



Politicising the laddu

The Tirupati laddu issue should be limited to one of quality control

In the face of it, the allegations are rather serious – the adulteration of ghee (clarified butter) – used in the making of Tirupati laddu *prasadam* – with ‘foreign fat’. The charges were made by no less than Telugu Desam Party (TDP) leader and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu himself, and his son and Minister Nara Lokesh, on September 18, against his predecessor and Leader of the Opposition, Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy of the Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party (YSRCP). Since then, the issue has snowballed into a free-for-all, with leaders of Mr. Naidu's central alliance partner, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), seeking an ‘independent investigation’. Former BJP MP Subramanian Swamy has even sought a Supreme Court-monitored probe. Unsurprisingly, as *The Hindu* has reported, the adulteration charges do not seem to have deterred devotees from making the arduous journey to the hilltop temple, nor has it slowed down the sale of the laddus. The timing of these charges, close to State elections, where the BJP faces tough challenges to retain power in Haryana and Maharashtra, raises concerns of their being politically motivated, and indeed irresponsible, having been made by a constitutional authority of Andhra Pradesh.

In the quality test by the Centre for Analysis and Learning in Livestock and Food (CALF), in Anand, Gujarat (National Dairy Development Board affiliated) the laddu samples were received on July 9, and the results submitted on July 16. But Mr. Naidu announced its findings in September. Moreover, the analysis mentions a range of what it considers to be ‘foreign fat’ – from soybean, olive, sunflower, rapeseed, and cotton seed, to fish oil, palm oil and beef tallow and lard. The extent of the contamination (‘foreign fat’) in the ghee which was sent by the Tamil Nadu-based supplier A.R. Dairy in Dindigul, is unclear. The CALF has also added an array of caveats. The apex body for food quality checks is the Ghazabad-based National Food Laboratory (NFL). So, why did the State government not send the samples to the NFL for final verification? It is to be noted that on July 29, an executive officer of the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) had said that A.R. Dairy would be blacklisted as its samples had contaminants beyond ‘vegetable oil’. In the wake of this controversy, the argument from the Hindutva right to remove temple administration, including the TTD, from the state's purview and return it to ‘hereditary custodians’, is opportunistic and faulty, as the Supreme Court has upheld the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments laws across States. An issue that must be limited to quality control should not be allowed to metamorphose into one of communal muck-raking.

Triumph squared

India's chess double win was fashioned by its young generation of players

India's double gold at the Chess Olympiad in Budapest is an extraordinary feat: only two other countries could do it in history. It came as no surprise to the serious followers of the game, though. The Indian women began as the first seed and the men as the second in the mind sport's most prestigious team event, for which most of the world's countries flew down to the Hungarian capital. While the women's campaign suffered a couple of setbacks towards the end, the men were absolutely dominant right through. The men were so good that they scored four points more than their nearest rivals, the top-seeded United States. What stood out is the fact that India's twin triumph was fashioned by a bunch of youngsters belonging to the golden generation of Indian chess. That should be a worrying thought for India's opponents on the chess board as these champions can only get better and will be playing at the Olympiad and other global competitions for another decade or two. Besides the team goals, India also won the individual golds through D. Gukesh (aged 18), Arjun Erigaisi (21), Divya Deshmukh (18) and Vantika Agrawal (21). The Indian teams also included Chennai's Grandmaster siblings R. Praggnanandhaa (19) and R. Vaishali (23). It is also worth mentioning that the Indian women's team did not have Koneru Humpy, one of the strongest female players in chess history.

Having stressed that, India's depth in the women's game is nowhere near that of the men's. While there are several promising male players outside the Olympiad teams, such as Nihal Sarin and Raunak Sadhwani, it is not quite so in Indian women's chess. India's chess administration should try to use the great success of its women at Budapest to promote the game more aggressively among girls. The women's bench needs to get stronger. The administrators also have to organise elite tournaments in India. The big stars of Indian chess hardly ever play in the country, for there are no events good enough for them. Viswanathan Anand, the man who single-handedly revolutionised chess in India, never had an opportunity to play in a tournament other than a World championship or World Cup at home after he became one of the superstars of world chess. There is the Tata Steel Chess India tournament in Kolkata, but its format is rapid and blitz, and not the classical variety of the Olympiad. Players like Arjun and Divya have shown in the eastern metropolises how much a top-quality event like that helps Indian players. Indian chess surely could soar higher with more support from the government and corporates.

Weighing in on business as usual with China

Recent media pieces have speculated on whether India's fraught relations with China are headed towards a relative thaw and suggestions are being put forward for a more liberal attitude towards foreign direct investment (FDI) from that country. Such a policy prescription of doing away with restrictions on Chinese FDI involves a radical departure from the policy of linkage between the state of borders and the state of overall relations.

Speaking in Geneva on September 12, India's Minister of External Affairs S. Jaishankar remarked that about 75% of “disengagement problems” with China have been sorted out but the “bigger issue” has been the increasing militarisation of the border. Hours later, National Security Adviser (NSA) Ajit Doval met Member of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Political Bureau and Director of the Office of the Central Foreign Affairs Commission, Wang Yi on the sidelines of the Meeting of BRICS NSAs in St. Petersburg, Russia. The readout of the Ministry of External Affairs noted that “both sides agreed to work with urgency and redouble their efforts to realize complete disengagement in the remaining areas”. However, there was no indication of a breakthrough in negotiations on disengagement in Dipsang Plains and Demchok. Nor was there any indication that India is reviewing its stance of not normalising relations with China unless there is restoration of peace and tranquillity in the border areas.

Following China's transgressions of the Line of Actual Control (LAC) at multiple locations and disturbing the status quo in Eastern Ladakh in 2020, what will constitute restoration of peace and tranquillity in the border areas remains unclear. Restoration of the status quo ante along the LAC, which India insisted on while resolving earlier stand-off situations, is not being mentioned. There is little visibility in the public domain on the terms of disengagement that have been worked out so far along the so-called “friction points”. Reportedly, Indian border forces are unable to access at least 15 patrolling points they were traditionally visiting in Ladakh. Are we prepared to accept the “new normal” created by China?

The economic commentary

Despite this national security situation, the Economic Survey 2024 has favoured India plugging itself into China's supply chains through Chinese investments in India rather than importing from China. This view has been echoed by some economists and industry members who seem to think of FDI from China as a panacea for meeting India's investment gaps and insufficient presence in global supply chains. Most of these commentaries fail to factor in the complex dynamics of both India-China relations and the



Ashok K. Kantha
a former Ambassador
to China, now
associated with
think tanks

From strategic, security and economic angles, India would do well to take a differentiated policy towards economic relations with China

imperative of economic derisking vis-à-vis China. The supposed dividends from closer integration with the Chinese supply chains and wooing investments from China are questionable.

China's demands

One, in recent Track-1.5 and Track-2 dialogues, Chinese scholars and officials did not deny that the status quo had been changed but expected India to accept the altered facts and to move on to full normalcy in relations. They reiterated four specific demands: a level playing field for Chinese companies; facilitation of visas; resumption of direct flights; and permitting Chinese journalists to be stationed in India. India pointed out that these issues were merely symptoms of a more fundamental problem that they had created, and that they must redress it first.

