Google admitted that its total global greenhouse gas emissions rose by 13% in 2023 year-over-year, pointing to the "challenge of reducing emissions while compute intensity increases and we grow our technical infrastructure investment to support this AI transition." Google has held that nuclear energy is clean, available round-the-clock (unlike solar energy), and carbon-free. In that vein, the search giant sees the next generation nuclear reactors as a way to power global data centres and its offices with the help of clean energy. Smaller sizes and modular designs further help the tech

giant in faster deployment cycles.

Which companies are partnering with nuclear reactor makers? On September 20, Microsoft and Constellation signed a 20-year power purchase agreement intended to launch the Crane Clean Energy Center (CCEC) and restart the Three Mile Island Unit 1. The deal should add around 835 MW of carbon-free energy to the grid, according to Constellation's statement. "This agreement is a major milestone in Microsoft's efforts to help decarbonise the grid in support of our commitment to become carbon negative," said Bobby Holle, Microsoft's VP of Energy, at the time. Amazon also announced that it signed three new agreements to support nuclear energy projects, such as the construction of SMRs. In Washington, it partnered with Energy Northwest. It is further making an investment in SMR reactors and fuel developer X-energy, and partnering with Dominion Energy in Virginia. "We also previously signed an agreement to co-locate a data centre facility next to the Talen Energy's nuclear facility in Pennsylvania, which will directly power our data centres with carbon-free energy, and helps preserve this existing reactor," Amazon said in a blog post.

OpenAI CEO Sam Altman backed the nuclear startup Oklo, which aims to build a commercial microreactor in Idaho and have it operational in 2027, though delays could affect this, reported CNBC. Mr.

Altman also invested in the nuclear fusion company Helion in 2021.

Is nuclear energy truly clean?

This is still a matter of debate. The main takeaway is that nuclear energy has a serious reputation problem, due to public memory of past accidents and crises that span generations.

For example, Ukraine's Chernobyl explosion (1986) and Japan's Fukushima accident (2011) resulted in extensive environmental destruction that lasted for years, even as the impact on human health is still being researched. While Chernobyl is a case study on multiple human errors and a communication breakdown, Fukushima demonstrates how natural disasters beyond human control – such as a tsunami – can lead to devastating nuclear accidents.

Separately, in the U.S., the Three Mile Island accident of 1979 in Unit 2 of the facility's nuclear generating station involved the combination of a malfunctioning valve and human error, resulting in the core overheating and releasing radioactive gases. While not considered overly dangerous to the surrounding population, it is regarded as one of the worst industrial nuclear accidents in U.S. history. Microsoft's deal with Constellation aims to start Unit 1 again; Unit 2 was decommissioned after the accident.

Many environmental groups are actively protesting nuclear energy and the way it is being presented as "clean".

'Friends of the Earth,' an international network of organisations, said on its website in 2018, "Since it was first commercialised, nuclear power has proven to be one of the dirtiest, most dangerous and most expensive sources of energy. Nuclear reactors have a long history of accidents, leaks, extended outages and skyrocketing costs." The organisation also pointed out the dangers of nuclear infrastructure being built over earthquake-prone areas.

But there is hope in SMRs as they have potentially lower building and operational costs. A U.S. Department of Energy report noted that SMRs have compact designs and can function in areas unable to withstand larger or older nuclear power plants that require huge volumes of water.

What is the U.S. government's stance on nuclear energy?

Apart from seeing nuclear power as one source of clean energy, the U.S. Department of Energy's Office of Nuclear Energy highlighted the importance of re-establishing the U.S. as a nuclear leader, to stay ahead of China and Russia.

Dr. Rita Baranwal, Assistant Secretary for Nuclear Energy, noted, "As the use of nuclear energy continues to expand internationally, it is crucial that the United States reasserts itself as a leader in this incredible technology. Existing U.S. nuclear plants prevent almost 500 million metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions each year – the equivalent of taking 100 million cars off the roads."



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

K. Subrahmanian
Upendran

"Hello. What brings you here so late in the evening?"
"I've come to borrow your stepney."
"What?"
"My friend's scooter, has a flat tyre. I thought I could borrow your stepney."
"Oh, you want to borrow my scooter's spare wheel? You had me worried for a minute."

"Worried? But why?"
"Because 'stepney' has another meaning as well, 'mistress'.
"Mistress! Ha! Ha! No wonder you looked so shocked when I asked for your stepney."

"Yes, I was a bit shocked. But you know, most dictionaries do not contain the word 'stepney'."

"What! You must be joking. Everyone in India uses it. Don't tell me that it's a word that we Indians have invented."
"Like the word 'prepone', you mean?"
"Exactly. Everyone in our country uses the word 'prepone' instead of 'advance'. But 'prepone' is not in any dictionary."

"But this is not the case with 'stepney', though. It is included in a few dictionaries. And the meaning given is, 'a spare wheel', often figuratively, a mistress, especially a white slaver's."

"So the mistress of a white slave-owner was called a stepney. What I don't understand is why a spare wheel was called a 'stepney' in the first place."

"Because the wheels were made in a place called 'Stepney' in London."

"Really? That's very interesting! But you say that the word 'stepney' is found only in a couple of dictionaries. Then what is a stepney called these days?"
"A 'spare' or a 'spare tyre'."

"Can I borrow your spare?"
"Sorry, but my cousin has borrowed my scooter... Hey, where are you going?"

"I'll ring up my friend and tell him that the spare is not available."
"Was your friend disappointed?"

"Very. Now he has to find a way to get home."

"Why can't he stay with you tonight?"
"He can't. He mentioned about three or four things that had to be done by tomorrow morning."

"You usually 'mention' something and not 'mention about' something. For example, 'Radha's name was mentioned as a possible candidate. So, how's your friend going? Is he taking an auto?'"

"There's an auto strike, remember?"
"Oh, yes. There are so many kinds of strikes these days – auto strike, bus strike, hunger strike, sleep strike."

"Sleep strike? What's that?"
"Why don't you guess the meaning?"

"Well, when a person is on a hunger strike, he/she refuses to eat or drink anything. So I suppose during a sleep strike, he/she refuses to sleep."

"Exactly."
"But what good will that do?"

"Well, if the workers in a factory go on a sleep strike, what will happen?"
"When they come to work, they'll be feeling terribly sleepy. So no work will ever get done."

Published in The Hindu on October 5, 1993.

THE DAILY QUIZ

On the occasion of October 23 being a National Day in Hungary, a quiz on the European nation

V.V. Ramanan

QUESTION 1

Simple one to begin with. What is Hungary's capital and on which famous river does it stand?

QUESTION 2

In which year did the famous revolution and freedom fight against communist rule start?

QUESTION 3

Name the famous traditional Hungarian stew made of meat and vegetables and flavoured with paprika.

QUESTION 4

Name the famous

Budapest-born mathematician, physicist, computer scientist and engineer who worked on the Manhattan Project.

QUESTION 5

Albert Imre Szent-Gyorgyi won the Nobel Prize in 1937 for first isolating which vitamin?

QUESTION 6

What is the native name of Hungary that is featured on its postage stamps?

QUESTION 7

László Bíró invented which commonly used item of stationery?



Visual question:

Name this legendary footballer nicknamed 'Galloping Major'. GETTY IMAGES

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz:

1. This province in Canada has a deep historical connection with India due to Sikh immigration. This is the oldest Gurdwara established there by the Sikh community. **Ans: British Columbia; Paldi**

2. The name of the famous ship that in 1914 was denied entry into Canada under restrictive immigration laws. **Ans: Komagata Maru; the incident is remembered as a pivotal moment in the history of immigration laws in Canada, and a formal apology was issued by the Canadian government in 2016**

3. This Canadian Prime Minister introduced a system that allowed more immigrants from non-European countries. **Ans: Pierre Trudeau**

4. The name of this unique annual festival in Surrey that has been going on from 2008. **Ans: Surrey Fusion Festival**

5. This Canadian MP, of Indian descent, is known for her role as Minister of National Defence. **Ans: Anita Indira Anand**

Visual: Identify this Indo-Canadian filmmaker. The name of the film that was part of her Elements Trilogy. **Ans: Deepa Mehta; Water**
Early Birds: Tamal Biswas| Sonali Das| Dodo Jayaditya| Sadhan Kumar Panda| Anjali Kumar Rai

Word of the day

Defenestration:

the act of throwing someone or something out of a window

Synonyms: riddance, ejection, expulsion

Usage: He has governed so badly as to deserve automatic defenestration.

Pronunciation: newsth./live/ defenestrationpro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /dɪfɛnstʃ(ə)n/

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

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

The decrease in Ukraine's population since Russia's invasion

8 in million. The UN Population Fund said there had not been a census, but that there clearly had been a dramatic population decline in war-torn Ukraine. Ukraine's population stood at around 45 million in 2014. It now stands at around 35 million. **AP**

The number of CCPA complaints against Ola Electric

10,644 The Central Consumer Protection Authority had issued a notice to the company for "alleged violation of consumer rights, misleading advertisement and unfair trade practices". **PII**

Uttar Pradesh's latest investment in healthcare projects

1,147 in ₹ crore. U.P. Chief Minister announced this while addressing the inauguration and foundation stone laying programme of various projects of Sanjay Gandhi Post Graduate Institute for Medical Sciences. **PII**

The UAE's investment in Rajasthan's renewable energy

3 in ₹ lakh crore. This investment will be made for setting up solar, wind and hybrid projects of 60 GW capacity in the western districts of the State. Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma said that Rajasthan will be installing 250 GW solar plants. **PII**

The number of people killed in the last two days of the Sudan war

50 Clashes erupted in Al-Jazira state after a paramilitary commander defected to the army. War has raged between the Sudanese armed forces and the Rapid Support Forces since April 2023. **AP**

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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On Section 6A of the Citizenship Act

What does the contentious provision state? What does the Assam Accord signed in 1985 stipulate? Why are there different cut-off dates for citizenship in Assam? What are the court's findings? What are the potential implications?

EXPLAINER

Aaratrika Bhaumik

The story so far:

In a landmark ruling, a Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court on October 18 upheld the constitutional validity of Section 6A of the Citizenship Act, 1955 (1955 Act) which laid out an exclusive regime for migrants in Assam from erstwhile East Pakistan (present Bangladesh) to obtain Indian citizenship as long as they entered India before March 25, 1971. The decision was rendered by a 4:1 majority. Justice Surya Kant authored the lead majority opinion on behalf of himself, CJI D.Y. Chandrachud, Justices M. M. Sundresh, and Manoj Misra, while Justice Pardiwala delivered the lone dissenting opinion.

What does Section 6A stipulate?

Section 6A originates from the "Assam Accord", a political settlement signed on August 15, 1985, between the Rajiv Gandhi-led Congress government and Assam's student groups, following a six-year-long agitation against the influx of undocumented migrants from Bangladesh into Assam. It established a framework for granting or denying Indian citizenship to migrants in Assam based on a cut-off date — March 25, 1971. The date marked the onset of the genocide in East Pakistan, leading to the Bangladesh Liberation War and the eventual creation of Bangladesh. The conflict drove millions of Bengalis to flee East Pakistan and seek refuge in Assam, which shares a 263-km border with Bangladesh. Accordingly, all those who entered the State after March 25, 1971, would be treated as foreigners and deported in accordance with law.

The provision also conferred Indian citizenship upon migrants of "Indian origin" who entered Assam before January 1, 1966, and had been "ordinarily resident" in the State since then. Meanwhile, those who arrived between January 1, 1966, and March 24, 1971, were granted the full rights of Indian citizens, except for voting rights, which were withheld for a decade.

Why was it challenged?

The petitioners, including the NGO Assam Public Works and the Assam Sammilita Mahasangha, contended that setting a different cut-off date for citizenship in Assam is discriminatory and violates the right to equality enshrined in Article 14 of the Constitution. Concerns were also raised about the provision's inconsistency with Articles 6 and 7, which regulate citizenship pertaining to Partition-era migration for the rest of the country. Article 6 grants citizenship to individuals who migrated to India from Pakistan before July 19, 1948, provided they have resided in the country since then. Meanwhile, Article 7 denies citizenship to those who moved to Pakistan after March 1, 1947, while allowing it for those who returned to India under a permit for resettlement or permanent return.

They also claimed the provision resulted in a "perceptible change in the demographic pattern of the State," thereby violating the cultural and linguistic rights of the "indigenous" population of Assam, as guaranteed under Article 29. This, they argued, constituted both "external aggression" and "internal disturbance" under Article 355 of the Constitution, thereby imposing an obligation upon the Union government to protect the State.

What did the majority rule?

Both Justices Kant and Chandrachud



Final word: Members of the All Assam Students' Union light lamps to celebrate the verdict on Section 6A of the Citizenship Act, in Guwahati, on October 18. **PTI**

upheld the differentiated treatment of Assam under Section 6A, citing the region's unique historical and political considerations. They reasoned that the provision does not violate the equality clause under Article 14, as it represents Parliament's careful balancing act between its humanitarian approach toward Bangladeshi immigrants and the significant strain their mass exodus has imposed on Assam's economic and cultural resources.

The majority also opined that Section 6A is not inconsistent with the citizenship provisions in Articles 6 and 7 of the Constitution. The Chief Justice pointed out that while these Articles establish a cut-off date for conferring citizenship at the commencement of the Constitution—January 26, 1950—Section 6A specifically addresses individuals not covered by these two provisions. Justice Kant concurred, asserting that Section 6A aligns with the constitutional philosophy of Articles 6 and 7, as it is rooted in the "same underlying policy of granting citizenship to the people of Indian origin migrating from Pakistan due to political disturbances in a foreign territory". Both judges also concluded that Article 11 of the Constitution grants Parliament substantial flexibility in formulating laws related to citizenship, including the authority to establish conditions for granting citizenship that may differ from those outlined in Articles 6 and 7.

Adopting a multicultural and pluralistic interpretation of Article 29, the judges further observed that Section 6A does not violate the cultural rights of the "indigenous" Assamese people. They reasoned that while the Article aims to

"conserve" the culture of a specific group, it does not preclude the coexistence of other cultures. In fact, Justice Kant highlighted that such grievances may stem from the failure of authorities to implement the other leg of Section 6A—specifically, the deportation of individuals who migrated to Assam after the cut-off date. He accordingly urged the Chief Justice to constitute a Bench to monitor the identification, detection and deportation of illegal immigrants in the State in a time-bound manner.

Both the judges also noted that "external aggression" referred to military actions and did not cover within its ambit humanitarian migration driven by economic or other distress. Accordingly, they found no breach of the Union's duty under Article 355. The Chief Justice further cautioned that allowing the Union to exercise such "emergency powers" would be detrimental to federalism and could undermine the constitutional status of States.

Why did Justice Pardiwala dissent?

In a sharply reasoned dissent, Justice Pardiwala declared Section 6A unconstitutional, effective only from the date of the judgment. He reasoned that while the provision may have been justifiable at the time of its enactment, its failure to curb illegal migration in Assam had rendered it inconsistent with constitutional principles over time. He also noted that the lack of a sunset clause on the application of Section 6A incentivises illegal immigration and exacerbates demographic imbalances in the region.

The judge further highlighted that

Section 6A does not allow for self-declaration or voluntary identification as a foreigner thereby leaving the detection process entirely reliant on state intervention. He concluded that this marked a clear departure from the scheme of the Citizenship Act and Articles 6 and 7 of the Constitution, which allow citizenship to be acquired through registration.

"The manner in which the provision is worded, counter-serves the very purpose of its enactment, which is the speedy and effective identification of foreigners of the 1966-71 stream, their deletion from the electoral rolls, registration with the registering authority and conferring of regular citizenship", the dissent noted.

What are the potential ramifications?

The March 25, 1971, cut-off date endorsed by the majority serves as the foundation for the contentious National Register of Citizens which was prepared in 2019 following the top court's directives. Although the register is yet to be implemented, it has identified 19 lakh residents (5.77% of Assam's population) as potential non-citizens. Moreover, the ruling bolsters the long-standing demand of Assamese organisations to repeal the controversial Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 (CAA), which sets December 31, 2014, as the cut-off date for granting citizenship to non-Muslim migrants who illegally entered India from Bangladesh, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Critics argue that by prescribing a different timeline, the CAA creates a loophole that exempts Bengali Hindus who migrated to Assam from Bangladesh after 1971 from the application of Section 6A.