India came away with the clear indication that the Chinese were not yet prepared to accommodate India either on the issue of the border or on other structural challenges in the relationship. They appear to be engaged in a game of attrition and expect the Indian side to cave in incrementally and acquiesce to the new facts on the ground they have created in Eastern Ladakh. Their playbook is one they have successfully deployed in other theatres, particularly the South China Sea.

The Chinese mindset is revealed in an intertemporal opinion piece in the *Global Times* of September 8 (“India's diplomacy has a ‘S. Jaishankar problem’”). Though the article has since been removed from the English edition of the *People's Daily*-linked newspaper, it is available in the far more influential Chinese edition.

Second, the Chinese are not inclined to address India's long-standing problem of a huge bilateral trade deficit and the impediments faced by Indian companies in accessing the Chinese market. According to International Trade Centre data, India's trade deficit with China exceeded \$105 billion in 2023 (up from \$64 billion in 2021), while its exports declined to \$16 billion in 2023 from \$23 billion in 2021. There has been no improvement in India's import dependencies vis-à-vis China in critical sectors, which is a source of great vulnerability, as China has an established track record of weaponising such dependencies.

Third, both the United States-led West and China are increasingly securitising their economies and de-risking and diversifying vis-à-vis each other. According to a Rhodium Group report, India has the highest score (2.86) of all emerging and developing countries as a potential alternative investment destination to China. If India seeks closer integration with Chinese supply chains, global companies might be discouraged from considering India as their alternate node for global value chains.

Fourth, China is still not a market economy. The Third Plenum of the CPC in July 2024

doubled down on industrial policy, with a growing role for the state sector and co-opting of the private sector to subserve the strategic objectives of the party-state.

China's objective of dominating future industries, including critical sectors such as electric vehicles, solar equipment and lithium-ion batteries, and its preference for exporting its way out of its economic difficulties, rather than prioritising domestic consumption, would aggravate existing tensions in economic relations with both advanced economies and emerging economies such as India.

The game plan

Fifth, China's rigorous scrutiny of outward flows of investment and technology by its companies aims to maximise domestic value chains and make the country indispensable in global technology production, as a recent Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS) study brings out. Another credible report suggests that China has strongly advanced its carmakers to ensure that advanced electric vehicle technology stays in the country and they produce key parts domestically and export so-called knock-down kits to their foreign plants. India has been specifically mentioned in this regard.

Going by past experience, it would be naive to expect that China will help build India's manufacturing capacities. Instead, Chinese companies have preferred to invest in sensitive sectors in India, including through acquisitions, which led to Press Note 3 in April 2020, before border tensions escalated. Giving free access to Chinese companies will attract low value-addition investments and be a recipe for retarded industrialisation in a large number of sectors that China seeks to dominate the world globally.

Sixth, the expectation that imports from China can be reduced by boosting FDI from China is not borne out by the experience of other geographies which have received substantial Chinese investments. For instance, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) imports from China increased from \$386 billion in 2021 to \$438 billion in 2023, as sourcing of intermediates from China soared. China has rerouted its exports through countries such as Vietnam and Mexico to circumvent tariffs imposed by the U.S., but this loophole is being progressively plugged.

Thus, from strategic, security and economic perspectives, India would do well to take a differentiated policy towards economic relations with China. India cannot decouple itself from the economy of China, the world's largest manufacturer and exporter. But India must decide which sectors of its economy it can selectively allow Chinese FDI based on its manufacturing strengths and strategies, and keep in mind the interests of its national security and industrial development.

India's defence exports and humanitarian law

The Supreme Court of India, earlier this month, dismissed a public interest litigation (PIL) asking that the central government be directed to stop exporting defence equipment to Israel as Tel Aviv is allegedly committing war crimes in Gaza. The top court refused to intervene, reportedly because foreign policy is not its domain. However, the issue that the PIL raised is a normative one that goes beyond Israel. It must be clearly understood given India's aspirations to become a major defence exporting nation.

It is critical to recall that quite a few countries have curbed defence exports to Israel. For instance, a court in the Netherlands ordered the Dutch government to block the export of all F-35 fighter jet parts to Israel. The basis of this order is a European Union (EU) regulation, which prohibits military equipment export to a country if there is a clear risk that the recipient country would use such equipment to violate international humanitarian law (IHL). Likewise, the United Kingdom government, acting under the Export Control Act, reviewed Israel's compliance with IHL concerning the ongoing conflict in Gaza. It concluded that there is a clear risk: if certain arms are exported to Israel, they would be used to commit or facilitate serious violations of IHL.

Legal gap

There is no equivalent of the U.K.'s Export Control Act or the EU regulations in Indian law requiring an assessment of a country's compliance with IHL obligations in deciding whether to export defence equipment to such a country. The Indian Foreign Trade Act, 1992 (FTA) read with the Weapons of Mass Destruction and their Delivery Systems (Prohibition of



Prabhakar Ranjan
Professor at the
Jindal Global Law
School, O.P. Jindal
Global University

Having India amend its domestic laws would be a better way to strengthen its credibility and assess the international humanitarian law-compliance of countries importing its defence goods

Unlawful Activities) (WMDA) Act, 2005 empowers the central government to regulate the export of designated goods relevant to India for various reasons. These reasons are listed in Sections 3(5) and 2(1) of the WMDA and FTA, respectively. In addition to things such as India's national security, an important factor listed in these sections is India's “international obligations under any bilateral, multilateral or international treaty, Covenant, Convention”. In short, the central government can prohibit the export of defence goods due to India's international law obligations. This is the closest Indian law gets to connecting the export of defence goods with international law. As per India's domestic law, the central government, unlike in the U.K. and the EU countries, is not under an obligation to review the IHL compliance of the country to which India is exporting defence goods. Thus, the legal gap.

The Supreme Court, in several cases, such as *Vishakha vs State of Rajasthan*, has not just used international law to enlarge the content of domestic law but has also judicially incorporated international law to fill the vacuum created by the absence of domestic law on the subject. The current situation falls squarely in this category. This is how we need to legally frame this issue instead of making it a foreign policy topic. So, the next question is about what the international law on arms trade is and how it binds India.

International law

The most important treaty in this regard is the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), aimed at regulating international trade in conventional arms. Article 6(3) of the ATT bars a country from supplying conventional arms if it has the “knowledge” that these arms “would be used” to inter alia commit war crimes. Article 7 obligates states to assess

whether the conventional arms they export would be used by the importing country to commit or facilitate a serious violation of IHL.

Interestingly, India is not a signatory to this treaty. As a result, this treaty is not binding on India and cannot be judicially incorporated, though some provisions of the ATT reflect customary international law.

The obligation

What about India's liability under the IHL? Common Article 1 of the Geneva Conventions, which is binding on India, obligates all states “to respect and to ensure respect for” IHL. As it was held by the International Court of Justice in *Nicaragua vs United States*, this provision imposes a negative obligation on states. Thus, countries are under obligation not to supply weapons to a country “if there is an expectation, based on facts or knowledge of past patterns, that such weapons would be used to violate the Conventions”. Scholars argue that the certainty required for the exporting state that its weapons will be used by the importing state to commit violations of the Geneva Conventions is quite high.