THE GIST

Section 6A originates from the "Assam Accord", a political settlement signed on August 15, 1985, between the Rajiv Gandhi-led Congress government and Assam's student groups, following a six-year-long agitation against the influx of undocumented migrants from Bangladesh into Assam. It established a framework for granting or denying Indian citizenship to migrants in Assam based on a cut-off date — March 25, 1971.

Both Justices Kant and Chandrachud upheld the differentiated treatment of Assam under Section 6A, citing the region's unique historical and political considerations.

In a sharply reasoned dissent, Justice Pardiwala declared Section 6A unconstitutional, effective only from the date of the judgment.

The job crisis undermines state legitimacy

India is not producing enough good quality jobs for its people. A good quality job provides dignity, adequate compensation, an opportunity for learning, and advancement for those who strive. Instead, many jobs are unpaid, informal, and dead end. Worse, the seemingly low unemployment rate masks the fact that to count as employed, a person needs to have reported working for only one month in an entire year.

The dearth of quality employment, particularly among the youth, is a ticking time bomb that threatens not just our economy, but the very legitimacy of our state. If the government fails to create avenues for social and economic participation for young people, it will inevitably breed frustration.

A twofold problem

The political problem is twofold: how do we give people a sense of dignity and purpose, and the means for financial support? Traditionally, people have derived dignity and purpose through a combination of community, work, and political engagement.

However, the package deal of liberalism and capitalism have deprivatised traditional sources of community and increased the importance of work in conferring social standing and belonging. As a result, work has become the dominant entry point into a broader sense of community and political engagement.

While the elite find purpose and status through their control over societal discourse and decision-making, which also bring them substantial financial rewards, large sections of our population feel they lack both dignity and financial security. This disparity is likely to worsen as technological advancements and capital concentration potentially displace large numbers of workers, perhaps permanently. In a large democracy such as India, such concentration of purpose and financial gain among the elites



Ruchi Gupta

Executive Director of the Future of India Foundation, which anchors an initiative to harness the political process to create aspirational employment opportunities for youth at the district level

can erode faith in the system and lead to political instability. This challenge – how we structure our society, what we value, and how we include everyone – is fundamentally political. Yet, the political response has been inadequate, oscillating between deferring to market forces and resorting to short-term partisanship. The market-oriented approach is reflected in the superficial mantra of 'creative destruction,' suggesting that old jobs and industries will be seamlessly replaced by new and better ones. Meanwhile, some politicians and capitalists have mooted universal basic income (UBI) as a solution. UBI is a minimum 'income' received by all citizens of a given population as financial transfers from the government without having to work.

Setting aside the question of UBI's financial feasibility, it is important to recognise that inequality and an assault on human dignity are inherent in the very concept. UBI implies that a significant portion of the population is no longer needed in the economy, with a smaller subset 'paying' for the rest. Its very premise concedes that technology and capital will create outsized winners while the majority will merely survive on their largesse. This approach fails to address people's need to feel relevant and capable, and ignores the loss of dignity that comes from not contributing meaningfully to society. It does not, thus, account for the possibility that UBI might encourage more anger and populism because people want to contribute and thrive, not just survive on the sidelines.

There is a risk to democracy as a whole as well. UBI would shift focus from structural reforms to mere economic transfers and thus entrench elite power by insulating them from pressures to address fundamental inequities in the economy and labour markets. It risks recasting the state as a mere distributor of funds rather than

the architect and arbitrator of societal processes required to create a just and participatory social and economic system.

Addressing structural issues

The partisan response has been to lob the issue between parties for short-term electoral gains instead of responding to the ongoing structural transformation of our society. Some political leaders are mindful of the long term, but institutionally, parties have become too narrow in their scope to address larger questions such as unemployment and have reduced their ambitions to winning elections alone. However, divesting societal issues to civil society or government in order to function solely as election-winning machines jeopardises their long-term legitimacy. This is because democracy is about more than elections – it is about creating a social contract that works for everyone.

In fact, the failure to anticipate and address long-term structural issues is a key reason why people feel neglected by the political class and view politics as a cynical game. When people believe the political system is incapable of addressing pressing challenges, they lose faith in democratic institutions. Thus parties and institutions must find ways to address structural issues, including unemployment, inequality, and dignity; else, people will seek alternatives, rendering political parties irrelevant. We are witnessing this globally through the rise of populism, authoritarianism, and civic disengagement.

Political parties must provide meaningful leadership by addressing structural issues head-on without resorting to deflection or partisanship. The future of Indian democracy – and the continued relevance of our political institutions – hinges on our ability to restore a broader sense of public purpose and economic participation to the centre of our national dialogue.

Two GOs and a competitive exam

After much delay and controversy, the Group I test begins in Telangana

STATE OF PLAY

R. Ravikanth Reddy

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The Group-I exam in Telangana is again in the news for the wrong reasons. It has been 13 years since a Group-I officer was appointed in Telangana, including in the combined State of Andhra Pradesh.

The previous BRS government failed to conduct the exam in the first eight years of its tenure. It issued a notification only at the tail end of its second term, in April 2022 (Government Order or GO 55). However, the exam was cancelled twice: once because the question paper was leaked and sold to several candidates; and then because it did not follow due procedure.

The Congress government assumed power in December 2023. It issued a new notification, adding 60 posts to the 503 posts announced for the exam earlier in 2022. It amended GO 55 and paved the way for GO 29.

This GO is being opposed by a section of aspirants, who argue that the rule of reservation is being violated in the selection of candidates for the Mains. After the schedule for the Mains was announced, some aspirants took to the streets demanding the withdrawal of GO 29. Some of them moved the High Court to stall the exam on various grounds, but the Court dismissed their arguments. Officials argue that many of the protesting candidates have not qualified for the Mains.

The protesters want the selection for Mains to be picked in 1:50 (merit versus quota) ratio in every reserved category so that they have additional opportunities in the merit or

open category. GO 55 adopted this method.

Officials argue that there was a possibility that GO 55 would be challenged as Supreme Court judgments clearly say that reservations cannot be implemented twice for the same notification. So, picking up candidates from each category at the prelims level would have violated this principle as the final selection of candidates for jobs would be based on the rule of reservation.

To overcome this problem, the Telangana Public Service Commission (TGPSC) made amendments to GO 55 and issued GO 29. As per this, candidates for the notified posts would be picked from the merit list irrespective of their reserved category in the ratio of 1:50. Reserved candidates would be picked from the merit list ensuring representation for each category as per the Constitution. If there is a shortage of candidates in any particular category, the TGPSC would go back to the merit list, search for reserved category candidates, and add them to their respective categories to ensure that the 1:50 ratio is maintained in each.

While some aspirants oppose this method, the TGPSC argues that this exercise would ensure that only meritorious candidates from each category are picked. This would also provide an opportunity for these candidates to compete in the open category.

The TGPSC argues that if GO 55 was implemented, those getting selected as per the reserved category would be able to compete only in the reserved category posts. As per the Supreme Court judgments, reservation benefits can be used only once in that particular notification. Since the Mains selection is based on the overall merit pool as per GO 29, candidates would be eligible to compete in the open category and also the reserved category posts.

The officials argue that by considering the Prelims exam as just a screening test, they are avoiding using reservation benefit even as they ensure that the 1:50 ratio of candidates is maintained for every reserved category.

The point on which both the groups have diverse views is of competition in the merit list. While aspirants say GO 55 ensures that candidates can compete both in the open category and reserved category, the Commission disputes this. It argues that those gaining eligibility in the reserved category would have to be confined to the same category. GO 29, on the other hand, ensures they get the opportunity to compete in both categories.

The Opposition has given the agitators help to challenge GO 29 in the Supreme Court. BRS leaders K.T. Rama Rao and Harish Rao and BJP Union Ministers G. Kishan Reddy and Bandi Sanjay have become the voice of the group of aspirants. The Congress has filed its PCC president Mahesh Kumar Goud, a Backward Classes leader, to defend its argument. It claims that the BRS is determined to discredit the exam so that the Congress government does not get credit. The Mains exams began even as the Supreme Court refused to intervene on the same day.

Tamil Nadu leads in both worker strikes and number of factories

In most industrialised States, strikes are fairly common, while the number of factories continues to remain high and keeps growing

DATA POINT

Sambavi Parthasarathy
Vignesh Radhakrishnan

When workers at Samsung India Electronics' factory in Sriperumbudur, near Chennai, went on strike for more than a month recently, many people argued once again that strikes are harmful to business. This view gathered steam when Samsung India Electronics claimed in the Madras High Court on Tuesday that it had suffered a loss of around \$100 million due to the strike by the workers, who were demanding recognition of their recently formed trade union. On October 15, the Tamil Nadu government announced that the strike had finally been called off.

The strike was widely seen as a disruption to the State's industrial climate and a potential threat to future industrial investments. However, data suggests that in most industrialised States, worker strikes are fairly common, with the number of factories continuing to remain high and even growing.

In the 2008-2018 period, Tamil Nadu was the State with the highest number of industrial strikes, but it was also where the maximum number of factories were set up and factory workers employed. This contradicts the argument that strikes are harmful to business. Reliable State-wide data for workplace disputes is available with the Union Labour Ministry between 2008 and 2018, so this is an analysis of that time period.

In 2008-2018, Tamil Nadu recorded over 26% of all the strikes called, the highest among all States by a wide margin (Chart 1).

At the same time, the State also hosted 16% of India's factories and a similar share of India's factory workers during the period, again leading other States by a wide margin (Chart 2).

Chart 1 also shows that 17% of workers in India who were in-

volved in a strike in that period were working in Maharashtra – the second-highest among States. In the share of man days lost – total working days lost due to strikes – Tamil Nadu's share was again the highest (15% of total mandays lost in India). In terms of value lost – production work hampered due to strikes – Gujarat was at the top of the list, forming 24% of such losses. Gujarat featured second-highest in the number of strikes called.

Notably, while these three States are at the top of the list on various measures related to strikes, as shown in Chart 1, they also lead the nation in key indicators of industrialisation, as shown in Charts 2 and 3. Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, and Gujarat are the top three States, in that order, in measures such as the number of factories set up and workers hired. They also lead in the Gross Fixed Capital Formation (GFCF) of factories – which measures the net investment in fixed assets such as machinery – which acts as a proxy for a firm's health and productivity. Their share in India's industries' overall profits also outsize other States.

In fact, in the 2008-2018 period, the share of worker strikes grew in Tamil Nadu and so did the State's share of the nation's factories. In 2008, 28% of India's worker strikes occurred in Tamil Nadu, and in 2018 the figure was 30%, with the State first on the list in both years in this measure. In the same period, the share of India's factories in Tamil Nadu also grew from 14% to 16%. The State occupied the first place in this measure in both the years.

In fact with a trade union density rate – union members/total workers – of about 20%, India is not even among the top 50 economies in this measure. India's figure is less than half of China's 44.2%, a highly industrialised nation (Chart 3). Iceland, followed by advanced Scandinavian economies, lead the world in this measure with over half of their workers unionised (Chart 4).

Not bad for business

The data was collected from the Labour Bureau's Industrial Disputes reports, the ILO's Stat Explorer, and Annual Survey of Industries



A united front: While the demand for a union is subjective, the Samsung workers have called off their strike, AP

Chart 1: State-wise industrial strikes in the 2008-18 period and their impact on wages, mandays and production. Each circle corresponds to a State. The farther to the right, the higher the State's share in India's strikes, mandays lost due to strikes, and wages and production lost due to strikes

● CORRESPOND TO GUJARAT, MAHARASHTRA, AND TAMIL NADU

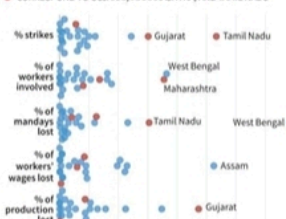


Chart 2: The chart ranks the States on key indicators of industrialisation in the 2008-18 period. Each circle corresponds to a State. The farther to the right, the higher the State's share in India's factories, factory workers, of all factories' GFCF, and all factories' overall profits

● CORRESPOND TO GUJARAT, MAHARASHTRA, AND TAMIL NADU

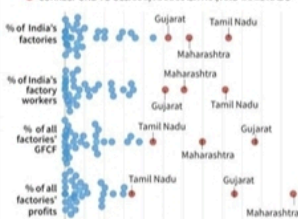


Chart 3: Trade union density rates (in %) across BRICS countries (latest years for which data are available)

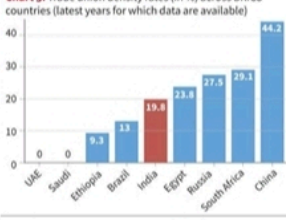
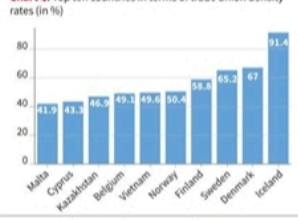


Chart 4: Top ten countries in terms of trade union density rates (in %)



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO OCTOBER 23, 1974

Vadya Vrinda for Madras AIR

Madras, Oct. 22: A Vadya Vrinda, an ensemble of instruments, Carnatic and Hindustani styles, totalling nearly 45 is to be set up in the Madras station of the All India Radio. The first National Orchestra, constituted in 1952, with the intention of synthesising the two musical streams of India, now functions from Delhi. Without compromising classical traditions, it had experimented and built up a repertoire of special compositions suited to orchestration. A few instruments of foreign countries may also form part of the Vrinda. The second unit in Madras, for which selection of artists is in progress, is expected to commence working from January next.

Explaining the steps taken to improve the quality of music, Mr. Emani Sankara Sastry, Chief Producer, Carnatic Music, AIR, said very often, a performing artist might not be able to render his best within the limited time of broadcast. It would take time for him to warm up and get "settled" but by then, the allotted time might lapse. It was hence proposed to invite musicians to the studio, make them give a recital, without being conscious about the time (as in a regular Cutcheri), record the entire concert, take out the best portion out of it, suitably edit and broadcast the excerpts later. It was also proposed to popularise choral music and group singing. Mr. Sankara Sastry said efforts were also being made to secure, from various sources, songs and recitals of master-singers who are now no more and build a store house of tapes and broadcast them over the national programmes, to make the younger generation know how the past-masters had handled and preserved this art.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO OCTOBER 23, 1924

Mr. Findlay Shirras' new book

London, Oct. 22: "The Science of Public Finance" covering 677 pages by Mr. Findlay Shirras is published by Macmillans. In the preface, Mr. Shirras remarks that public finance, federal and provincial, seems to have received at the hands of the framers of the new Indian constitution not quite the adequate treatment that so important an issue deserved. There are in India sources of revenue untouched for example, inheritance taxes and taxation on agricultural incomes.



RAM SINGH
AAQIB CHAUDHARY

There has been much discussion over the idea of a BRICS currency as an alternative to the US dollar and other weaponized currencies. The context is the evolving geo-economic shift in favour of BRICS countries, rising geopolitical tensions, and the shortage of US dollar in the backdrop of Fed rate hikes.

A number of countries from the Global South have been scouting for settlement of payments in local and alternative currencies; this is in view of the blockage of financial channels, economic sanctions and in order to hedge against the potential economic threats issued by western countries. Amidst the ongoing BRICS Summit at Kazan, Russia; the currency issue is back in focus.

However, recent remarks by Russian President Vladimir Putin suggest the initiative is still far from becoming a reality. The diverse economic structures, and differing monetary, fiscal, financial, and trade policies of the expanded BRICS countries pose major challenges.

INDIAN MOVES

In this context, let us probe India's policy stance, initiatives for rupee internationalisation, role of central bank digital currencies and evolving digital public infrastructure aimed at exploring a vibrant, smart and sustainable currency system for cross border trade and commerce.

India's approach on the BRICS currency is cautious and reflects its broader strategic economic orientation. While Russia and China actively advocate for alternatives to the US dollar, including exploring digital and national currencies within BRICS, India maintains that it is not targeting de-dollarization.

Instead, India accepts the merits of hegemonistic stability theory and correspondingly recognises the importance of the US dollar as a key currency in global trade and finance, ensuring that it remains central to economic transactions where necessary.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has clarified that India's efforts are not about displacing the dollar but rather addressing practical challenges, such as trade partners' currency shortages, overcoming issues of blockage of financial channels, honouring rupee lines of credit and indeed cushioning from future challenges associated with "weaponised" currencies.