When India's domestic laws, the WMDA and the FTA, are read in light of India's IHL obligations, a clear duty arises not to supply weapons to a country that would use them to breach its IHL obligations. But rather than deriving this obligation using international law, it would be better for India to amend the WMDA and the FTA, to explicitly assess the IHL compliance of countries importing Indian defence goods. This way, India will shore up its credibility as a responsible defence-exporting nation.

The views expressed are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Change in Sri Lanka

India is undergoing a challenging phase in its relations with its immediate neighbours. The main obstacle lies in navigating the relationship with Sri Lanka, the new President of Sri Lanka, Anura Kumara Dissanayake. So far, no Sri Lankan political party has evinced great interest in addressing the problems of the Lankan Tamils. With a leader who has leftist leanings at the helm of affairs, it remains to be seen how China might exploit the

situation in Sri Lanka.

A. Thiruganasambantham,
Coimbatore

It was no doubt a peaceful election, giving every votary of democracy much hope. Electorates across the democratic landscape are clearly signalling the pre-eminence of economic issues. Mr. Dissanayake must appreciate the finer nuances of the verdict, which means a revamp of the economy and giving a leg-up to federalism,

overcoming the temptation of unbridled centralisation. The Tamil-majority districts did not flock to him, which is a sober reminder that national consensus is important for people who want a healing touch.

Angara Venkata Girija Kumar,
Chennai

Tirupati laddu

There is a committee in Tirupati to supervise the daily pooja and sale of the laddu *prasadam*. In these circumstances, how did

‘adulteration’ take place? A temple or place of worship is not a place to earn money through unethical means. There has to be a fair probe.

Dr. Arunachalam,
Nagercoil, Tamil Nadu

Seeking information

It was very bizarre to read the report, “Confusion over alert on ‘entry of 900 Kuki militants’” (September 23). Does the Indian Army not have a better way of asking for information? Does

sensitive information have to be put out on X (Twitter)?

Mahender Singh,
Chennai

At Budapest

History has been made in Indian chess with Team India winning gold in both the men and women's categories at Budapest. The victories show India's growing prowess in the world of chess which will inspire future generations.

Sanjit Pal Singh,
Ichhapur, West Bengal

With perseverance and dedication, India's young talents in chess have fetched the country glory. It is a moment to cherish for all Indians and the moment will linger for long. The light kindled by Viswanathan Anand has increased its glow manifold through his worthy successors.

Ayyaseri Raveendranath,

Arumula, Kerala

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A provision fraught with practical problems

The Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023, introduced Section 107, which deals with properties which are "proceeds of crime". Until recently, this term was known by its mention either in the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002, or in the chapter, "Reciprocal Arrangements for Assistance in Certain Matters and Procedure for Attachment and Forfeiture of Property", under the erstwhile Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC). While the provisions of attachment of property of a person absconding under Sections 82 and 83 of the CrPC are also replicated under Sections 84 and 85 of the BNSS (with some minor changes), the provision in Section 107 of the BNSS did not feature in the CrPC. Section 107 of the BNSS gives unbridled powers to the court to not only attach any property (on the request of the police during investigation), but also to forfeit the proceeds of crime to the government under certain conditions.

No preconditions

Under this section, any police officer making an investigation, with the approval of the Superintendent of Police or the Commissioner of Police, may make an application to the court for the attachment of property if he has reason to believe that the property is derived or obtained as a result of a criminal activity.

The PMLA says where an officer has reason to believe that a person is in possession of any proceeds of crime, the officer should record the reason for such belief in writing. If the officer has reason to believe that "such proceeds of crime are likely to be concealed, transferred or dealt with in any manner which may result in frustrating any proceedings relating to confiscation of such proceeds of crime, he may, by order in writing, provisionally attach such property for a period not exceeding 90 days." There is



R.K. Vij
former Indian Police Service officer

Section 107 of the BNSS gives unbridled powers to the court to not only attach any property (on the request of the police during investigation), but also to forfeit the proceeds of crime to the government under certain conditions

no such condition prescribed under Section 107 of the BNSS. Further, while the property may be attached by an authorised officer only after forwarding the report to a magistrate under Section 173 of the CrPC (i.e., on completion of investigation), the property under Section 107 of the BNSS may be attached during the investigation itself.

The PMLA provides that the property involved in money laundering shall be disposed of by the Adjudicating Authority only on the conclusion of a trial of the offence. However, Section 107 of the BNSS is silent about the stage of disposal of such property. It says that if the court or magistrate "finds the attached or seized properties to be the proceeds of crime", it shall order the District Magistrate "to ratably distribute such proceeds of crime to the persons who are affected by such crime". In case there are no claimants or there is any surplus after satisfying the claimants, such proceeds of crime shall stand forfeited to the government.

An entire chapter of the BNSS deals with the disposal of property. These provisions replicate the CrPC provisions except that Section 497 of the BNSS mandates the court or the magistrate to take a photo or video of the property to enable them to be used as evidence during trial or inquiry. The Supreme Court in *Sunderbhai Ambalal Desai v. State of Gujarat* (2003) had dealt with the jurisdiction of the court to record evidence promptly to avoid tampering, so that the police or the court would not be required to keep the article in safe custody and the owner of the article would not suffer.

This chapter deals with contingencies such as the custody and disposal of property pending trial, the disposal of property at the conclusion of the trial, and restoration of possession of immovable property. Even if the property is perishable, it may be sold, but the final disposal is to be done only on the conclusion of

trial or inquiry by the court.

Safeguards

Section 107 of the BNSS requires the court to issue a show-cause notice returnable within 14 days on why an order of attachment of property (i.e., proceeds of crime) shall not be made. If the person concerned does not represent his case, the court may proceed to pass the ex parte order. Further, if the court finds the attached properties to be the proceeds of the crime and it orders the District Magistrate to distribute the property to its claimants, the District Magistrate shall distribute such property within 60 days of the order. There are no guidelines for the District Magistrate to identify the claimants to do the needful. Thus, theoretically, the proceeds of crime or property may be disposed of in about three months of time, without the investigation or trial coming to an end. This section is silent about the stage at which the court or the magistrate has to take this call.

Article 300A of the Constitution says "no person shall be deprived of his property save by authority of law". It has been given the status of a basic human right. It is also a settled principle that "law" means a validly enacted law which is just, fair, and reasonable.

There is no provision in the BNSS which defines or deals with the "proceeds of crime" except for the use of similar terms in sections dealing with "organised crime" and "terrorist act". The legislative intent of introducing Section 107 in the BNSS appears to be to empower States (as the PMLA is a Central Act) to undertake expeditious disposal and distribution of the proceeds of crime to its rightful claimants. But it is fraught with legal and practical problems. While identifying the rightful claimants may not be easy for the investigating officer, final disposal of such property by the court without a proper trial does not appear to be a just, fair, and reasonable procedure.