Consequently, India is exploring pathways to settle payments in rupees when feasible, especially with countries experiencing dollar liquidity issues.

To support this transition, the Reserve Bank of India has taken several

BRICS currency: A long-term possibility

GLOBALISING RUPEE.

India for the time being can focus on its efforts to internationalise the rupee



GETTY IMAGES

initiatives such as opening of a special rupee vostro account for trade settlements in rupee, mitigating exchange rate risk, reducing transaction costs, enhancing forex reserves, strengthening bilateral trade and supporting India's economic diplomacy.

India also intends to support countries of the Global South experiencing dollar shortages (Sri Lanka, Maldives, Tanzania, Lesotho) or facing Western sanctions (Venezuela, Russia, Myanmar).

Furthermore, India's push for a central bank digital currency (CBDC) is aimed at overcoming all these challenges in a seamless, transparent and real time payment system. Correspondingly, India is gradually modernising its financial system and promoting the rupee's internationalisation to reduce transactional costs, speed up cross-border payments, enhance transparency and security, minimise reliance on intermediary banks, boost trade efficiency and indeed to align with global digital economy trends.

In the long run, when issues of diverging economic, financial, monetary and trade policies among BRICS nations are settled and associated challenges of a common currency like currency

volatility, exchange rate differences, harmonized regulatory framework structure and governance architecture, monetary sovereignty, issues of trust deficit among member states are addressed, we can have common BRICS currency as well.

WAY FORWARD

In the short run, we must aim to create a SR Pay or BRICS Pay, a blockchain-based payment platform, and develop a SWIFT-like financial messaging system are steps toward enhancing intra-BRICS economic transactions. These initiatives aim to increase the use of local currencies and facilitate secure cross-border payments, gradually building the infrastructure needed for a more integrated financial system.

Moreover, to facilitate retail financial transactions, we can explore the "mBRIDGE" project, led by the Bank for International Settlements (BIS) in collaboration with several central banks.

Several countries such as the UAE, China, Iran and Russia are already doing their payment settlement via mBRIDGE, leveraging the value of digital currencies. India has already explored such a possibility by joining the ASEAN-NEXUS payment settlement system, extending the reach of its famed UPI system.

For India, mBRIDGE represents an opportunity to enhance the rupee's role in cross-border transactions, aligning with the broader goal of internationalising the rupee while reducing dependency on the US dollar.

We can integrate our Unified Payments Interface (UPI) with the payment networks of mBRIDGE's member states, facilitating seamless cross-border remittances and trade.

We can also explore the possibility of

integrating into the recently launched BRICS pay card as unveiled at the UN annual summit at New York as it will further promote token retail payment, promoting tourism, people to people contact and democratization of gradual financial integration as envisaged.

This strategy not only accelerates India's rupee internationalisation efforts but also strengthens economic ties with evolving world order, enhancing the overall resilience and reach of its available financial infrastructure.

Given this context, the concept of a BRICS currency remains an ambitious long-term goal rather than an achievable short-term reality. For India, internationalising the rupee serves as a pragmatic approach to enhancing economic sovereignty while avoiding direct confrontation with the global dollar-dominated system.

Recent efforts, including trade settlements in rupee, digital currency initiatives, and financial infrastructure modernisation, underscore India's incremental strategy to strengthen the rupee's role in international trade.

As BRICS continues to evolve, India's efforts to internationalise the rupee could complement broader initiatives to create a multipolar global financial system. By focusing on strengthening economic fundamentals, enhancing financial market resilience, and developing secure payment solutions, India can position itself at the forefront of global economic shifts, simultaneously overcoming the challenges associated with a common BRICS currency and weaponization of financial instruments.

Singh is Professor & Head, and Chaudhary is Research Scholar, IIFT New Delhi. Views expressed are personal

Sewing up the Black, Latino and Jewish vote

Black and Latino voters, particularly men, not turning up to vote could pose a big problem for Kamala Harris

Sridhar Krishnaswami

In the final days of the campaign neither Donald Trump nor Kamala Harris are leaving anything to chance. Whipping up the fear syndrome is a strategy, as is going after that segment of the voting population which might have seemed in their pocket in 2020, 2016 or 2012. These apart, there is also the deliberate attempt to try and appeal to a segment of voters who would appear distant.

Vice President Kamala Harris' interview with Fox News might have seemed to many as a calculated attempt to woo that small sliver of conservative vote who may not be fully in the Trump-mode.

The interview showed a fiery Harris willing to talk to a right wing network, but Trump unwilling to do the same with a liberal network.

But there is a bigger issue that Democrats and the Harris campaign are worried about. Days to go before the vote, the Vice President is going the extra mile in making sure that the Black, Latino and Jewish votes stayed with her. The bottom line: former President

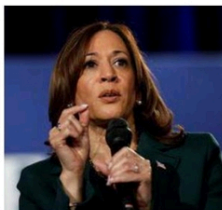
Trump is building on the numbers he had in 2016 and 2020.

OBAMA'S SUPPORT

It was not without good reason that the Harris campaign pulled out its big time campaigner, Barack Obama who appealed to black men. "And you are thinking about sitting out?... part of it makes me think that, well, you just aren't feeling the idea of having a woman as president, and you're coming up with other alternatives and other reasons for that... women in our lives have been getting our backs this entire time," Obama posed.

Obama's blunt speaking may have angered some but the timing could not be ignored. A poll showed that Harris had the backing of 78 per cent of black voters; and only 15 per cent backed Trump. But this is down from 90 per cent who had backed President Biden in 2020. The drop this time around has been attributed to black men. And this could be a disaster in a battleground state like Georgia where black voters account for about one-third of the total.

The same warning signals are coming from the Latino voters, poll numbers suggesting that Harris losing the



LAST LAP, Kamala Harris REUTERS

26-point grip that President Biden had over Trump in 2020. A recent New York Times/Siena College survey showed Harris with only a 19-point lead over the former President.

But Trump has been warning blacks and Latinos on the negative implications of an uncontrolled immigration at the borders, especially on crime and jobs. "Any African American or Hispanic... that votes for Kamala, you gotta have your head examined. Because they are really screwing you," Trump said knowing full well the importance of

Latino voters in Arizona and Nevada.

Another segment that the Harris campaign must pay close attention to is the Jewish community, traditionally supporters of Democrats. It is being pointed out that support for Democratic Presidents has been slipping since the time of Bill Clinton who in 1992 posted a 80 per cent backing.

In 2016 Hillary Clinton had 71 per cent backing; 68 per cent for Biden in 2020 and currently Harris with 67 per cent. And the weak spots for the Harris campaign are anti-semitism and the events in Gaza.

Arab Americans who supported Biden have decided to sit out this November. It would matter in a swing state like Michigan. Responding to a heckler in Wisconsin who was yelling about Israel committing genocide, Harris replied, "Listen, what he's talking about. It's real. That's not the subject that I came to discuss today, but it's real and I respect his voice". Even indirect linkages between Israel and genocide will be unacceptable to a traditional Jewish voter.

The writer is a senior journalist who has reported from Washington DC on North America and United Nations

THE ASIAN AGE

23 OCTOBER 2024

Subhani

First sign of breakthrough in India-China LAC friction

It could be the roseate dawn of a new era if agreeing to disengage leads to a period of peaceful coexistence of India and China. It appears the ice in ties between the Asian giants could be melting if the dramatic announcement by the external affairs ministry that patrolling will resume shortly in Ladakh on the Line of Actual Control is taken as the first sign of a definitive breakthrough to end a four-and-a-half-year stalemate.

Mutual suspicions have been so alarmingly high since the Galwan scuffle in which soldiers were lost on both sides that the military strengths on the two sides of the LAC at the friction points had built up to an in-your-face standoff. If the patrolling resumes soon and opens avenues for total disengagement and resolution of issues that arose in 2020, a whole new perspective could emerge for the adversarial neighbours in several other areas.

If India's patient playing of China with the focused approach that there could be no normal trade, cultural and people-to-people ties without first resolving the border issue indeed pays off at this juncture when a part of the world appears willing to meld more in a meeting of BRICS in Russia, nothing could be more welcome from India's point of view.

India's security overload in the last four years has been such a burden that all bilateral exchanges have been only about the disengagement in Ladakh. Long before that can physically take place along with the resumption of patrolling, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be meeting China's supreme Xi Jinping in Kazan, Russia, and the vibes of the exchanges will be a pointer to the future that may lie ahead as imagined in this positive scenario emanating from agreeing to disengage.

If the issues over Depsang and Demchok, which have been pending from among the six friction points post-Galwan skirmishes, are sorted out smoothly as promised, the long ice on the way for the birth of a little trust in a relationship that has been fraught with mutual suspicions for decades since 1962, and especially so in the time since China has become a leading world economic and military power in the new millennium.

It is not as if India will be letting down its guard at this point and it will, perhaps, not even think of doing so until other matters of mistrust, including the security angle that remains stark even in trade and from Chinese investments in companies that operate in India, are unlikely to be mitigated for some time to come.

A great deal of benefit can flow from an even more normalised economic relationship to both countries, more so for China at a time when its economy and property market have been tanking since 1962, and especially so in the time since China has become a leading world economic and military power in the new millennium.

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Welcome return to duty by docs

The junior doctors of West Bengal have called off their strike after a televised discussion with chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday after prolonging an agitation for a just cause for an unjustifiable duration. The doctors launched the strike immediately after the rape-murder of a post-graduate resident doctor at K.G. Medical College and Hospital in Kolkata on August 9, demanding justice for the victim and better security systems for medical personnel and institutions.

As per the agreement reached between the doctors and the government, a task force, headed by the chief secretary and comprising representatives of the government and the doctor community, will oversee the functioning of all medical colleges related grievances and address health-related issues.

Everyone sympathised with the doctors who brought to the fore the pathetic service conditions and frightening security arrangements in hospitals and they were also right in protesting against the lethargic approach and investigation by the police into the horrendous crime. They were justifiably angry with the state government which, for reasons best known to itself, took the crime so casually that hooligans were emboldened to crash into the college and thrash the agitating doctors.

However, with the intervention of the Calcutta high court and the Supreme Court, matters were back on track. The investigation was taken over by the CBI which has already charged the prime accused. The Supreme Court has set up an empowered committee to look into the service and security conditions of the doctors. It has assured the doctors that it will protect them against vindictive actions from the state government, should these take place.

But the state government, too, eventually saw merit in the demands of the doctors and took several decisions which included the transfer of key officials, including the police commissioner. Still the doctors continued with their agitation which put lakhs of patients in deep trouble. Several lives were lost in the process.

The fight for justice is a legitimate public action but those engaging in it must be realistic on their part. True, we need improvements in several areas of public service, healthcare delivery included, but changes cannot happen overnight. Long-term changes involve careful allocation of resources in a country such as India, and hence could take time. It's good that the doctors realised it, if a bit late.

THE ASIAN AGE

Kaushik MITTAL

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Maleeha Lodhi

Tired superpower? Bibi ignored Biden repeatedly, yet US still backing Israel

Woodward writes the ultimate "insider" about American Presidents, politics and foreign policy. He is one of the duo of journalists who exposed the Watergate scandal that led to president Richard Nixon's downfall. Woodward has long enjoyed unique access to America's top political and military leaders. Which is why he is sometimes unfavourably described as an "access journalist" who shows undue deference to his main, often anonymous sources.

His latest book, *War*, belongs to the same genre as earlier works and is based on scores of interviews offering insights into the highest levels of decision-making during Joe Biden's presidency. What gives this book added significance is its publication on the eve of the American presidential election, as he draws Trump's relationship with Israel and Mr Biden in how they dealt with international crises.

Woodward considers Trump as "the most reckless and impulsive President in American history", who is demonstrating the very same character as a presidential candidate in 2024. He, therefore, deems Trump to be unfit for a second term in office. These views are no different from what Woodward previously wrote in his trilogy of books on the Trump presidency. The first two, titled *Fear and Rage*, were about the chaos in the Trump White House and depicted the former President as a self-obsessed, ill-informed and impetuous leader.

The principal focus of his new book is on how the Biden administration handled the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, although Woodward's disclosures about Trump's relationship with Russian President Vladimir Putin — sending him Covid test kits when they were scarce at home — attracted greater pre-publication publicity than the book. Woodward covers all these international engagements, but perhaps it is the American exit from Afghanistan that he is most critical about. When Biden became President, he inherited the 2020 Doha agreement Trump concluded with the Taliban, which committed the US to withdraw from Afghanistan by May 2021.

Three options were presented to Biden: Stay on indefinitely, undertake a slow, "gated" withdrawal, or pull out quickly and safely. Like Trump, he wanted an expeditious exit, and accordingly announced that in April 2021. Criticism followed from former military officials, and even ex-President George Bush. Biden remained unshaken. His administration, however, "failed to

anticipate contingencies and plan for worst-case scenarios", says Woodward. It was taken by surprise by how swiftly the country fell to the Taliban without a fight. This inevitably damaged America's global standing and credibility.

The chapters on the war in Gaza portray a frustrated US President, angry with Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu and his constant lies about his intention to escalate the conflict, which Biden saw as inextricably linked to his political survival. "Defined by distrust", their tense relationship is described in graphic detail. Woodward cites several occasions when Netanyahu's advice was willfully ignored, including on a ceasefire deal as Israel's invasion of Rafah, siege of Gaza, air strikes on Beirut, and on avoiding civilian casualties. He quotes Biden as telling Netanyahu that "the withdrawal of Israel around the world increasingly is that you're a rogue state, a rogue actor". He cites Biden's frequent use of four-letter words for the Israeli leader. Biden was so angry with Netanyahu that he was willing to sign a ceasefire deal with Hamas and, according to Woodward, told Netanyahu that the US is "not on board" on an preemptive attack on Hezbollah. He also told him Washington would not participate in any Israeli offensive action against Iran. He was concerned that 45,000 US military personnel and contractors stationed across the Middle East would become targets of attack. The book details heated arguments between Biden and

Netanyahu over humanitarian assistance for Gaza. Netanyahu's refusal to listen to Biden and unwillingness to provide urgent aid for aid meant the better. A recent study says that many die in Gaza. The role of key Arab states is highlighted in anecdotes of several meetings. For example, King Abdullah of Jordan told US secretary of state Antony Blinken, "We want Israel to defeat Hamas." Similarly, the UAE ruler conveys to the Americans that "Hamas must be eliminated". Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman says to Blinken in discussions on a future Palestinian state "Do I want it? It doesn't matter that much. Do I need it? Absolutely". Significantly, though, he added he would never betray the Arab or Muslim world on this issue.

The war in Ukraine also receives detailed treatment. The most striking disclosure concerns US intelligence information in September 2022 that Putin was considering using tactical nuclear weapons, and efforts by the Biden national security team to stop him. Direct US warnings to Russian officials are claimed by the book to have averted the danger of nuclear escalation.

Whether or not one agrees with many of Woodward's assessments and conclusions, this is a compelling, must-read book.

—By arrangement with Dawn

Looking beyond the fog of 'short-term' results



Sanjeev Ahluwalia

Most institutions in India are characterised by "short-termism" — privileging near-term results over long-term trends and objectives.

In Haryana, the transitory distancing of the electorate from the BJP, after two terms, was interpreted by nearly all pollsters to mean victory for the Congress, wrongly, giving more weight to sentiment than to the potential for panning a hotly contested, first past-the-post election by massing nascent party loyalties. Individual leaders matter more than parties in Haryana. Consequently, it was the efficacy of spoilers — Independent candidates, with large followings — not popular sentiment, which gave the BJP a majority and the highest vote share of 39.9 per cent with the Congress following closely at 30.9 per cent, but far behind in seats.

Consider, that even erstwhile colonial masters carried the "short-term" game with them, along with a taste for curry, when they left in 1947. The Brexit referendum in 2016 was unbelievably woolly-headed rather than pragmatic, with the United Kingdom choosing to isolate itself in its pond, after centuries of benefitting from global trade, investing access to foreign talent.

India dumped central planning in 2015 when the intrusive Planning Commission — a Nehru legacy — was replaced with a think-tank style Niti Aayog. Many interpreted this as the end of an era of Big Government and the beginning of decentralisation, empowerment of local communities and a return to bottom-up planning and execution. Admittedly, the force had long dissipated from central planning as a tool for optimising the use of public resources. It had become yet another cog micro-managing the site and composition of the government spend over the next five years. Have things really changed since?

One simple metric for the time trend in decentralisation is a higher share for state expenditure in total (general) government expenditure of the Union and states. According to the data in the annual economic survey, the share of states in general (total) government expenditure, increased from 36 per cent in 2017-18 (the waning year of UPA-1) to 38 per cent in 2022-23 in Modi 2.0. Correspondingly, the share of the Union government decreased from 64 per cent to 61 per cent. A positive outcome, but not significant.

Successful Finance Commissions — a constitutional body — which advises the Union government quinquennially, on the sharing of tax revenues with state and local governments, did their bit for enhancing decentralised expenditure, including direct grants from the Union to local governments. Also heartening is the ability of a constitutional body to influence the Union government to decentralise. Sadly, in comparison, state finance commissions, appointed by state governments, have generally played a "short term" game, preserving the status quo, leaving decentralisation to the local governments.

Nor do local governments present a credible case for greater decentralisation by selling to fully exploit the property tax base available to them or collecting extraordinarily little tax versus their expenses. Similarly, states do not generally tax earnings from agriculture. The bulk of their tax revenue is from their share of value added (GST) levied by the GST Council — an innovative institutional arrangement, in which the Union and all states collectively determine the tax rate. Tax on petroleum products is another big-ticket revenue for states, quite unmindful that consump-

The momentum behind 'One-Nation-One-Election' is to stretch the 'apolitical working space' to at least four years by avoiding state elections during the five years between national elections...

tion is expected to decline over the next five years, renewable energy becomes more affordable and the electric vehicle revolution kicks in. Yet again, short-termism prevails. However, not all short-term goals are impractical. Consider the trade-off between investment for growth and spending on welfare. Under India's flagship scheme, free cereals are subsidised to more than 60 per cent of families even though officially, poverty levels are at about 11 per cent. Admittedly, a lower middle-income country needs near-term strategies to help families with their immediate needs. Food consumption is more than one half of the average consumption basket of the bottom half.

The problem lies in the poor targeting of the really needy and the large deep-seated loss (process inefficiency related loss which is enjoyed neither by the producer nor the consumer) associated with the long public sector dominated supply chain of buying foodgrains from farmers at a low administered price, storing, transporting and then distributing them to families. The associated "leakage" or diversion of foodgrain to the open market, was estimated at between 37 and 45 per cent in 2011-12 (Khara and Dreze, Gulati and Saini 2015). This practice persists because it is politically attractive to bind farmers to political parties. Sadly, it also discourages farmers from taking the market risk of planting more valuable crops but associated with market risk. Ineffective crop insurance mechanisms further dilute the farmer's appetite for risk.

Direct income transfer to a targeted set of beneficiaries would be cheaper and more efficient, allowing ex-

cessionally small farmers to top up their guaranteed income from other jobs or market-based farming. What stops the government from transitioning to a direct transfer of benefits to beneficiary bank accounts? Recent research in progressive Maharashtra by Abhinav, Datt, Gangadharan, Negi, and Ramaswamy, in May 2022, shows that resistance to direct transfers comes from women who feel they will be worse off by having to buy cereals, without price certainty, and because access to bank accounts is possibly controlled by the menfolk. The Jan Dhan Yojana accounts were opened in the name of the female head of the home, but clearly local patriarchal norms cannot be wished away.

So long as the asymmetric quinquennial electoral cycle frames the developmental discourse, short-termism is here to stay. The need for deep structural reforms is widely recognised in hand through a lowering of purchase risk via better records of ownership and ease of transactions, scaling up labour rights along with nimbler rules for businesses to employ and dismiss, transparent access to bank credit, higher returns for debt holders via tax benefits, lower reserve ratios for banks and deepening of the corporate bond market.

The problem is to find the political space to implement such basic reforms, all of which create winners and losers. Barring conspiracy theories, the momentum behind "One-Nation-One-Election" is to stretch the "apolitical working space" to at least four years by avoiding state elections during the five years between a national election for the Lok Sabha. The opposition to the proposal can be muted. But only if India becomes more than just an electoral democracy and "service to the people" is the norm rather than a temporary measure during elections. For that to happen, a precondition is deep political party reform — the big elephant in the room which no one wants to confront.

The writer is a former IAS officer, and a governance and economic regulation expert

LETTERS DEVINE FLEW HIGH

The name Sophie Devine has been doing the rounds among cricket fans after the prodigious New Zealand all-rounder and her team won the first-ever T20 Women's World Cup for their country. In the slam-bang version of the tournament, the New Zealand skipper, along with teammates Suzie Bates and Lea Tahuhu, defied age and defined greatness. In fact, Devine is a double international, meaning she has represented New Zealand in both cricket and hockey. From a bowler who sometimes batted at No. 11, she developed into one of the leading all-rounders and most destructive batters in the game. This kiwi has spread her wings and is flying high.

R. Sivakumar

Chennai

PHILOSOPHERS ALL

SCIENCE AND RELIGION are opposite poles. Science is based on evidence but religion is based on faith. There has been a recent trend of using one to prove the other creating problems. There are many who claim their scriptures have been proved true now after their mystics had known about them thousands of years ago. Most of these conjectures are based on half-truths and complete lies. It would be better to keep science out of religion because the religious rarely know much about the subject and have a little basic knowledge at best. Science is about natural laws and religion is basically about ethics and what we have to do to go to heaven or any other reward.

Anthony Henriques

Mumbai

REFORM LABOUR

ACCORDING TO THE 2024 Global Hunger Index report, one out of three Indian children (55.5 per cent) is a victim of stunting. How can a country compete with others when the growth of more than one third of its future workforce has been stunted? The findings of this year's Nobel Laureates in economics demonstrated that institutions that exploit the population do not generate growth or change for the better. A recent study says that many gig workers in India have to work for 10 to 14 hours daily to earn less than ₹10,000 per month. While overwork damages their health, the poor wage makes their life a struggle. We need political will to stop blatant labour exploitation.

Sujit D.

Kolkata

IT's uncertain

IT majors continue facing growth challenges

The boost to Indian IT companies, from the accelerated digital adoption during the Covid-19 pandemic, has been tapering since the last fiscal. The second quarter earnings of the four largest information technology companies — Infosys, TCS, Wipro and HCL Tech — show that the growth environment continues to be challenging. While Infosys reported 3.1 per cent sequential growth in revenue in the second quarter, TCS, Wipro and HCL Tech reported weaker revenue growth numbers at 1.1 per cent, 0.6 per cent and 1.6 per cent, respectively.

Their profitability is also under stress with TCS and HCL Tech reporting a decline in net profits on a sequential basis and all of them struggling to maintain their operating profit margins at current levels. The main issue is slowing orders from the North American region which contributes over 57 per cent to the revenue of Infosys, Wipro and HCL Tech and almost 48 per cent to TCS. The US Federal Reserve's restrictive monetary policy has made US-based companies focus on cutting down costs, leading to postponement of less-exigent projects. This, coupled with growing political uncertainty due to the US Presidential elections next month, seems to be dampening the demand from the US; top IT players witnessed flat to negative growth in the North American business in the second quarter. The second impediment is the nebulous state of the BFSI (banking, financial services and insurance) business from the US. This segment accounts for almost a third of the IT majors' revenue. The banking crisis in the US in 2023 appears to have impacted orders in recent quarters. The likely compression of margins of banks with the beginning of the rate-cut cycle, can further slow down IT spends of this segment.

Slack IT revenues do not bode well for the balance of trade. Services exports have helped curtail the trade deficit and support the rupee over the last few years. IT companies will do well to hone their capabilities in emerging technologies such as generative AI, smart manufacturing and cyber security where large orders are still being given. The silver lining in the IT results is the slight improvement seen in hiring. With these companies providing employment to the droves of engineers graduating every year, net reduction in headcount over the last two years had increased unemployment among graduates. But Infosys, TCS and Wipro reported an increase in their net headcount in the second quarter, providing some relief. HCL Tech, however, reported a reduction in net headcount.

IT companies seem to be expecting an improvement in deal flow once the uncertainty around the US elections is resolved. But the lofty valuations at which the IT majors are trading in the stock market have factored in the positive news. If the anticipated business from generative AI and other similar opportunities does not work out, or geopolitical tensions escalate after the US elections, the business of the IT companies can be further impacted. This can roll stock prices further.

POCKET



"I recognized you, of course! I can recognize your cough anywhere!"



RAM SINGH
AAQIB CHAUDHARY

There has been much discussion over the idea of a BRICS currency as an alternative to the US dollar and other weaponized currencies. The context is the evolving geo-economic shift in favour of BRICS countries, rising geopolitical tensions, and the shortage of US dollar in the backdrop of Fed rate hikes.

A number of countries from the Global South have been scouting for settlement of payments in local and alternative currencies; this is in view of the blockage of financial channels, economic sanctions and in order to hedge against the potential economic threats issued by western countries. Amidst the ongoing BRICS Summit at Kazan, Russia; the currency issue is back in focus.

However, recent remarks by Russian President Vladimir Putin suggest the initiative is still far from becoming a reality. The diverse economic structures, and differing monetary, fiscal, financial, and trade policies of the expanded BRICS countries pose major challenges.

INDIAN MOVES

In this context, let us probe India's policy stance, initiatives for rupee internationalisation, role of central bank digital currencies and evolving digital public infrastructure aimed at exploring a vibrant, smart and sustainable currency system for cross border trade and commerce.

India's approach on the BRICS currency is cautious and reflects its broader strategic economic orientation. While Russia and China actively advocate for alternatives to the US dollar, including exploring digital and national currencies within BRICS, India maintains that it is not targeting de-dollarization.

Instead, India accepts the merits of hegemonic stability theory and correspondingly recognises the importance of the US dollar as a key currency in global trade and finance, ensuring that it remains central to economic transactions where necessary.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has clarified that India's efforts are not about displacing the dollar but rather addressing practical challenges, such as trade partners' currency shortages, overcoming issues of blockage of financial channels, honouring rupee lines of credit and indeed cushioning from future challenges associated with "weaponised" currencies.

Consequently, India is exploring pathways to settle payments in rupee when feasible, especially with countries experiencing dollar liquidity issues. To support this transition, the Reserve Bank of India has taken several

initiatives such as opening of a special rupee vostro account for trade settlement in rupee, mitigating exchange rate risk, reducing transaction costs, enhancing foreign reserves, strengthening bilateral trade and supporting India's economic diplomacy.

India also intends to support countries of the Global South experiencing dollar shortages (Sri Lanka, Maldives, Tanzania, Lesotho) or facing Western sanctions (Venezuela, Russia, Myanmar).

India's push for a central bank digital currency (CBDC) is aimed at overcoming all these challenges in a seamless, transparent and real time payment system. Correspondingly, India is gradually modernising its financial system and promoting the rupee's internationalisation to reduce transaction costs, speed up cross-border payments, enhance transparency and security, minimise reliance on intermediary banks, boost trade efficiency and indeed to align with global digital economy trends.

In the long run, when issues of diverging economic, financial, monetary and trade policies among BRICS nations are settled and associated challenges of a common currency like currency

India intends to support countries of the Global South experiencing dollar shortages (Sri Lanka, Maldives, Tanzania, Lesotho) or facing Western sanctions (Venezuela, Russia, Myanmar).

BRICS currency: A long-term possibility



GLOBALISING RUPEE.

India for the time being can focus on its efforts to internationalise the rupee

volatility, exchange rate differences, harmonized regulatory framework structure and governance architecture, monetary sovereignty, issues of trust deficit among member states are addressed, we can have common BRICS currency as well.

WAY FORWARD

In the short run, we must aim to create a 5R Pay or BRICS Pay, a blockchain-based payment platform, and develop a SWIFT-like financial messaging system as steps toward enhancing intra-BRICS economic transactions. These initiatives aim to increase the use of local currencies and facilitate secure cross-border payments, gradually building the infrastructure needed for a more integrated financial system.

Moreover, to facilitate retail financial transactions, we can explore the "mBRIDGE" project, led by the Bank for International Settlements (BIS) in collaboration with several central banks.

Several countries such as the UAE, China, Iran and Russia are already doing their payment settlement via mBRIDGE, leveraging the value of digital currencies. India has already explored such a possibility by joining the ASEAN-NEXUS payment settlement system, extending the reach of its famed UPI system.

For India, mBRIDGE represents an opportunity to enhance the rupee's role in cross-border transactions, aligning with the broader goal of internationalising the rupee while reducing dependency on the US dollar.

We can integrate our Unified Payments Interface (UPI) with the payment networks of mBRIDGE's member states, facilitating seamless cross-border remittances and trade. We can also explore the possibility of

integrating into the recently launched BRICS pay card as unveiled at the UN annual summit at New York as it will further promote token retail payment, promoting tourism, people to people contact and democratization of gradual financial integration as envisaged.

This strategy not only accelerates India's rupee internationalisation efforts but also strengthens economic ties with evolving world order, enhancing the overall resilience and reach of its available financial infrastructure.

Given this context, the concept of a BRICS currency remains an ambitious long-term goal rather than an achievable short-term reality. For India, internationalising the rupee serves as a pragmatic approach to enhancing economic sovereignty while avoiding direct confrontation with the global dollar-dominated system.

Recent efforts, including trade settlements in rupee, digital currency initiatives, and financial infrastructure modernisation, underscore India's incremental strategy to strengthen the rupee's role in international trade.

As BRICS continues to evolve, India's efforts to internationalise the rupee could complement broader initiatives to create a multipolar global financial system. By focusing on strengthening economic fundamentals, enhancing financial market resilience, and developing secure payment solutions, India can position itself at the forefront of global economic shifts, simultaneously overcoming the challenges associated with a common BRICS currency and weaponization of financial instruments.

Singh is Professor & Head, and Chaudhary is Research Scholar, IIT New Delhi. Views expressed are personal

Sewing up the Black, Latino and Jewish vote

Black and Latino voters, particularly men, not turning up to vote could pose a big problem for Kamala Harris

Sridhar Krishnaswami

In the final days of the campaign neither Donald Trump nor Kamala Harris are leaving anything to chance. Whipping up the fear syndrome is a strategy, as is going after that segment of the voting population which might have seemed in their pocket in 2020, 2016 or 2012. These apart, there is also the deliberate attempt to try and appeal to a segment of voters who would appear distant.

Vice President Kamala Harris' interview with Fox News might have seemed to many as a calculated attempt to woo that small sliver of conservative vote who may not be fully in the Trump mode.

The interview showed a fiery Harris willing to talk to a right wing network, but Trump unwilling to do the same with a liberal network.

But there is a bigger issue that Democrats and the Harris campaign are worried about. Days before the vote, the Vice President is going the extra mile in making sure that the Black, Latino and Jewish votes stayed with her. The bottom line: former President

Trump is building on the numbers he had in 2016 and 2020.

OBAMA'S SUPPORT

It was not without good reason that the Harris campaign pulled out its big time campaigner, Barack Obama who appealed to black men. "And you are thinking about sitting out?... part of it makes me think that, well, you just aren't feeling the idea of having a woman as president, and you're coming up with other alternatives and other reasons for that... women in our lives have been getting our backs this entire time," Obama posed.

Obama's blunt speaking may have angered some but the timing could not be ignored. A poll showed that Harris had the backing of 78 per cent of black voters; and only 15 per cent backed Trump. But this is down from 90 per cent who had backed President Biden in 2020. The drop this time around has been attributed to black men. And this could be a disaster in a battleground state like Georgia where black voters account for about one-third of the total.

The same warning signals are coming from the Latino voters, poll numbers suggesting that Harris losing the



LAST LAP, Kamala Harris returns

26-point grip that President Biden had over Trump in 2020. A recent New York Times/Siena College survey showed Harris with only a 19-point lead over the former President.

But Trump has been warning blacks and Latinos on the negative implications of an uncontrolled immigration at the borders, especially on crime and jobs. "Any African American or Hispanic... that votes for Kamala, you gotta have your head examined. Because they are really screwing you," Trump said knowing full well the importance of

Latino votes in Arizona and Nevada. Another segment that the Harris campaign must pay close attention to is the Jewish community, traditionally supporters of Democrats. It is being pointed out that support for Democratic Presidents has been slipping since the time of Bill Clinton who in 1992 posted a 80 per cent backing.

In 2016 Hillary Clinton had 71 per cent backing; 68 per cent for Biden in 2020 and currently Harris with 67 per cent. And the weak spots for the Harris campaign are anti-semitism and the events in Gaza.