On the margins of the political sphere

The political representation of women is an exception and not a norm in J&K

STATE OF PLAY

Bilal Ahmad Wagay
Binish Qadri

As Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) enters the second phase of the Assembly elections on September 25, the persistent marginalisation of women in the political sphere demands critical scrutiny.

Despite women comprising almost 48% of the electorate in the Union Territory, their political representation has remained poor. In the 2014 J&K Assembly elections, only 3.6% of the total candidates were women. In the 2024 elections, there were only nine women out of the 219 candidates in the first phase. The political landscape is deeply rooted in J&K's patriarchal social structure that views public and political life as male-dominated. Further, political instability and concerns about safety in a volatile atmosphere have kept women at the margins.

While there have been legal and advocacy efforts in expanding the representation of women, such as granting 33% reservation to women in the J&K Assembly, they often fall short in addressing the deep-seated cultural and institutional barriers that limit women's political engagement. The two main political parties in the region – the National Conference and the People's Democratic Party – have historically sidelined women. Even female leaders, including former Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti, have failed to effect the needed transformation, as they often conform to the male-dominated political structures themselves.

When women are fielded as candidates, it is often in constituencies considered unwinn-



nable or in token positions within party structures. In the 2020 District Development Council elections, though 32% of the seats were reserved for women, actual representation barely crossed 10%.

No women-centric policies Further, there are no dedicated women-centric policies. Neither the major political parties nor the local governance institutions have implemented policies that specifically address the economic, social, and political empowerment of women, such as reserving seats for women in legislative bodies, introducing gender-sensitive economic schemes, or supporting women entrepreneurs in J&K.

While women's literacy in J&K has improved over time, the gender gap remains significant – 66% of women are literate compared to 84% of men. Additionally, women's labour force participation is abysmal, hovering around 25%. The absence of gender-responsive budgeting, economic empowerment initiatives, or electoral reforms contribute to the ongoing political exclusion of women.

Elections are a mechanism to ensure that all sections of society are represented, but when half the population is under-represented, the very foundation of democracy is undermined. In J&K, where women's participation is notably low, the absence of female voices results in policies that

fail to comprehensively address gender disparities, further entrenching patriarchal norms. The formulation and implementation of inclusive, women-centric policies are imperative for ensuring equitable representation in democratic governance.

Making women's perspectives integral to peace-building, education, healthcare, and employment will ensure that their voices are heard and encourage political involvement. Providing free childcare, healthcare benefits, and family support policies for female politicians would ease the burden of familial responsibilities, enabling more women to enter and stay in politics. A push for political quotas in J&K, as implemented in post-conflict Rwanda where 60% of parliamentarians today are women, including electoral reforms and capacity-building initiatives for women, could substantially alter the status quo.

After the dilution of Article 370 in J&K in 2019, the UT came under the scope of Central laws, including the National Policy for Empowerment of Women (2001). There is a strong foundation now to support women in participating more actively in politics. These laws offer a chance to not only boost women's involvement in decision-making but also to secure their rights and dignity. By focusing on political participation, we can empower women to shape their own futures and create a more inclusive society in J&K.

Our hope is that it will slowly become a norm to see women represented politically in J&K, not an exception.

Bilal Ahmad Wagay teaches Politics at Government Degree College, Baramulla, and Binish Qadri is Assistant Professor, Cluster University Srinagar

Working women's double shift

Working women get only 740 hours for rest every day, due to work at both office and home

DATA POINT

Vignesh Radhakrishnan

The Data Point published on Monday showed how professional Indian women work the most number of hours globally. Young Indian women in professional jobs such as auditing, Information Technology, and media work more than 55 hours a week, which translates to 9-11 hours of work every day depending on whether it was a six-day or five-day work week.

The Data Point was published after the death of Anna Sebastian Periyil, a Chartered Accountant. According to her mother, Anna, 26, lost her life because of "work stress" at Ernst & Young. The letter addressed to the company's India chairman went viral, leading to discussions on the increasing workload of professionals in India.

Indian women are working in newer and demanding jobs these days. According to data, despite women undergoing more stress in office, they do not enjoy a commensurate reduction in the amount of household work they do. While families have become more accepting of women working over time, they still do not share the women's workload and care responsibilities at home.

Chart 1 shows the average time (in minutes) that men and women across employment groups spent on unpaid domestic and care activities during a day in 2019. Women who are not in the labour force (neither employed nor seeking employment, mostly housewives) spent the most time on unpaid domestic/care work, averaging 457 minutes or 7.5 hours a day. But employed women were not far behind, spending 348 minutes or 5.8 hours a day.

In Monday's Data Point, we had established that professional women spend 9-11 hours at work a day. When this data is read with the conclusion in Chart 1 – that

employed women spend about 5-6 hours doing unpaid household work – we see a worrying trend. This means that every day, working women are left with only about 7-10 hours to wind down and rest. While this may not be the case in every household and outliers do exist, the data correspond to an average Indian household.

The data show that unemployed women spend less time doing household chores than employed women – only 3.5 hours per day compared to employed women's 5.8 hours. Chart 1 shows the gap. Employed men spend 2.7 hours a day on such chores, which is about three hours less than what unemployed women spend. One of the biggest factors for such a skew is marriage. Chart 2 shows the average time spent (in minutes) on unpaid domestic and care activities in a day by men and women categorised by marital status. Married women – employed or otherwise – spend eight hours in unpaid work every day, about two times more than women who never married. In contrast, married men spend 2.8 hours in unpaid house work, fewer than men who never married (3.1 hours). So, as we can see, post-marriage, household work reduces for men and doubles for women.

Moreover, there is no notable difference between urban and rural women in the amount of time they spend on household work. Table 3 lists the share of men/women aged 15-59 who participated in select activities in a day in 2019. There are no regional variations either. Chart 4 shows the share of men and women aged 15-59 who participated in unpaid domestic work and employment across States. In all the States, close to 85% or more women were engaged in such chores, while in a majority of the States, the share was below 50% for men. In Haryana, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, and Gujarat, the share of men doing household work was less than 20%.



Chart 1: Average minutes spent per day in 2019 on unpaid domestic and care activities across employment groups

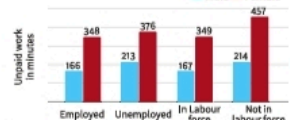


Chart 2: Average minutes spent on unpaid domestic and care activities in a day across marital status in 2019

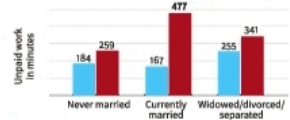
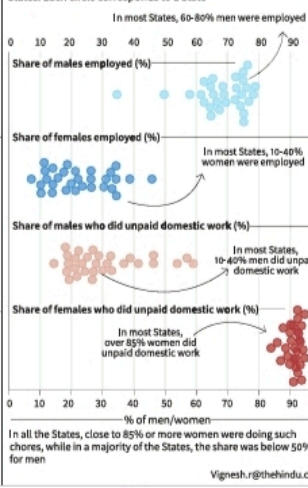


Table 3: The table shows the % of men/women aged 15-59 who participated in select activities in 2019

Area	Gender	Employment and related activities	Unpaid domestic services
Rural	Male	69.7%	29.2%
Rural	Female	22.5%	93.2%
Urban	Male	73%	22.5%
Urban	Female	19.9%	88.8%
Total	Male	70.7%	27%
Total	Female	21.7%	91.8%

Chart 4: Percentage of men and women aged 15-59 who participated in unpaid domestic work and employment across States. Each circle corresponds to a State



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindustan

FIFTY YEARS AGO SEPTEMBER 24, 1974

Oil nations warned of dangers of high prices

Detroit (Michigan), Sept. 23: President Gerald Ford to-day warned the oil-producing nations of West Asia of "disastrous consequences" if they refused to lower prices or share their resources with dependent nations.