Arab Americans who supported Biden have decided to sit out this November. It would matter in a swing state like Michigan. Responding to a heckler in Wisconsin who was yelling about Israel committing genocide, Harris replied, "Listen, what he's talking about. It's real. That's not the subject that I came to discuss today, but it's real and I respect his voice". Even indirect linkages between Israel and genocide will be unacceptable to a traditional Jewish voter.

The writer is a senior journalist who has reported from Washington DC on North America and United Nations

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

Fill up vacancies

With reference to the news report 'Fin Min overhauls middle management structure in nationalised banks', (October 22), while the move to provide more opportunities at the middle management level is most welcome one hopes steps will be taken to fill the vacancies at entry-level too. According to CH Venkatachalam, General Secretary, All India Bank Employees Association, more than a lakh positions are lying vacant in banks. Many of the bank branches are reeling under staff shortage impacting customer service. Note that most banks are on a branch

opening spree problems are bound to worsen. A scientific method needs to be evolved urgently to link staff deployment in branches to the real needs.

Manohar Alembath
Kannur (Kerala)

Cut TDS on interest

This pertains to the Editorial 'Tax Truths' (October 22). It is encouraging that our direct tax receipts are rising and are up 22 per cent this year alone. Personal income tax revenues have already overtaken corporation tax receipts, indicating greater compliance and convenience in filing tax returns.

Simultaneously, refunds to personal taxpayers, particularly seniors, who derive much of their income from interest on deposits, are increasing since they typically have an excess deduction of tax at source (TDS) against interest income.

The new tax regime has further reduced the tax burden and, consequently, increased refunds. Thus, there is a strong case for reducing the current TDS rate on interest to 7.5 per cent. This will also benefit revenue since the interest paid to taxpayers on refunds will come down drastically.

Kamal Laddha
Bengaluru

Taxation blues

This refers to the timely Editorial 'Tax truths' (October 22). The direct tax base should be further widened and one such plausible segment could be taxing the farming community beyond a certain income. But, who will bell the cat? Tax avoidance is also an issue that needs to be tackled. The ball lies in the court of tax authorities which should make an effective use of AI (artificial intelligence) to plug all extant loopholes. Let the IT laws be applied on some 'universal' basis without any exceptions.

SK Gupta
New Delhi

Kharif crop hit

Aporeos "Kharif paddy acreage up 65 lakh ha, finds a new digital crop survey" (October 22). While the acreage has gone up, the worrying factor is the severity of NE monsoon that is affecting the harvest of various Kharif crops including plantation crop coffee, since its further processing at the farm stage is hampering its quality. How will the Agriculture Ministry rescue the farmers from such a threat?

Rajni Magal
Holkere Village (Karnataka)

Boost for Kashmir apples

Shift to organic farming, better distribution needed

Bilal Ahmad Wagay
Binish Qadri

Jammu and Kashmir's (J&K's) apple industry, the backbone of its agrarian economy, has shaped the region's social and economic fabric for centuries. As the largest producer of apples in India, the valley's orchards not only support thousands of livelihoods but also position the region on the global fruit market map. Apple farming is the largest employment generator in J&K, with nearly 3.5 million farmers — 27 per cent of the region's population — involved in growing the fruit, whose export contributes more than 8 per cent to the region's GDP. However, behind this thriving industry lies a crisis of fluctuating market forces, geopolitical tensions, and environmental challenges.

THREATS AND CHALLENGES

Kashmir's apple growers are increasingly relying on cold storage units to navigate fluctuating demand. With over 40 cold storage facilities, mostly in SICO Lassipora, capable of holding more than 2.5 lakh tonnes, these controlled-atmospheric units provide a crucial buffer. However, with limited cold storage in Kashmir, many apple growers are left with no choice but to sell early at low prices, or risk watching their produce go to waste.

The influx of foreign apples has driven down prices for Kashmiri apples, leaving local growers struggling against a tide of cheaper imports. The flood of Iranian, Washington, and South African apples has sharply eroded the dominance of Kashmiri apples. J&K's apple industry is hindered by the region's rugged terrain and insufficient infrastructure. The fragile transportation network, often blocked by political instability or harsh weather, further impedes the timely distribution of produce. Erratic weather patterns, particularly frequent hailstorms, devastate orchards.

A growing demand for organic and premium apple varieties is reshaping the market, driven by health-conscious consumers. The apple growers in Kashmir are unable to produce organically grown apples. Promoting traditional apples grown organically in Kashmir is essential to safeguard health and preserve the region's agricultural heritage and enhance sustainability. Haniabi — an innovative solution (advanced pesticide) to boost apple farming in Kashmir — must



GROUND REALITY. No so sweet

be used in the early stage of rat infestation.

The National Conference, now at the helm in J&K, must turn their promises into action, especially when it comes to the apple industry. The new government must craft a robust natural farming policy, and must enhance the quality of Kashmiri apples through better farming practices, pest management, and post-harvest handling to meet international standards.

Farmers must be encouraged to diversify their crops or invest in value-added products like apple juice, cider, or dried apples to reduce dependence on fresh apple sales. The Modified High Density Plantation Scheme, set to span 5,500 hectares in J&K from March 2021 to March 2026, embodies a vision for agricultural revitalisation. This scheme could serve as a force for economic growth, empowering farmers and boosting the apple industry through increased productivity and sustainability.

Kashmir's apple growers face triple burden — spurious pesticides that threaten crops, an erratic climate disrupting yields, and the glaring absence of insurance coverage. This leaves them vulnerable, with little protection for their labour or livelihood. The Market Intervention Scheme for apple procurement in Jammu and Kashmir addresses the needs of perishable agricultural and horticultural commodities excluded from the Minimum Support Price. By stabilising market prices and ensuring timely procurement, this initiative can safeguard farmers' livelihoods and reduce post-harvest losses.

J&K's economy hinges on a single national highway, its vital lifeline to the rest of the country. Yet, this crucial route is often blocked, leaving the region's trade at a standstill. The highway must be operational round the year, or alternative routes must emerge.

Bilal teaches politics at Government Degree College, Beerwah. Binish is Assistant Professor, Cluster University Srinagar

THE WIDER ANGLE.

PARAN BALKRISHNAN

It was a dramatic title for a book that came out back in 1985. "Pakistan on the Brink" was the edgy name commentator Ahmed Rashid gave for his grim assessment of the direction in which his country was heading.

Since then, Pakistan has been on the verge of toppling over many cliffs. Somehow, it always clings on by its fingertips. But this commentator must admit he was sorely tempted to declare the last nail had just been hammered into the coffin of Pakistan's always fragile democracy. So, let's just say the last nail has been placed in position — and it's just waiting for a man or woman or mob to come and bang it down.

What's gone wrong this time? It's pretty much accepted the last election was more than manipulated by the army and yanked away from Imran Khan. The army discovered the larger-than-life cricketer, who began as their protégé, wasn't following their orders and was even trying to build a mass base of his own. He had to be more or less erased from Pakistan's political map. He's been in jail since May 2023 but, without the slightest doubt, he remains the towering shadow looming over the country's political parties — and their military bosses.

It's safe to say this government is a vulnerable beast at best. Now, a new threat has emerged that could wrench it from power. This mortal threat is coming from Pakistan's Supreme Court. Pakistan's Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa was due to retire October 25 and the army and government feared the next man who inherited the crown of thorns might not be very sympathetic to its anti-Imran project. Might they release him from jail, or worse, declare the last election fatally flawed?

The situation was a desperate one and time was short. Could Isa, the sitting chief justice, be given an extension? Alternatively, the judiciary had to be brought to heel, by hook or by crook — and before October 25. This required a massive constitutional amendment that would render the courts relatively powerless.

The first attempt to push through a bill with these sweeping changes had to be withdrawn after it became clear it



Pakistan's political system on edge

Imran Khan's shadow looms large over a fragile Pakistan, even from behind bars

wouldn't pass the legislature with the requisite two-thirds majority.

The last few weeks have seen a whirlwind of wheeling-and-dealing as all Pakistan's political forces scrambled to cobble together the necessary two-thirds. The key player appears to have been Fazlur Rehman, Pakistan's wildest political poker player, who had seemed cornered in recent months.

Once again, Rehman's emerged triumphant, cementing his position as a force without whom no deals can be struck. Famously known as Maulana Diesel (for previous corrupt practices)

It's safe to say this government is a vulnerable beast at best. Now, a new threat has emerged that could wrench it from power. This mortal threat is coming from Pakistan's Supreme Court

in political circles, Rehman has come out of this dealmaking round with more honour than he's managed in the past.

Rehman played his cards cannily, persuading the government to ease back on their demands. He appears to have been the key figure who persuaded the other main actors in the game to tone down the constitutional changes, thus enabling a deal. Even Imran Khan's PTI agreed to abstain and not oppose the sweeping amendments.

CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES

Under the changes, the chief justice will be chosen from the three senior-most judges by a Special Parliamentary Committee of legislators, where the government holds the majority. The constitutional changes have provoked a sharp rebuke from the International Court of Justice (ICJ). "These changes bring an extraordinary level of political influence over the process of judicial appointments and the judiciary's own administration," chief Santiago Canton, ICJ's Secretary General in a

statement. But all this non-stop political manipulation has created a new government that can be best described as shaky and a political situation that's combustible. The mobs aren't out on the streets yet but don't be too surprised if they suddenly make an appearance.

Mind you, the current government, illegitimate though it may be, has achieved just about as much as could be expected under the circumstances. The deal with the IMF has been settled. Inflation is down from the sky-high 30 per cent where it was stuck for almost two years. Could it be a sign of stability that petrol prices are down from a peak of PKR 300 a litre to PKR 250?

Still, the auto industry's been in the dumps for the past year, showing little signs of recovery. Now, even the textile industry is in dire straits with a poor cotton crop putting the mills in a tough position.

Can Pakistan pull through amidst all these difficulties? It has done so in the past but this time the situation is looking darker than ever.

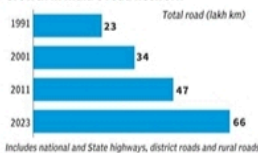
STATISTALK.

Compiled Nishanth Gopalakrishnan | Graphic: Viveswaran V

India's highway construction witnessing a slowdown

India's road network spans 66 lakh kilometres (km) and its national highway (NH) network spans about 1.45 lakh km. It is second only to the US, both in terms of overall road network and NH network. The NH network is projected to become 2 lakh km by FY25. The government's budgetary allocation to the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) to develop the road infrastructure has grown 34 per cent annually between FY20-24. The NH network has grown at a compounded rate of 5 per cent since FY14. India needs to increase the pace to 17 per cent CAGR, in order to reach the 2 lakh km milestone by FY25. However, the pace of construction, which peaked during FY21 owing to lockdown and fewer vehicles on road, has now slowed down

Growth in India's road network



Includes national and State highways, district roads and rural roads

India's NH network projected to reach 2 lakh km



Rising budgetary allocation to MoRTH



Pace of construction slowing down



Source: Deepak Builders & Engineers India Ltd LLP

thehindubusinessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

October 22, 2004*

Draft code of conduct for NBFCs ready

A draft code of conduct has now been adopted by the Finance Industry Development Council, the newly formed self-regulatory organisation of non-banking financial companies (NBFCs). The Code will broadly cover areas such as business practices, accounting policies and legal matters.

Keep interest rates in line with market trends, RBI to UCBs

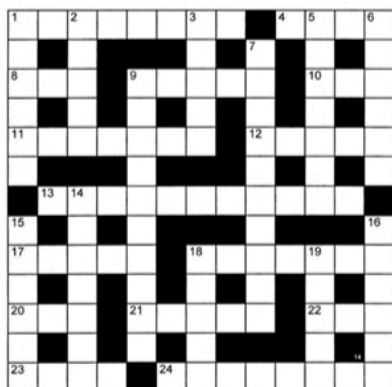
Urban co-operative banks must ensure that the interest rates they offer on deposits are in line with the market trends, as per RBI's best practices code for UCBs. RBI has asked UCBs to comply with CRR/SLR norms, maintain a reasonable credit-deposit ratio and sanction loans within exposure norms.

Norms eased for export units in DTA

The Government has eased the norms for sale of second-hand capital goods in the Domestic Tariff Area (DTA) by export-oriented units that had imported such goods under the export promotion capital goods (EPCG) scheme. The existing stipulation that allowed EOUs to sell second-hand capital goods in DTA only after two years of the import of such goods has been removed.

* There was no issue dated October 23 on account of Ayudha Pooja

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2553



EASY

ACROSS

- May be carried (8)
- Some way away (4)
- Disenumber one of (3)
- Wind player (5)
- Ridicule, tease (3)
- Having a distension (7)
- Gather in folds (5)
- Small flames lighting larger ones (5,6)
- Pedestrian ways (5)
- One who observes (7)
- How long play is shown (3)
- Shackles (5)
- Fell at university (3)
- Go out and look for (4)
- Marital offence (8)

DOWN

- Area of local church (6)
- Wireless (5)
- Garden flower (5)
- Excite, agitate (7)
- Repayment of a part (6)
- Multiplies plants (10)
- Item of bedclothes (6-4)
- Deeply emotional, earnest (7)
- Manages to do without (6)
- Cognac (6)
- Courted (5)
- Be evasive; lay off bets (5)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

- Plot to beat out that one can take it with one (8)
- Some way off, an armed service can return to it (4)
- Get shot of a doctor who holds one back (3)
- A musician quietly engaged in seaside entertainment place (5)
- Make fun of one shaft in a feather (3)
- Sell, now that it's been made larger than usual (7)
- Fold seen in a pelt when it's made up (5)
- They burn one in conspiracy who has slight disagreement (5,6)
- Footways in the past could include the beginning of history (5)
- Observer shows what credit may be arranged around the East (7)
- Go quickly if there's a general call on the bank (3)
- Fetters one presses flat (5)
- Put clothes on a gentleman in Spain (3)
- Look for a way to understand work finally (4)
- Sin of the grown-up starts early, renouncing youth (8)

DOWN

- Area of church concern makes capital by end of a month (6)
- Send signal if one is seen in the wrong road (5)
- Bloom one will endlessly pull up when at home (5)
- Men fret about causing such agitation (7)
- Something one gets back might be rate of exchange (6)
- Multiples, using paper got as necessary for it (10)
- Phosphor will spoil different item of bedlinen (6-4)
- Deeply emotional way one may have got from the Nineties (7)
- Extra wheels are available in spins, in having left (6)
- Spirit will mark one as a boy finally (6)
- Courted one with energy when among the trees (5)
- It won't answer directly where privet is concerned (5)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2552

ACROSS 1. Paralysis 5. Rod 7. Role 8. Cannibal 10. 5 Down. Daylight robbery 11. Defy 13. Slight 15. Crayon 18. Army 19. Proposed 22. Rareness 23. Pall 24. Wed 25. Overtakes

DOWN 1. Parades 2. Rally 3. Swathe 4. Sing 5. See 10 Across 6. Dully 9. Sight 12. Immured 16. Noodles 17. Wrasse 18. Arrow 20. Slack 21. Undo

Does madarsa education violate secularism? SC to decide

AJOY SINHA KARPURUM
NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 22

THE SUPREME COURT on Tuesday reserved its verdict in a case that could have ramifications for religious education across the country. A Bench headed by Chief Justice of India (CJI) D. Chandrachud held a challenge to a ruling by the Allahabad High Court, which in March struck down the Uttar Pradesh Board of Madrasah Education Act, 2004 (UPBME Act), unconstitutional.

In April, the SC stayed the HC verdict until it decided the validity of the UP law. With the impending National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights issuing two communications on June 7 and 25—directing the UP government to investigate recognised madrasahs and admit non-Muslim students to such schools imparting formal education, and requesting the Centre to direct all states and Union Territories to inspect madrasahs and withdraw recognition from those that were not compliant with the Right to Education Act, 2009.

Both notifications were stayed by the SC.

on October 21.

The Madarsa Act, 2004

The Act provides the legal framework for madarsa education where, apart from the curriculum of the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), religious education is imparted as well. The law creates the Uttar Pradesh Board of Madrasah Education, predominantly comprising members of the Muslim community. The functions of the board are detailed under Section 9 of the Act, and include preparing and prescribing course material and conducting exams for all students from 'Madrasah' (equivalent to Class 10) to 'Tajir' (equivalent to a Master's).

According to a data presented by the Centre to Parliament on February 7, 2020, as of 2018-19, of the total 24,010 madrasahs in India, more than 10%—14,526—were in UP. These included 11,621 recognised madrasahs. About 1.69 lakh students sat for the UP madrasah board examinations—equivalent to Class 10 and Class 12—in 2023.

Allahabad HC decision

On March 22, Justice Sanjay Subhash Vidyarthi and Justice Chaudhary struck down the Madarsa Act in its entirety. The Act was deemed unconstitutional on three main grounds.

SICILARISM: Referring to past SC cases, the HC held that secularism means 'equal treatment to all religions and religious sects and communities' by the State, without either identifying itself with favouring any particular religion, religious sect or denomination.

The court found that... (it is) compulsory for a student of Madarsa to study in every class, Islam as a religion, including affirming prescriptions, instructions and philosophies... The modern subjects are either absent or optional... The court held that the government has a duty to provide secular education, and cannot 'discriminate' by providing education based on religion.

EXPLAINED LAW

Arguments before SC
During the hearings in October 2024, two main questions emerged.

CONSTITUTIONAL LAW
The HC held that the government was in conflict with the University Grants Commission Act, 1956 (UGC Act). It stated that only universities or institutions 'deemed to be a university' under Section 3 of the UGC Act can grant degrees, and 'no other person or authority, including any Madrasah or the Madarsa Board, can confer any degree'.

Arguments before SC
During the hearings in October 2024, two main questions emerged.

HRISHI, where a madarsa imparts 'religious education' or 'religious instruction'. In *M. Aruna Raju vs Union of India* (2002), the SC drew a distinction between the two. The court held that religious instruction, such as compelling attendance for religious worship, was not allowed in educational institutions recognised by the state as per Article 28 of the Constitution. But the purpose of religious education, or 'education about religion', was to teach students about the provisions of the Madarsa Board 'in harmony', the court held.

During the hearing on October 21, Senior Advocate Manoj Kumar Gupta argued that the 'HC wrongly conflates regulation of religious instruction and thereby says religious instruction violates secularism as provided for by the Constitution'.

SECONDLY, whether the HC was correct in striking down the entire Act, or whether it should have limited the decision to specific provisions and allowed the government to regulate the functioning of madrasahs. On October 22, CJI Chandrachud observed

that 'to throw out the (Madarsa) Act is to throw to the baby out with the bathwater'. He said that the state government has the power to make rules under the Act to ensure that the education imparted is more secular in nature.

The respondents, represented by Senior Advocate Kishan Kashyap, argued that the Act is not designed to ensure that students receive secular education or enter the mainstream. He said the Act is meant to ensure the status quo, wherein mainstream subjects are optional and religious education is mandatory.

Impact of the decision
The impact of the SC decision will be felt directly in UP, but the CJI repeatedly cautioned the lawyers that it will likely have wider ramifications on religious education across the country. The CJI's comments appeared to indicate that all educational institutions that impart some manner of religious education (such as gurukuls and convent schools) will be affected by the decision on how the principles of secularism interact with the functioning of these institutions.

EXPLAINED CLIMATE

WHY INDIA WILL BUILD A 'CLOUD CHAMBER' UNDER MISSION MAUSAM

ANJALI MARAR
BANGALURU, OCTOBER 22

THE GOVERNMENT'S Mission Mausam, launched last month, aims to not just improve weather forecasting but also 'manage' certain weather— including enhancing or suppressing phenomena such as rainfall, hail, and fog.

Doing so would mean India to improve its cloud physics research. To that end, a first-of-its-kind cloud chamber will be established at the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), Pune.

What is a cloud chamber?

A cloud chamber resembles a closed cylinder or tubular drum, inside which water vapour, aerosols, etc. are injected. Under ideal humidity and temperature conditions, a cloud can develop inside this chamber. The facility will allow scientists to study the seed particles that form clouds and the ice particles that fall.

Many countries have basic cloud chambers with limited functionalities to perform specific studies. With Mission Mausam, India is building a cloud chamber with conception priorities, as is regional climate change. With Mission Mausam, India is building a cloud chamber with conception priorities, as is regional climate change. With Mission Mausam, India is building a cloud chamber with conception priorities, as is regional climate change.

Understanding cloud physics involves the study of cloud behaviour during nucleation and the enhancement of cloud droplets inside this chamber. The facility will allow scientists to study the seed particles that form clouds and the ice particles that fall.

How will scientists use the chamber? With the establishment of a convective cloud chamber, scientists will have the flexibility to tailor physical and aerodynamic parameters to meet specific meteorological requirements that influence

How can weather be 'modified'?

We have certain new ideas... Within a controlled environment, where we can apply temperature, humidity, condensation, and other parameters, we can monitor and understand clouds to arrive at a high-level scientific findings on how monsoon clouds behave," said Dr. Prabhakar, senior IITM scientist and an expert in cloud physics.

Over the next 18-24 months, the Indian team will focus on developing computer and highly advanced instruments and probes that will be deployed once the chamber is ready. The civil construction of the chamber will happen in the next few months.

Why will India highly advanced instrumentation package, capable of monitoring the minute properties of the conditions under investigation. We will also have to perform seed particle injection into the chamber, which will offer us a scenario to look at different environmental conditions," Prabhakar added.

Can weather be 'modified'?

Under the Cloud Aerosol Interaction and Precipitation Enhancement Experiment (CAIPEE) programme, trials were done over a limited geographical area along the rain-shadowed region of Maharashtra's Solapur district from 2016-2018. Such reports witness little rainfall, as they lie along the mountain side facing away from moisture-laden winds.

Analysis of the experiments suggests that under suitable conditions, cloud seeding was an effective strategy for enhancing rainfall. Rainfall could be enhanced up to 10%. However, it has been widely recognised that cloud seeding is not a silver bullet to address rainfall problems.

(Anjali Marar is a science communicator at Ramnarayan Institute, Bangalore)

EXPLAINED ENVIRONMENT

World Biodiversity Summit: Countries are currently meeting in Cali, Colombia, for the 16th Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, which aims to protect global biodiversity and restore natural ecosystems

AMITABH SINHA

AHEAD Of the annual climate change summit in November in Glasgow, this year from November 11, countries are currently assembled in the Colombian city of Cali for the UN Biodiversity Conference that takes place every two years.

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1 million The number of species that are at risk of extinction in the next few decades

75% of world's land is significantly altered

400 million hectares of forests were lost between 1990 and 2020, about 10 million

EXTINCTION RATE OF SPECIES IS NOW 100 TO 1,000 TIMES FASTER THAN NORMAL

1.44% only of deforested land is demarcated as protected area. Almost all of this is near Antarctica.

75-199 mt* Estimated volume of plastics in the world's oceans

NBSAPs Many more are likely to do so during COP16.

The High Seas Treaty, also known as the agreement on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdictions or BBNJ, which was finalised last year as a separate international agreement to maintain the ecological health of seas was a major step forward in meeting the 30 x30 targets.

One of the objectives of the High Seas Treaty is to demarcate protected areas in the high seas, which are rich in biodiversity. Rich parts of the oceans—just like national parks or wildlife reserves on land—where human activities can be regulated and restricted.

Shared genetic resources

Another goal of the High Seas Treaty is to ensure that the benefits from exploitation of genetic resources in the oceans outside of national boundaries of countries, are equitably distributed among all. Oceans host a massive variety of life forms from tiny microbes to big

ant fish, some of which may be beneficial for medical, commercial, or scientific reasons.

This also fits in with COP16 discussions, where sharing of benefits from genetic resources is expected to figure prominently. Back in 2010, at COP10, countries agreed to establish an Access and Benefit Sharing mechanism, also called the Nagoya Protocol, that lay down the general principles for the rights and claims of countries on their bio-resources and rules for their commercial utilisation.

At COP16, countries are negotiating the sharing of benefits from the use of genetic information and plants and organisms that have been made possible by advances in modern science. The genetic sequences, stored digitally are becoming more accessible and are used by corporations for making a variety of items, including high-yield crops, beauty products or medicines.

COP16 is expected to deliver some decisions on how these digital sequences can be used, who can use them, and what fair and equitable mechanism for sharing of profits would be, particularly for the indigenous land and peoples who have been the original owners of the bioresource.

Question of finance

Like in climate change negotiations, finance is crucial in COP16 discussions as well. One of the goals of the Kunming-Montreal Framework is to mobilise at least \$200 billion per year by the year 2030, from all sources, for funding biodiversity conservation. Out of this, developed countries must provide at least \$20 billion every year to support the biodiversity-related work.

India's share has to increase to about \$30 billion by the year 2030. Ways and means to mobilise these financial resources is one of the key issues for discussion at COP16.

Countries are also supposed to ensure that perverse incentives or subsidies that are causing environmental degradation, or are being eliminated, or reformed. These can be incentives that allow over-fishing, encourage deforestation, or subsidise use of fossil fuels.

Under the Kunming-Montreal Framework, such measures should scale up the pace of biodiversity conservation. Countries at COP16 are also expected to discuss the possibility of setting up a biodiversity fund, new finance mechanism and biodiversity credits on the lines of carbon credits.

LONGER VERSION
Indianscience.com/Explained

Hosting the S summit: Why Kazan in Tatarstan matters in Putin's Russia

ARJUN SENGUPTA
NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 22

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi is in Russia for the 16th BRICS summit, which China's President Xi Jinping and South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa are also attending besides the host, President Vladimir Putin.

The host city, Kazan, is among Russia's largest and wealthiest cities, deriving its prosperity from its rich robust petrochemicals and military industry, as well as a fast-growing information technology sector. In 2009, it was branded Russia's third capital after Moscow and the cultural capital of Tatarstan. Kazan is also one of the country's cities of the future—in the sense that it already anticipates some of the significant demographic changes that are contributing to Russia's evolving national identity.

Russia and Russian

The country Russia is the homeland of

the Russian people, the largest Slavic ethnic group, who speak Russian as their mother tongue. Since most ethnic Russians are Orthodox Christians, religion too has been central to the imagination of who is Russian. But this definition does not capture the socio-cultural diversity of the world's largest country. Scattered from Finland to its west to Alaska in the east, Russia is a transcontinental, multi-ethnic giant straddling Europe and Asia, and

EXPLAINED GLOBAL

More than 80 per cent of its population is ethnic Russian. It is also home to as many as 193 ethnic groups and 21 national minorities, which are home to specific ethnic minorities. The minority groups have been historically sidelined and repressed by the ethnic Russian majority.

But this could be about to change. The proportion of ethnic Russians and Slavs in the population has been declining, and this trend will likely accelerate. The birth rate among ethnic Russians (1.3 children per woman) is significantly lower than that

of the Republic of Tatarstan, the second largest of the Tatar people, the largest Slavic ethnic group, who speak Russian as their mother tongue. Since most ethnic Russians are Orthodox Christians, religion too has been central to the imagination of who is Russian. But this definition does not capture the socio-cultural diversity of the world's largest country. Scattered from Finland to its west to Alaska in the east, Russia is a transcontinental, multi-ethnic giant straddling Europe and Asia, and

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The skyline of Kazan, showing the famous Kul Sharif Mosque.

East & West city

Kazan is especially relevant to this location 900 km to the east of Moscow at the confluence of the rivers Volga and Kazanka, this city of 1.2 million is the capi-

tal of the Republic of Tatarstan, the second largest of the Tatar people, the largest Slavic ethnic group, who speak Russian as their mother tongue. Since most ethnic Russians are Orthodox Christians, religion too has been central to the imagination of who is Russian. But this definition does not capture the socio-cultural diversity of the world's largest country. Scattered from Finland to its west to Alaska in the east, Russia is a transcontinental, multi-ethnic giant straddling Europe and Asia, and

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brought Tatarstan under Muscovite control in 1552. The mosque was rebuilt with Saudi and Chinese help in 2005.

Tatars under Putin

President Putin sought to play a balancing game in his dealings with Russia's ethnic minorities.

He tried hard to incorporate ethnic minorities into the mainstream, reconcile differences, and championed nationalism and a renewed sense of Russian identity and ethnic Russians. But he has dealt with secessionist sentiments with an iron hand, as his approach towards ethnic minorities has been one of repression.

Putin's persecution of Chechen Tatars following the 2004 annexation of Crimea, and the deportation of Chechen and Ingush from the leader of Tatarstan in 2011 have been some points. Bringing the BRICS summit to Kazan has been seen as a conciliatory step. Moscow and Tatarstan spent more than \$1 billion (over \$80 million) on city renovation projects in the lead-up to the 'largest foreign policy event ever held' in Russia, Russian media have reported.

18 CALENDAR

CROSSWORD 5502

ACROSS

1 Spent the day in, free from danger (6)

4 It may be put on (8)

5 900 hours a month (5)

6 A person (15)

10 A person (15)

11 72 change colours (4)

12 13 against the poet? (8)

13 201 sounds out the hand up (8)

14 Produced food and heat (4)

17 Kazan to get at the work (6)

20 Wholesome are the tales of (10)

21 Fear (6)

24 Express a condition (5)

28 Caring needed on (4)

30 28 lacks injunction to keep increasing the rent (8)

31 201 sounds out the hand up (8)

32 201 sounds out the hand up (8)

33 201 sounds out the hand up (8)

34 201 sounds out the hand up (8)

35 201 sounds out the hand up (8)

36 201 sounds out the hand up (8)

37 201 sounds out the hand up (8)

38 201 sounds out the hand up (8)

OVER THE HEDGE by Michael Fry & T Lewis



CALVIN & HOBBES by Bill Watterson



MARVIN by Tom Armstrong



DAY TODAY by PETER VIDAL



ARIES (Mar 21 - Apr 20)

Planetary alignments play a balancing act encouraging a more balanced approach to life.

being it's important to seek out like-minded people, otherwise you'll be struggling to find your way in a world that's so different from yours.

TAURUS (Apr 21 - May 21)
Legal and professional problems are on the horizon. You may find yourself in a difficult situation.

GEMINI (May 22 - Jun 21)
You are expected to take up a new challenge. You may find yourself in a difficult situation.

CANCER (Jun 22 - Jul 21)
You are expected to take up a new challenge. You may find yourself in a difficult situation.

LEO (Jul 22 - Aug 21)
You are expected to take up a new challenge. You may find yourself in a difficult situation.

VIRGO (Aug 22 - Sep 21)
You are expected to take up a new challenge. You may find yourself in a difficult situation.

LIBRA (Sep 22 - Oct 21)
You are expected to take up a new challenge. You may find yourself in a difficult situation.

SCORPIO (Oct 22 - Nov 21)
You are expected to take up a new challenge. You may find yourself in a difficult situation.

JUMBLED WORDS

DIFFICULTY LEVEL 2a

ACROSS

1 Spent the day in, free from danger (6)

4 It may be put on (8)

DOWN

1 Spent the day in, free from danger (6)

4 It may be put on (8)

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Wait and watch

Onus on China to walk the talk along LAC

IT is no coincidence that India and China have reached an agreement on patrolling along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh on the eve of the BRICS summit in Russia, where Prime Minister Narendra Modi is likely to hold a bilateral meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping. The 'major breakthrough' has set the stage for a cordial encounter between the two leaders, who have been reluctant to talk to each other after the Galwan clash of June 2020. They finally have something positive to show to the world amid a four-year-old standoff that has kept armies of the two nations in a state of round-the-clock readiness. What's more, the perception that Modi and Xi can act as mediators in the Ukraine war hinges on their ability to resolve their own differences.

However, it is too early to expect that the situation on the ground will become normal anytime soon. New Delhi knows very well that Beijing has a knack for disregarding border agreements; the latest one could meet a similar fate. Unilateral alteration of the status quo by Chinese troops is at the core of the present dispute. And it is largely due to Chinese intransigence that disengagement from the friction points of Depsang and Demchok got delayed despite a series of military and diplomatic talks.

China's massive infrastructure buildup along the LAC is a telltale sign that it wants India to stay busy catching up. The Indian Government and the defence forces would be well advised to keep a close eye on Chinese movements along the border. Attempts to mislead the nation with half-truths and falsehoods must be avoided. The PM set a wrong precedent when he claimed during a post-Galwan all-party meeting that 'neither is anyone inside our territory nor is any of our post captured'. Greater vigil and transparency can help India push China harder to walk the talk.