"Sovereign nations cannot allow their policies to be dictated or their fate decided by artificial rigging and distortion of world commodity markets," Mr. Ford told the World Energy Conference.

"No one can foresee the extent of the damage or the end of the disastrous consequences if nations refused to share nature's gifts for the benefit of all mankind," he said.

"It is difficult to discuss the energy problem without lapsing into doomsday language," Mr. Ford declared. "The danger is clear. It is severe. I am nevertheless optimistic. The advantages of co-operation are as visible as the dangers of confrontation. And that gives me hope as well as optimism."

His remarks, his toughest on record, were a follow-up to a hard-hitting speech before the United Nations less than a week ago in which he denounced the use of oil as a political weapon.

"We will take tough steps to obtain the degree of self-sufficiency to avoid disruption of our economy," Mr. Ford said.

"In the immediate future," he added "we will expand our efforts to increase our energy efficiency. This will reduce the growing dependency on foreign petroleum."

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO SEPT. 24, 1924

Chess.

"King Pawn" writes in the "Statesman": The Secretary of the Calcutta Chess Club (Chowringhee) has sent me a letter, enclosing one from Boris Kostich, one of the world's leading chess experts.

"Boris Kostich," writes the Secretary, "the Serbian chess master who has just completed a very successful tour in Australia, is anxious to visit India. In a letter recently received from him he says 'I would be extremely pleased and honoured if I could come into contact with the chess players of India too, and have the pleasure to visit their principal cities like Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, after I finished New Zealand, Australia and South Africa, which would be some time end of this year, or beginning of 1925.'"

Text & Context

THE  HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS


Number of dengue cases detected in Madhya Pradesh so far

3,800 Out of the total dengue cases in the State this year, 250 were found in Bhopal, while the highest (500 cases) were detected in Gwalior. 

Number of migrant arrivals via the U.K. channel

25,052 This represents a 4% rise from the number of arrivals last year, but a 21% drop from 2022. Stopping the arrivals was a key issue in Britain's election. 


Number of fatalities from Israeli airstrikes on Hezbollah

274 This marks the deadliest day in Lebanon in nearly one year of fighting. According to the Lebanese Health Ministry, more than 400 others were wounded in the strikes in southern Lebanon. 

People affected by cholera in Sudan in the past two months

13,000 Amidst the war, 388 people have died of cholera according to health authorities. The disease is spreading in areas devastated by recent floods. 

The fishermen who have been arrested by Sri Lanka

37 Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin apprised External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar of the arrest of Tamil Nadu fishermen by the Sri Lankan Navy. 

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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How to enable transit oriented development

Transport infrastructure is a prime driver of economic activity. As a case study of Bengaluru shows, improving accessibility to jobs, through safe and efficient transport modes, could significantly enhance workforce productivity

FULL CONTEXT

Radha Chanchani
Jaya Dhindaw

Indian cities are on the brink of a transportation revolution, with a projected expenditure of ₹3 trillion (between 2022-2027) set to be spent on approved metro rail projects. These investments will not only enhance urban mobility but can also unlock vast economic potential.

Studies reveal that investment in public transportation can generate thousands of jobs and deliver economic returns 5-7 times greater than the initial outlay. To leverage investments in mass transit and maximise the economic benefits as well as improve quality of life in cities, the Government of India approved the National Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Policy and Metro Rail Policy in 2017, encouraging the adoption of TOD as a key urban planning and growth management strategy. With this national policy and funding push, 27 Indian cities are building metro rail systems, and many others are building other forms of rail- and bus-based mass rapid transit systems.

To improve accessibility to jobs

Public policies and land market conditions drive the development of economic centres in suburban and peri-urban areas, and public transport systems struggle to keep up with this outward sprawl. The resulting longer work-home commutes, and the congestion and pollution arising from greater private vehicular use, are hampering access to jobs and labour markets, productivity and liveability. Bengaluru, for instance, is among the world's most traffic-congested cities, with the social cost estimated to be ₹38,000 crore annually (5% of the city's GDP) as per 2018 figures.

TOD presents a promising approach to address these challenges, while contributing positively to India's low-carbon growth ambitions. Premised on the principle of land use-transport integration, TOD promotes compact, mixed-use development and sustainable transport modes, like walking, cycling and mass transit, effectively decoupling density from congestion and economic growth from resource use and carbon emissions. WRI India's recent publication titled 'Jobs near metro rail transit in Bengaluru: Enabling an accessible and productive city' underscores the critical need for integrated spatio-economic planning and bringing jobs closer to transit through TOD, given its significant benefits and co-benefits.

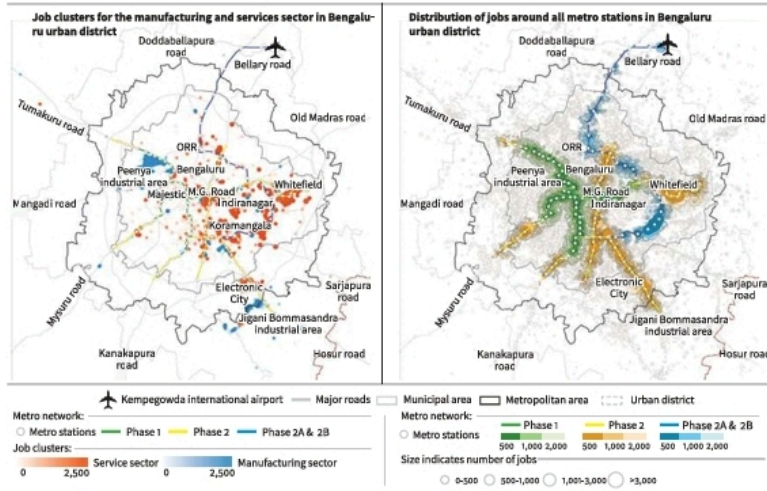
Improving accessibility to jobs, through safe and efficient transport modes, can significantly enhance workforce productivity and participation. Workplace proximity and higher job densities drive transit rider-ship more effectively than residential density. Clustering job growth near transit creates an agglomeration effect that boosts innovation, productivity, and competitiveness – far more than dispersed job growth. Apart from expanding worker and customer catchments for businesses, it also spurs local economic and real estate development, leading to increased revenues for public agencies, which can be reinvested into infrastructure and service upgrades revitalising city neighbourhoods.

Key findings

WRI India's study examines the spatial distribution of jobs associated with registered factories (manufacturing enterprises) and shops and commercial

Better transport, better work

WRI India's study examines the spatial distribution of jobs associated with registered factories (manufacturing enterprises) and shops and commercial establishments (service enterprises) in the Bengaluru Metropolitan Area (BMA)



establishments (service enterprises) in the Bengaluru Metropolitan Area (BMA).

The study also assesses current job proximity and density along the city's operational and under-construction metro network which are Phases 1, 2, and 2A/2B, and offers insights into the locational considerations for businesses and the benefits, trade-offs, and market or regulatory challenges they face in locating near metro stations.

The paper provides actionable recommendations for enabling job growth near mass transit stations.

The research indicates there are about 0.2 million registered enterprises in the BMA, employing close to 4.6 million workers, with service enterprises accounting for the bulk of it. Notably, large enterprises (100+ employees) constitute only 2% of all enterprises but contribute 60% of all jobs. Owing largely to the service sector, average job densities are highest in inner-city areas within the Outer Ring Road (ORR) and decrease further away. Peak job densities range from about 25,000 jobs/sq. km in large industrial clusters to 58,000 to 1,09,000 jobs/sq. km in hi-tech clusters such as Whitefield and Electronic City.

Once the ongoing metro phases are completed (72 kms), 28% of the total mapped jobs in the BMA will be within 500 m of the nearest metro station, 59% within 1 km, and 85% within 2 km. Some large job clusters however remain disconnected, and most jobs currently lie beyond a comfortable walking distance (500 m) from metro stations, emphasising the need for pedestrian infrastructure, and feeder services, particularly in the 1-3 km range.

Market linkages and agglomeration economies drive enterprises of certain sizes and types to be located near each other, with large businesses anchoring smaller ones around them, collectively gaining from the benefits of agglomeration. The study found that service enterprises, especially those benefiting from enhanced catchments and accessibility for employees and customers, prefer to locate and cluster near the metro. However, the metro has

little impact on the location choice of manufacturing enterprises. Most blue-collar workers tend to live in surrounding areas and either walk, cycle, or use public buses or informal transport to commute to work. The study corroborates other research findings that suggest that the metro has boosted real estate development nearby, especially the growth of service enterprises.

The main barriers discouraging large businesses from locating near metro stations include the lack of suitable properties, unfavourable development regulations, and inadequate infrastructure levels.

Developed inner-city areas have limited land availability for large-scale commercial businesses and are packed with buildings that often do not meet their requirements, for instance, legally compliant Grade-A buildings. Moreover, small plot sizes and other regulations pertaining to access road widths, setback, ground coverage and parking norms, hinder higher-density (re)development. Also, plot amalgamation processes involving multiple owners can be difficult, risky and costly.

Higher property prices near metro stations however tend to dissuade smaller businesses, more than larger established ones. Market saturation and community resistance to greater commercialisation in station areas also pose a challenge for businesses seeking to locate there.

The way forward

High-functioning global cities like Hong-Kong have 57% of jobs within 500 m of a transit station, 84% within 1 km, and 96% within 2 km as per LEI 2013 data. The city has one of the highest levels of transit use (90% of motorised trips) and one of the lowest levels of car ownership (56 cars per 1,000 people). This has enabled its Gross Value Added per capita to increase by 50% between 1993 and 2011, while fuel consumption and carbon emissions per capita decreased by 10%. In Bengaluru, the impending revision of the city's master plan provides a valuable opportunity to set aspirational targets for jobs near transit and strategise

transit network extensions to connect existing and emerging high-density job clusters.

To optimise resource and economic efficiencies, the plan should also identify and prioritise areas served by transit where job densities can be increased through renewal and densification, balancing market demand with environmental and community goals.

Public policies can stipulate location-efficient incentives such as additional development rights or fee/tax subsidies to encourage businesses to locate near transit or in economically depressed areas. Apart from conventional funding sources, the government can explore public-private partnerships and value capture financing mechanisms that can be ring-fenced for station area improvements. It should also designate a nodal agency to facilitate interactions between multiple stakeholders and coordinate TOD planning and implementation.

The private sector (businesses, developers, financing institutions) can play a significant role in directing commercial and industrial investments, near transit stations.

Additionally, proactive partnerships, between the private and public sector, can enable catalytic developments with augmented amenities, public realm enhancement, and provision of last-mile connectivity between workplaces and transit stations.

Transport infrastructure is a prime driver of economic activity and a developing country like India will continue to invest in it. For our metropolitan cities to become, and remain, globally competitive, the government needs to prioritise job densities near transit in policy-planning-regulatory frameworks. This must encompass the upgradation of public infrastructure, and institutionalising coordinated action to shape inclusive, low carbon, compact and connected growth. Radha Chanchani is Senior Manager and Jaya Dhindaw is Executive Director with the Sustainable Cities program at WRI India.

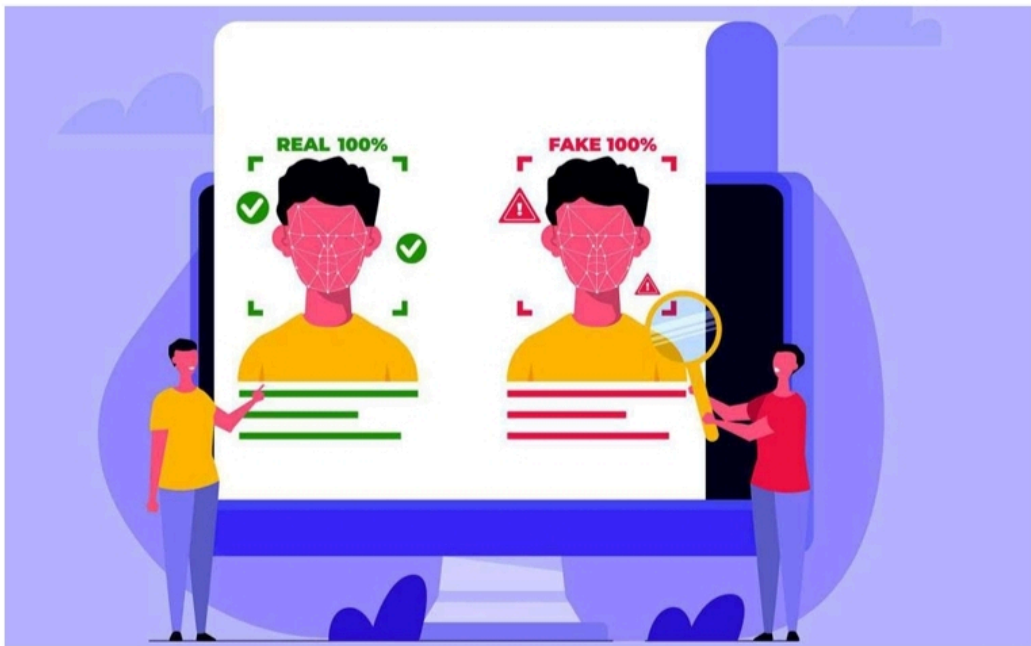
THE GIST

Public policies and land market conditions drive the development of economic centres in suburban areas, and public transport systems struggle to keep up. The resulting longer work-home commutes, and the congestion and pollution arising from greater private vehicular use, are hampering access to jobs and labour markets, productivity and liveability.