Sacrilege cases

Fair, time-bound trial is the way forward

THE grant of prosecution sanction by the Punjab Government sets the stage for resumption of the trial against the Dera Sacha Sauda chief in three sacrilege cases dating back to 2015. The Supreme Court had recently lifted the stay imposed by the Punjab and Haryana High Court on proceedings against the self-styled godman. The cases involve the desecration of the Sikh scripture in Faridkot district. Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh was among those booked for causing religious hurt following the registration of multiple first information reports. The delay in taking the cases to their logical conclusion has added to the political slugfest. The AAP government has been facing flak for inaction from within its own ranks. Even after nine years, closure is nowhere in sight.

The dera chief remains a controversial figure over actions considered blasphemous by the Sikh community. Ram Rahim is already serving a 20-year sentence for rape and murder in a Rohtak jail. The frequent parole granted to him by the Haryana government is viewed as a sign of the influence he holds. Public perception, thus, started gaining ground of a deliberate attempt to prevent bringing him to justice in the sacrilege cases. For Ram Rahim's followers, such insinuations and ennuai put him at a distinct disadvantage. As per the special investigation team of the Punjab Police, the dera chief was one of the main conspirators and among the 12 persons indicted for the sacrilege incidents. The way forward is a fair and time-bound trial.

The incidents of sacrilege and the firing on protesters in 2015 continue to rankle. A mature and more nuanced vocabulary by political leaders in matters of such sensitive nature would help. Social harmony cannot be held hostage to the alleged misdeeds of an individual.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune

JALANDHAR, THURSDAY, OCTOBER 23, 1924

Sir John Maynard's evidence

ALTHOUGH Sir John Maynard appeared before the Reforms Enquiry Committee with the avowed object of removing the 'misapprehensions' caused and the 'misstatements' made by some witnesses, the evidence actually given by him contains more than one statement which serves a different end, from the public point of view, more important and useful purpose. We have, first of all, the interesting statement made by the witness in reply to Dr Sapru that the Government of Punjab really depends upon the Muslim bloc. Does this not mean that there has all this time been what so many in the province regard as an unholy alliance between the official and Muslim members of the Punjab Council, unholy because whatever may be the case when the country becomes self-governing, the only legitimate place for all patriotic and independent members in our legislatures at present, so far as the reserved subjects are concerned, is on the Opposition benches? Secondly, there is the statement also corroborative of the general view on the subject, that the line of coverage in the Punjab Council is both Hindu versus Muslim and rural versus urban, and the still more significant statement that even on questions not raising communal issues, the 'voting somehow took a communal line'. Of course, the official explanation of this fact is that the state of things in the Council is a more or less accurate reflection of the state of things in the province. But the question which disinterested contemporaries as well as the impartial historian will ask is whether the communal bitterness which existed in the province when the reforms were introduced was not accentuated by what took place in the Council.

Lessons, warnings on India-Pak front

Both nations must remember how Kargil war undid good work done during Vajpayee's Lahore visit



VIVEK KATJU
FORMER SECRETARY, MINISTRY
OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

MEAN Nawaz Sharif, the Pakistan Muslim League (N) supremo who has thrice served as Pakistan's Prime Minister, recently met a group of Indian journalists in Lahore in the office of his daughter, Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz. Sharif urged India and Pakistan to begin talking and "live like good neighbours". One newspaper report quoted him as saying, "We should not go into the past, and should look to the future". However, he could not resist going into the past himself; he recalled his efforts to mend the relationship, but said his efforts were disrupted. He advised the two countries to pick up the threads from his interaction with PM Narendra Modi.

Sharif turned nostalgic about then PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee's visit to Lahore in February 1999. He said, "Vajpayee's Lahore visit is still remembered very fondly... His speech was very good. I sometimes watch YouTube videos of the visit and the speech to revive good old memories". This writer was present in the Punjab governor's house lawn when Vajpayee delivered a truly memorable address to the Pakistani people. The objective of his speech was to convince them that India wanted to live in peace and harmony with them. It was the same aim which took him to visit the Minare-Pakistan in Lahore.

More than 25 years have passed since Vajpayee's Lahore visit. It will be betraying nothing of strategic value if I dwell on how the idea that Vajpayee should directly speak to the Pakistani people came to pass. Vajpayee's Lahore trip was decided in early February. I was then Joint Secretary in charge of the



HISTORIC: Nawaz Sharif fondly recalled then PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee's visit to Lahore in February 1999. (1)

Iran-Pakistan-Afghanistan Division of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). I had, therefore, a role in preparing for the visit. The more I thought about the visit, the more I realised that India's greatest asset, in the context of the visit, was Vajpayee's oratorical prowess. And, the only way in which this asset could be utilised was if he made a public speech on Pakistani soil. Naturally, this could not be in an open public meeting; it had to be in a setting where security could be guaranteed. I mentioned the idea to my superiors in the MEA. No one objected.

I was present when the idea was presented to Vajpayee. He was surprised and asked, "Kya ushah bolna hai hoga?" Everyone kept quiet. Since it was initially my idea, I said, "Sir iska bolna faida hoga." He turned to me and said, with some sharpness, "Baba tu mujhe hai." That meant that he wanted time to mull over the idea. Before I accompanied the advance team to Lahore, I got the clearance that he had agreed, but the Pakistanis were not informed of his intention. I was asked where and whom should he address. I thought the right venue would be the Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS), where some of the best and brightest of the Pakistani youth studied and which was founded by Syed Babar

The Ganderbal terror attack is Gen Munir's way of showing that the Pak army has the wherewithal to disrupt political progress in J&K.

Ali. Babar, now 98, is one of Pakistan's most respected industrialists and philanthropists. I got a nod to sound him out during the advance team's visit to Lahore. By the time I got free on the first day of the two-day visit, it was about 10 pm. I was leaving for Delhi the next evening, and the next day was also packed with meetings. I shared my predicament with Ghanashyam, who was a counsellor in our High Commission in Islamabad but was in Lahore then. He said he had the phone number of Babar's son, and that the father-son duo lived in the same house, close to the Punjab Government Guest House, where we were staying. Before he called the son, I told Ghanashyam to tell him that my uncle, who knew Babar, had instructed me to convey his regards to him in person and that I could not return to

Delhi without doing so.

It was well past 10 when Ghanashyam called the son. He told him who I was and that I needed to see Babar sahib that late evening itself. The son said Babar had retired for the day but that he would call back. He did so within minutes and said Babar would be happy to meet me. So, Ghanashyam and I went to his house.

As we reached Babar's beautiful home, it became clear that the family had retired for the evening. The lights in the reception room of the house were switched on, and the son was there to graciously welcome us. After some time, Babar came down in a dressing gown. He was the embodiment of courtesy and brushed aside my apologies. I conveyed my uncle's salaams and then broached the objective of my visit. He listened attentively and said Vajpayee sahib's visit to LUMS would be a great honour, but naturally he would have to consult the Pakistani Government.

I do not know what Babar did, but the message that Vajpayee wanted to address the Pakistani people obviously went to the right quarters. In a few days came the response that Vajpayee was welcome to speak to a select but large group of persons at the Punjab governor's house. Naturally, that would be a secure environ-

ment and easier to control than LUMS. As Vajpayee's speech would directly reach the Pakistani people, our purpose would be served, as it indeed was.

The Lahore visit's promise died in Kargil. Gen Musharraf's misadventure is condemned by most thoughtful Pakistanis. The Indian Army, paying a great price in blood, recaptured most of the Kargil heights. Indian diplomacy did well too. Nawaz Sharif and Musharraf fell apart after the Kargil war, but there was a fleeting period, in the operation's early stage, when Sharif dreamt of becoming 'Fateh-e-Kashmir'. I wrote this with a sense of responsibility.

In 1999, it had seemed that the Sharifs had gained substantial influence over the army. That proved false. Prime Minister Modi did not pay heed to the Kargil lesson. The Pakistan army soon made that obvious to him after his visit to Lahore in 2015.

Recently, the Pakistani army held back, allowing the J&K elections to be held peacefully. It did not want any issue to prevent the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Heads of Government meeting in Islamabad from proceeding smoothly. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar's participation in the SCO event led to speculation among de-hat optimists that it may pave the way for the normalisation in ties, though no bilateral talks were held.

The Ganderbal terror attack, in which six workers and a doctor were killed when an infrastructure project was targeted, is Gen Asim Munir's way of showing that the Pakistani army has violent intrusive capabilities which it can use to disrupt political progress in J&K. It is also a signal to ex-PM Imran Khan that he would not be given the opportunity to blame Gen Munir for being soft on India, whatever the Sharifs may want. It is also a warning to the Valley's political class as Ganderbal is CM Omar Abdullah's constituency.

Finally, the Ganderbal incident has made the Indian cricket team's visit to Pakistan in 2025 for the ICC Champions Trophy far more difficult.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

An important part of our diplomacy is that people take our words seriously. — George W Bush

An SOS for spellings

K SHAHIL KUMAR

THE way spellings are getting mutilated and phrases are being reduced to acronyms on instant messaging platforms would make Wren and Martin purists agonise over the thousand cuts their beloved English is facing daily.

The first wave saw shortening of words as the messaging service had a 160-character limit per message, which was changeable. Secondly, keying in letters in the pre-Qwerty push-button keypads of the good old Nokia 3310 or Samsung R220 phones was quite an effort.

Hence, 'where' or 'were' got shortened to 'wer', message to 'msg', 'are' to 'r', 'you' to 'u', 'see' to 'c' and even 'ok', which was already a short form of 'okay', became 'k' as users tried to get the maximum bang for their SMS buck to save on phone bills.

Soon, this SMS shorthand began evolving into a full-fledged lingo and acquired a trajectory of its own. Practitioners also stumbled upon the utility of numerals. So, 'before' became 'b4', 'weight' lost many kilos to turn into 'w8' and 'too' and 'to' got reduced to '2'.

The popularity of this lingo spilled over to MSN and Yahoo messengers and other chat platforms, even though they were free from the tyranny of the character limit. The sheer convenience of typing fewer letters was too enticing.

The next frontier of short-form lingo was reducing phrases and sentences to acronyms. Among the early acronyms were GM (good morning), GN (good night), TC (take care), TY (thank you), BRB (be right back) — to inform colleagues that he/she is away from the computer/phone — and TGIF (thank God it's Friday) in anticipation of the much-awaited weekend. Angry bosses wanted glitches to be fixed ASAP (as soon as possible), and PPA (please find attached) became part of the email etiquette.

In personal chats, the early entrants included LOL (laugh out loud), ROFL (rolling on the floor laughing) — as 'ha ha' or 'he he' became passé — and BTW (by the way). Then there was a cloudburst of such acronyms, and the ingenuity to coin new ones continues unabated.

Some like IMO (in my opinion), TBH (to be honest) and FYI (for your information) have now gained wide currency and no eyebrows are being raised.

But some acronyms like AFAIK (as far as I know), ICYMI (in case you missed it), YKWM (you know what I mean) or YOLO (you only live once) don't ring a bell unless you happen to be born after 1995 or are an Instagram freak.

Thus, the chat lingo continues to evolve and acquire weird forms. And one has to keep eyes and ears open to keep tabs on it — or risk falling prey to FOMO (fear of missing out).

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Centre, Army must stay vigilant

Refer to 'Ganderbal shocker': the killing of APCO Infratech workers by Pakistan-based militant outfit People's Anti-Fascist Front is the first terror attack on a key infrastructure project in the Kashmir valley. This attack, which came days after the new government assumed office in the UT, underscores the challenge for the Omar Abdullah government and is also a testament to how tough it is for infrastructure companies to execute projects in disturbed areas. This incident has again shown that Pakistan should never be taken at face value and the Centre, the armed forces and the UT government cannot afford to let their guard down.

BAL GOVIND, NOIDA

Government must assert itself

With reference to 'Ganderbal shocker', the incident has reinforced India's consistent stand that talks with Pakistan and terrorism cannot go together. Even if the Pakistan government does not endorse such incidents, it cannot absolve itself of responsibility. The government should assert its authority to find an amicable solution. India wants to maintain peaceful relations with all its neighbours, including Pakistan. Pakistan is reeling under a severe economic crisis, which it can overcome with the help of India. In such a situation, Islamabad will have to pursue a friendly policy towards New Delhi in consultation with its army.

RAVINDER KUMAR JAIN, LUDHIANA

Penalise hoax threat callers

Apologies of 'Hoax threat calls': due to a surge in hoax threats targeting Indian airlines, flights are getting delayed, diverted or cancelled, causing huge financial losses to the airlines and inconvenience as well as anxiety to the affected passengers, gradually eroding their faith in air travel itself. Such hoax threat calls are serious offences and deserve deterrent punishment entailing protracted incarceration and punitive fines. State-of-the-art technology must be deployed to curb this menace.

ROSHAN LAL GOEL, LADWA

Oversight could be dangerous

With reference to 'Intel agencies need parliamentary oversight': since intelligence agencies work in secrecy and have little accountability, they become a law unto themselves. The row over the plot to assassinate anti-India separatists has brought this issue in the spotlight. Even if the writer has made an impassioned plea for parliamentary oversight, it is hard to see the agencies accepting this, since they work behind the scenes and any sensitive information falling into the wrong hands would be dangerous for them and their operations.

ANTHONY HENRIQUES, MUMBAI

India should recalibrate policy

Apologies of 'Dealing with China': Why India should rethink strategy: since its inception, the PRC has never treated India on an equal footing, basing its foreign policy on the strategic triangle comprising the US and Russia. Viewing India as a strong competitor, China adopted all sorts of diplomatic and military means to suppress India and endanger its sovereignty and economy by weakening Indian capabilities to challenge China's hegemony. India became the first non-socialist country to establish diplomatic ties with China and has remained one of its top 10 trading partners. Knowing China's true intentions, India should recalibrate its policy to prioritise its interests, including strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific region, non-cooperation with Pakistan, gaining supremacy in industrial and military sectors and maintaining strong foreign relations.

VANSHAV GOYAL, CHANDIGARH

Put forth a unified strategy

Refer to 'Dealing with China': Why India should rethink strategy: the Middle Kingdom syndrome, which has emboldened Chinese aggression since the rule of the Zhou dynasty, seems to have been resuscitated by Xi Jinping, who has styled himself as a dictator. His election to the post of President was a sham as there was no other name on the ballot. Thus, in order to deal with China led by an autocratic leader, India needs to devise a unified strategy notwithstanding the differences across party lines.

VINAY SAROHA, KURUKSHETRA

Hosting the BRICS summit: why Kazan in Tatarstan matters in Putin's Russia

ARJUN SENGUPTA
NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 22

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi is in Russia for the 15th BRICS summit, which China's President Xi Jinping and South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa are also attending besides host President Vladimir Putin.

The host city, Kazan, in Russia's largest and wealthiest cities, deriving its prosperity from a robust petrochemicals and military industry, as well as a fast-growing information technology sector. In 2009, it was branded Russia's third capital after Moscow and the cultural capital St Petersburg. Kazan is also one of the country's cities of the future—in the sense that it already anticipates some of the significant demographic changes that are contributing to Russia's evolving national identity.

Russia and Russia

The country Russia is the homeland of

the Russian people, the largest Slavic ethnic group, who speak Russian as their mother tongue. Since most ethnic Russians are Orthodox Christians, religion too has been central to the imagination of who is Russian. But this definition does not capture the socio-cultural diversity of the world's largest country. Sprawled from Finland to west to Alaska to its east, Russia is a transcontinental, multi-ethnic giant straddling Europe and Asia, and all but touching America.

More than 80 per cent of its population is ethnic Russian, but it also comprises as many as 193 ethnic groups and 21 national republics, which come to specific ethnic minorities. The minority groups have been historically sidelined and represented by the ethnic Russian majority.

But this could be about to change. The proportion of ethnic Russians and Slavs in the population has been declining, and this trend will likely accelerate. The birth rate among ethnic Russians (1.3 children per woman) is significantly lower than that



The skyline of Kazan, showing the famous Kul Sharif Mosque. Reuters

among Muslim ethnicities (2.3), and the share of Muslim ethnic minorities in Russia's population could, in coming decades, triple from the current 10K.

Besides becoming ethnically less Russian and religiously more diverse, Russia's population will likely also be smaller. Official data published last month showed the country recorded its lowest birth rate since 1999 in the first six months of 2024. Reuters reported. To offset the popu-

lation decline, Russia is expected to allow more migration, with the bulk of new migrants being Muslims belonging to Turkic and Asiatic ethnic groups.