WRI India's study assesses current job proximity and density along the city's operational and under-construction metro network and offers insights into the locational considerations for businesses and the benefits, trade-offs, and market or regulatory challenges they face in locating near metro stations.

In Bengaluru, the impending revision of the city's master plan provides a valuable opportunity to set aspirational targets for jobs near transit and strategise transit network extensions to connect existing and emerging high-density job clusters.

CACHE



GETTY IMAGES

What is California's new anti-deepfake bill and can it stop manipulated political ads?

Why did California governor Gavin Newsom sign bills to stop the use of deepfakes in political campaign advertisements? What is the Defending Democracy from Deepfake Deception Act of 2024? How have AI companies reacted?

Sahana Venugopal

The story so far: California's governor Gavin Newsom promised to take action on deepfake AI-generated content in late July after X owner and billionaire Elon Musk re-posted a deepfake video of U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris, in which she refers to herself as a "diversity hire". In response to the governor's criticism, Mr. Musk made an obscene remark, claiming parody was legal in the country. On September 18, Mr. Newsom re-upped his X post criticising Musk and said he had made such content illegal in California by signing a bill. He signed three pieces of legislation to take action against deepfakes or digitally altered content in election campaigns that could be "deceptive". "You can no longer knowingly distribute an ad or other election communications that contain materially deceptive content – including deepfakes," Mr. Newsom said.

What are the new bills about? According to Mr. Newsom, users can no longer distribute ads or election communications with "materially deceptive content," including deepfakes. Mr. Newsom signed three bills in total: AB 2655 that will make large online platforms remove or label election-related deepfakes during "specific periods"; AB 2839 to expand the interval during which posters cannot distribute election ads or

material with "deceptive" AI-generated or manipulated content; and AB 2355 that requires electoral ads with AI or altered content to disclose the same. The three bills also give regulators and law enforcement bodies the power to handle such media through legal means or have them taken down. "Safeguarding the integrity of elections is essential to democracy, and it's critical that we ensure AI is not deployed to undermine the public's trust through disinformation – especially in today's fraught political climate. These measures will help to combat the harmful use of deepfakes in political ads and other content, one of several areas in which the state is being proactive to foster transparent and trustworthy AI," said Mr. Newsom in an official press note on September 17.

How watertight are the bills? The bills largely apply to California and expand already existing laws regarding election-related conduct that prevent highly altered media from being circulated for a stipulated number of days before or after elections in the state. While Mr. Musk claimed that the governor's actions are in violation of the Constitution of the United States, a number of compliant AI companies have already established filters and content restrictions that stop users from making deepfakes of election candidates, officials, heads of state, celebrities, etc. AB-2655 stated: "This bill, to be known

as the Defending Democracy from Deepfake Deception Act of 2024, would require a large online platform, as defined, to block the posting of materially deceptive content related to elections in California, during specified periods before and after an election. The bill would require a large online platform to label certain additional content inauthentic, fake, or false during specified periods before and after an election in California." These are largely standard requirements across most jurisdictions, and major search engine platforms have also committed to identifying or watermarking AI-generated images in order to prevent user confusion and the dissemination of false news. Mr. Musk has used parody as an excuse to defend the deepfake campaign ad showing Ms. Harris in a negative light. In fact, AB 2655 stated the bill "would also exempt content that is satire or parody." While the original deepfake video's poster stated that it was a parody, one version that Mr. Musk shared on X on July 27 did not have any Community Notes or platform-based disclosures that made it clear the media was fake. **What will happen if someone violates the regulations?** Though the newly signed bills and the existing laws have laid out measures for violations, it is not yet clear how this will play out in reality if someone violates the new regulations. The bills were signed almost fifty days before the U.S. election is

set to take place, so it will be difficult to assess how effective or rigorous they are in such a short time span. Adding to this, the bills may not severely penalise non-compliant individuals or entities. While AB 2355 states that the following disclosure – "Ad generated or substantially altered using artificial intelligence" – should be added to applicable media content, the bill noted that violating the disclosure requirements "does not constitute a misdemeanour." Though powerful stakeholders such as Mr. Musk are not likely to be curtailed by the new bills, the legislation may be used to shine a light on the rising volume of AI-generated misinformation spreading across X. A significant portion of this is enabled by the Grok AI chatbot, which has fewer content restrictions than its counterparts from more compliant AI companies. Ultimately, repeated violations of California's laws could land X in legal hot water over time, and affect its already shaky standing with more risk-averse advertisers. In response to Mr. Newsom's news of the bills being signed, Mr. Musk again amplified the parody campaign ad featuring Ms. Harris that prompted criticism from the governor in the first place. Mr. Musk shared the deepfake video with his more than 180 million followers, saying it "would be a shame if it went viral." However, the version he shared this time clearly identified the video as a parody.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

K. Subrahmanian
Upendran

"It's no use."
"What's no use?"
"There's no point in even talking about it. I'm sure it's going to happen."
"Will you please stop beating about the bush and tell me?"
"I have a test tomorrow."
"I know that. You've been talking about it for the past four days."
"I'm sure I'm going to get a zero."
"Oh please don't start that again. How many times do I have to tell you that you won't get a zero. You'll do well."
"No, I won't. I'm sure I'll fail."
"Oh stop being a gloomster."
"A gloomster? Who is a gloomster?"
"A gloomster is a pessimist. He/she keeps telling you that something terrible is going to happen. Gloomsters in the Department of Agriculture predict a world-wide famine this year."
"Oh no."
"And Renuka, our local gloomster, keeps telling me that the world is coming to an end next week."
"I wish it would come to an end today; then I won't have to write the test."
"Why are you so worried about the test? Haven't you prepared for it?"
"Of course, I have. I've gone through the lessons thrice."
"How many times do I have to tell you, it's not thrice, but three times."
"Sorry, I keep forgetting. It's once, twice, three times, four times... Right?"
"That's right. 'Thrice' has become old-fashioned and native speakers of English don't use it anymore except occasionally in poetry."
"Thrice has become old-fashioned, eh? Well, in that case, let me say that I have gone through my lessons three times."
"Then what's your problem? I am sure you are well-prepared."
"I'm well-prepared. But you see I keep thinking..."
"Don't think too much. It can wear you out."
"Too much thinking can wear me out?"
"It means that too much thinking can make you tired. When you wear someone out, it means that you make him/her extremely tired. I looked after my little nephews for a day last month. Their constant shouting and crying wore me out by the afternoon."
"Your nephews sound like my cousins. Whenever they visit us, they wear everyone out within an hour."
"Full of energy, are they?"
"You bet. Too much energy if you ask me. They run non-stop."
"Then they must be wearing out their shoes quickly."
"Wearing out their shoes? Can shoes become tired?"
"Shoes? Tired?"
"Didn't you say to wear someone out means to make them tired?"
"That's right. But I'm not talking about someone now. I'm talking about something. I'm talking about the shoes. If you wear something out, it means that you have used it so long, so much, it's become useless through long use. It becomes unfit to wear."
Published in *The Hindu* on June 15, 1993.