East & West city

Kazan is especially relevant to this discussion on Russia's demography. Located roughly 900 km to the east of Moscow at the confluence of the rivers Volga and Kazanka, this city of 1.2 million is the capi-

tal of the Republic of Tatarstan, the homeland of the Tatar people, the second largest ethnic group in the country after Russians and Tatars. The Tatars are a predominantly Muslim Turkic ethnic group with their own language and distinct culture.

The population of Kazan is split roughly equally among ethnic Russians (48.6%) and ethnic Tatars (47.8%). This makes Kazan the symbol of the kind of nation Russia is gradually evolving into: a blend of Europe and Asia, a melting pot of diverse ethnicities and religions.

Conversations have noted evidence of Kazan's diversity in the neighbourhood of the city centre, the fortified complex that lies at the heart of many Russian cities. Not to the official buildings stands the Orthodox Annunciation Cathedral and the Kul Sharif Mosque—among the largest in Europe with its distinctive white tiles and turquoise dome and minarets.

Originally built in the early 16th century, Kul Sharif was burned down by Ivan the Terrible during the Siege of Kazan, which led to the fall of the Khanate of Kazan and

brought Tatarstan under Muscovite control in 1552. The mosque was rebuilt with Saudi and UAE help in 2005.

Tatars under Putin

President Putin has sought to play a balancing game in his dealings with Russia's ethnic minorities. He has tried hard to incorporate ethnic minorities into the mainstream, reconcile differences, and championed a nationalism that promotes the greatness of Russia, not ethnic Russians. But he has dealt with secessionist sentiments with an iron hand, as his approach towards the Chechnya showed.

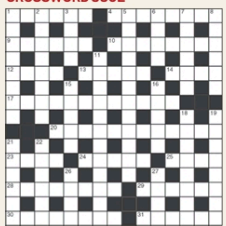
Putin's persecution of Chechen Tatars following the 2014 annexation of Crimea, and the devolution of powers and status from the leader of Tatarstan in 2021, have been some points, bringing the BRICS summit to Kazan has been seen as a conciliatory step.

Moscow and Tatarstan spent more than \$8 billion (over \$80 million) on city renovation projects in the lead-up to "the largest foreign policy event ever held" in Russia. Kazan has also been reported.

18 CALENDAR

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THE INDIAN EXPRESS, WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2024

CROSSWORD 5502



ACROSS
1 Speedy dog is live, free from danger (6)
4 It may be put on disc (8)
5 How many a rumpus is a rumpus (6)
6 Venetian (6)
9 All-around elegant in dress (8)
12 They change colours (4)
13 To sag to the point? (6)
17 Means to get at the desk (6)
20 Week's are his rare means of locomotion (6)
22 Faint (6)
24 Express a condition (5)
25 Courage needed on icy roads (4)
28 Indignation to keep increasing the vent (8)
29! Sounds cold for the hand up there (6)
30 One of another's fishing ground (5,3)
31 Put out in West winds (6)
32

DOWN
1 Speedy dog is live, free from danger (6)
2 Pagers thrown about at union meeting (6)
3 Fables in the sunbath? (4)
5 Get strained badly and go to pieces (6)
6 Venetian (6)
7 Bilingual someone or bother (6)
8 Banners and surmises (6)
10 They may dispense lakes (5)
18 Put on the hand (6)
19 Members of the family in a religious order (8)
21 They involve great responsibility (6)
22 Cool to find another partner (6)
26 One dish that may be settled round (5,3)
27 Design (4)
32

OVER THE HEDGE by Michael Fry & T Lewis



CALVIN & HOBBES by Bill Watterson



MARVIN by Tom Armstrong



DAY TODAY BY PETER VIDAL

ARIES (Mar 21 - Apr 20)
The Sun and Moon play a balancing act on the horizon, creating a feeling of unease. It's important to seek out like-minded people, otherwise you'll be struggling by yourself. There is a risk in waiting your energy on someone's story.

Taurus (Apr 21 - May 21)
Legal and professional problems are paramount, so think twice before pushing the rules. On the serious side, you are obliged to face challenges and tackle new issues. On the lighter side, you'll soon discover that a lower is on your side.

GEMINI (May 22 - Jun 21)
You will expect to shut up and listen to the people. The problem is you are only too aware of the way that others' parties tend to ignore the facts in favour of dogma. If only they'd stop and think! Still, perhaps that's just too much to ask.

CANCER (Jun 22 - Jul 21)
Just financial and unincorporated by half, and a partner's decisions are winding you up. You could be well to do in a company all the necessary tasks yourself, rather than waiting for other people to come up with the goods, you might end up having to wait for them.

LEO (Jul 22 - Aug 23)
It's an excellent day to compete and come first, but you may play by the rules. The moment that you think you can get away with cutting corners, you will run the risk of running into a vast back wall. The reward has a shade more for you.

VIRGO (Aug 24 - Sep 23)
The world and material responsibilities are demanding up you, your sleeves up and get your hands dirty. A moment of emotional effort comes your way, but you may find that you're starting back. You must value your traditional virtues—organisational skills and efficiency.

LIBRA (Sep 24 - Oct 23)
Fresh financial matters are on the way, but you may decide to take time off: many working people could be spending more time in 'meeting' or finding ways to help the world.

SCORPIO (Oct 24 - Nov 23)
Fresh financial matters are on the way, but you may decide to take time off: many working people could be spending more time in 'meeting' or finding ways to help the world.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov 24 - Dec 23)
Once again, your cash situation is complicated, but the next few weeks should bring the solution. However, please don't neglect your emotional needs. Your confidence may be a little bit of a letdown, but it's all about a fresh try at improving an old relationship could be well worth the effort.

CAPRICORN (Dec 24 - Jan 20)
Your secrets, and don't let everyone's see. The average Capricorn needs a little bit of a letdown, but it's all about a fresh try at improving an old relationship could be well worth the effort.

AQUARIUS (Jan 21 - Feb 18)
Your stars suggest that profound psychological work, pushing you so hard that you end up worried. A little bit of a letdown, but it's all about a fresh try at improving an old relationship could be well worth the effort.

PISCES (Feb 19 - Mar 20)
You're experiencing a moment of emotional effort comes your way, but you may find that you're starting back. You must value your traditional virtues—organisational skills and efficiency.

JUMBLED WORDS

Given below are four jumbled words. Solve the jumbles to make proper words and move them to the respective square below. Note the letters in the shaded square and use them to help you find the answer for the given word. One of the disadvantages of wine that it makes a nice mistake... for... Samuel Johnson.



DIFFICULTY LEVEL 2a

Everyday Sudoku puzzle, to solve from left to right must appear in each of the nine vertical columns. In each of the horizontal rows and each of the nine boxes.

DIFFICULTY LEVEL 2a

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

SOLUTION SUDOKU 5751

SOLUTION SUDOKU 5751

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

HANDOVER—RECPOCL

RECPOCL handed over a project specific VPI to Rajeshwar IV H-1 Power Transmission to RECPOCL, recently at Gurugram. RECPOCL, the Transmission Service Provider through TATIL-based Competitive Bidding process conducted by RECPOCL, the Bid Process Coordinator, for development of the above transmission project on Build, Own, Operate & Transfer basis.

PROGRAM—SCOPE
SCOPE organized Education (Living Well, Fairing Well)—emphasizing overall wellness through the integration of financial stability, holistic health & environmental wellness at SCOPE Convention Center. The program was addressed by Prof. Subodh DSG, SCOPE & Member, Governing Body, Dr. Mohit Gupta, Professor of Cardiology, GB Pant Hospital, C&H Chopra, Group Director, Bajaj Capital Ltd & KK Rao, Senior Advocate, Supreme Court of India.

MOU—NBCC
NBCC signed an MoU with Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti to embark on a transformative educational initiative, aimed at constructing three new permanent campus facilities in Delhi & implementing various electric water heating systems in 331 Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas across India. The MoU was signed by KV Radday, GM, Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti & Arun Kumar, Chief General Manager, NBCC.

CELEBRATION—TERUMO INDIA
Terumo India celebrated Terumo Patient's Day 2024 to connect with its Group Mission of "Contributing to Society through Healthcare". The celebration, which coincides with the founding day of Terumo globally, reflects the company's deep commitment to patient safety at the center of every innovation, partnership, and innovative undertakes. H. Samir, CEO, Terumo Corporation attended the celebrations.

INAUGURATION—UTTARAKHAND GRAMIN BANK
Chief Secretary, Mr. Rishi Rastogi, inaugurated the new premises of Uttarakhand Gramin Bank Dehradun Main Branch, located opposite MPP College. This branch is nobility managed entirely by women staff. Mr. Rastogi appreciated the bank's efforts to enhance customer convenience & commended the display of products promoted by Self-Help Groups in the current premises.

VIGILANCE AWARENESS—BANK OF INDIA
Bank of India is organizing Vigilance Awareness Campaign from 15.09.2024 to 15.11.2024. Various awareness activities are being organized by the BOI Dehradun Zone & 38 branches of BOI across the State. T. Vijay, Zonal Manager, informed that the Zonal officer of VAW, all the Rural & Semi-Urban Branches will be conducting a minimum of 116 Awareness Gram Sabhas in Villages.

INAUGURATION—NAGAR NIGAM GHAZIABAD
The inauguration for the development and beautification of roads was done by Smt. Sharmila (Cabinet Minister & Chief guest), Mayor Smt. Sunita Datta, Commissioner Vikramaditya Singh Malik and other officers recently, wherein Airport Road to Nag Road in focus alongsides the construction of pavements and siting areas.

EVENT—SOCIAL WELFARE DEPARTMENT
The Department of Social Welfare celebrated World Mental Health Day, 2024 & organized a mega event on this occasion by holding sessions in the theme, "Mental Health at Work Place". Dr. Sarbesh Sah, Psychiatrist, Dr. Armita Sahay, Assistant Psychiatrist, Clinical Psychologist, Anam Shahiwal, Paris Olympic Bronze Medalist (57 kg wrestling category) was felicitated on the occasion.

CORPORATE BRIEFS

CONCLAVE—IREDA

PK Das, CMD, IREDA, participated in two panel discussions at the Brainstorming Conferences organized by the Central Electricity Authority. The conference focused on shaping the "Indian Power Sector Scenario by 2047", where CMD addressed the topics of "Financing the Energy Transition by 2047" & "Capacity Planning & Regulatory Framework for Renewable Energy by 2047". During the discussion, Das underscored IREDA's leading role in providing and making innovative renewable energy technologies such as Ethanol, Electric Mobility, Battery Storage, Pumped Storage, Floating Solar, Green Hydrogen, & Green Ammonia—financially viable.

MOU—RTES

RTES signed a MoU with Ethial Rail, the developer & operator of the UAE National Rail Network, to explore cooperation & synergies strengths in developing railways & related infrastructure services in the UAE & wider region. The MoU was signed by Shadi Malik, the CEO of Ethial Rail & Rahul Mittal, the CMD of RTES Ltd., during the Global Rail Transportation Exhibition & Conference held in Abu Dhabi. The partnership aims to explore collaborative opportunities for supplying rolling stock, consultancy & project management for railway projects & services such as repairing rolling stock & operation & maintenance of railway infrastructure to ensure more efficient & modernized rail services in the UAE & across the region.

MEETING—WAPCOS

RK Agrawal, CMD, WAPCOS called on H.E. Ibrahim UMZEY, the Minister of Energy, Water Resources & Mines, Government of Burundi. During this meeting, Agrawal briefed about the status of projects being handled by WAPCOS in Burundi. H.E. Brig. Gen. Aloys BIZINDANYI, the Ambassador & Senior Officials of the Government of Burundi and WAPCOS were also present in the meeting. WAPCOS has provided engineering consultancy services to various clients since incorporation, in over 75 countries & has developed a global presence, particularly in South Asia & across Africa, in areas of water, power & infrastructure sectors.

ACQUISITION—POWERGRID

POWERGRID has acquired three Project Specific Purpose Vehicles (PSPVs) to execute Inter-State Transmission Projects related to transmission of renewable energy. These PSPVs are "South Odisha Transmission Ltd." (Jm Khambhalya Transmission Ltd.), which have been acquired from the Bid Process Coordinator PDC Consulting Ltd. & the SPV "Rajasthan HV HV Power Transmission Limited" have been acquired from the Bid Process Coordinator RECPOCL. These projects have been won by POWERGRID after competing with various private sector players & emerging as successful bidder in TBCL process.

KOREA TOURISM ORGANIZATION INDIA SIGNS MOU WITH ICTC SOUTH ZONE

The Korea Tourism Organization (KTO) India office has signed a significant MoU with the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (RCTC) South Zone to promote cross-cultural tourism and strengthen travel ties between India and South Korea. The MoU was formalized by Myong Ki Yoon, Regional Director, India & SAARC countries, KTO & P. Rajagopal Basu, RTSC, Group General Manager of RCTC South Zone on October 10, 2024 in Chennai.

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY MANAGER OF COMMERCE

Dr. Manojee Singh Chhatwal, Co-Founder & CEO of Intellectual Property Chamber of Commerce and Innovation (IPCCI) India, was felicitated by Dina Mondino, honorable foreign minister of Argentina who was on her first official trip to India. A luncheon reception was hosted by H.E. Mariano Caccini, Ambassador of Argentina to India. Dr. Chhatwal had constructive discussion with the Argentinian delegation led by their foreign minister.

INDIAN POWER



CELEBRATION—NTPC

Every year, the NTPC's Diversity at India transforms during Durga Puja to infuse everyone in the festive vibes. During the 22nd of the Purnima in Sector 33, NTPC, the NTPC's Diversity received many visitors from different parts of Delhi-NCR. Each year, it is an opportunity to spread different relevant social messages through district themes, wherein the theme of this year was Green Power.

APPROVAL—PFC

PFC Infra Finance PFC Ltd. has received approval from the International Financial Services Centres Authority to commence business as a Finance and Infrastructure in PFC City, Gujarat. PFC will be the first finance company in PFC dedicated to power and infrastructure funding.

ASSOCIAM

Sarjany Varma President ASSOCIAM, said, the PM GatiShakti National Master Plan is a perfect example of leveraging technology for real time monitoring and development of national infrastructure projects in crucial sectors such as food, health, tourism, power, food and public distribution. In recent conversations with global stakeholders, three years of this transformative initiative highlights the incredible infrastructure story of India and showcases the potential for India to make for India and the world.

HSCA

HSCA has been awarded a project for the campus development of Gandhinagar University, Gandhinagar, Maharashtra. The project, valued at Rs 1000 Cr., will establish a modern educational & administrative sector, transforming the university into a center for advanced learning and innovation.

UTTARAKHAND TOURISM

Perched away from the hustle of city life, Uttarakhand's tourism is a hidden gem. The Uttarakhand District of Uttarakhand is a village where time seems to have stopped. Inhabited originally by the Jadhviyas, a semi-nomadic tribe, the village was evacuated in 1962 during the India-China war. Since then, the inhabitants have migrated to nearby villages & even to far-off cities like Dehradun, Haridwar & Roorkee in search of work.

ACADEMICS

SC Day Public School

SC Day, organized a Hostel Day UP State level Sports tournament from 17th to 19th Oct. Inauguration ceremony was held by the presence of Chief Guest, Hon. Shri. Singh, MCA, Hon. Minister of Education, Government of India, Dr. N. K. Jha (Chairman of the school) & Dr. Alpha Sharma (UP), DAV schools, U.K. Zonal, Principal Mrs. Chandra expressed her gratitude towards the school & the participating schools. The participating schools were 10 & 12 students took part. Programme ended with National Anthem.

Bind Relief Association

Bind Relief Association's organizing World Bazar, more popularly known as Delhi's first "Bindu School Bazar" more this iconic festive event is one of Delhi's oldest & most eagerly awaited. The Bazar has been consistently held for 44 years, with the sale of 2020 due to the pandemic. This year's Bazar is again a week-long event, scheduled to take place from 22nd to 28th Oct. 2024, from 10:30 am to 6:00 pm. The event is organized by Bindu Relief Association, New Delhi.

19 REPORT

WILLIAMSON
New Zealand's second test against India starting as he continues his recovery from a groin strain. New Zealand Cricket said on Tuesday, PTI