THE DAILY QUIZ

A quiz in the light of India's gold medal winning performances in the Chess Olympiad

Srinivasan Raman

QUESTION 1 Which player registered the first medal winning performance for India? He did so in the 1980 Malta Olympiad while playing on the third board.

QUESTION 2 Name the Grandmaster who holds the record for representing India in the most number of games in the open section of the Chess Olympiad.

QUESTION 3 GM D. Gukesh, who won gold in the 2022 and 2024 Chess Olympiads on the first board, holds the enviable record of scoring 17 points in 20 games

with just one loss. Name the only player to have beaten Gukesh in the Olympiads.

QUESTION 4 Speaking of Gukesh, the Chennai-based GM finished with a performance ELO rating of 3056, the highest in the Budapest Olympiad. Which Indian player registered the second highest ELO rating – 2968?

QUESTION 5 Prior to the 2022 Olympiad in Chennai when India's second team won bronze, the 2014 Indian team also won bronze in the open section. Name the Indian GM with the best performance rating from this team the finished with an ELO of 2757.



Visual question: Identify these three chess players (their surname is enough), who first represented India in the women's section in the 1978 Chess Olympiad.

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz: 1. The number of sign languages which currently exist in the world. **Ans: 300 plus**
2. In this country's sign language format, a well-formed question requires a specific eyebrow position. **Ans: American Sign Language**
3. Does brain damage affect the ability to sign? **Ans: Yes, just as with speech, brain damage can affect an individual's ability to sign**
4. The number of deaf people in the world. **Ans: 70 million**
5. This person is said to have collated the first known manual alphabet. **Ans: Pedro Ponce de Leon, a Benedictine monk**
Visual: The meaning of this gesture in Indian Sign Language. **Ans: Woman**
Early Birds: Tamal Biswas, J.N. Viswanathan

Word of the day

Dally: behave carelessly or indifferently; waste time; talk or behave amorously, without serious intentions

Synonyms: toy, play, flirt, dawdle, romance, philander, chat up, coquette, trifle

Usage: Go out and get some milk, and don't dally on the way.

Pronunciation: newsth.live/dallypro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /ˈdæli/

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

Massive Greenland landslide sent seismic waves around earth for 9 days

One year ago, roughly 25 million cubic metres of ice and rock splashed into the Dickson Fjord in Greenland and displaced the water enough to give rise to a 200-metre high mega-tsunami; in this way, a melting glacier led to a planet-wide tremor, and researchers warn that it may not be the last

T.V.Venkateswaran

On September 16, 2023, several seismic stations worldwide detected a bizarre signal. Earthquakes are not rare. In 2023 alone, 1,712 earthquakes of magnitude 5 or more were registered worldwide. But these seismic waves were puzzling; the signatures clearly indicated that earthquakes had not caused them, and the reverberations lasted for a staggering nine days.

A mysterious ringing

"We saw it on sensors everywhere, from the Arctic to Antarctica," Stephen Hicks, a computational seismology research fellow at University College London, and Kristian Svennevig, senior researcher at the Geological Survey of Denmark and Greenland, wrote in a recent article. They are coauthors of the study reporting their findings, published in *Science* on September 12.

When you play the violin, you yank multiple strings together, which emit sounds at a mix of frequencies. Seismic waves from earthquakes behave the same way. However, the hum the seismologists recorded had only one frequency — like only one string of the violin had been plucked. That is not characteristic of tremors.

At first, the seismologists classified this wave as a "USO", an unidentified seismic object. "Even more puzzling was that the signal kept going for nine days," Hicks and Svennevig wrote. Earthquake vibrations also produce aftershocks. But in this case, the reverberations faded more slowly than one might anticipate from an earthquake.

A global effort

What set off the tremble? Only powerful events like volcano eruptions or clandestine nuclear weapons tests could unleash this much energy. Seismologists were intrigued.

To resolve the enigma, more than 68 researchers from 40 universities in 15 countries teamed up across disciplines. After piecing together numerous datasets and using computer simulations, the team realised the waves were caused by a massive landslide on the banks of the Dickson Fjord in Greenland.

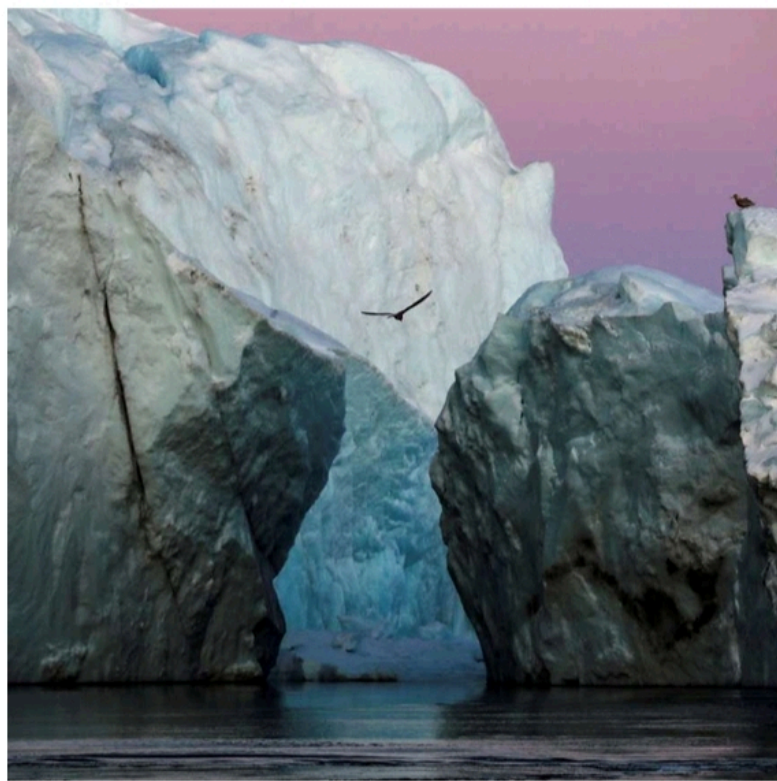
According to Hicks and Svennevig, "solving this mystery required putting many diverse pieces of evidence together, from a treasure trove of seismic data to satellite imagery, in-fjord water level monitors, and detailed simulations" of how the water reacted.

The team even had to obtain a classified army bathymetric map of the fjord from the Danish Navy. It took about a year to assemble the jigsaw pieces and get the complete picture.

Rocks in the water

A fjord is a geological structure created when glaciers erode a valley below sea level and the sea water floods it. They frequently feature U-shaped channels that stretch well inland, surrounded by high cliffs or hills.

A series of events, starting with the collapse of Hvite Stuvhorn peak, located approximately 1.2 km from the fjord, culminated in a mega-tsunami. The rockslide rolling down gained momentum and shattered the glacier, resulting in a rock-ice avalanche. According to the



Melting away: Icebergs seen at the mouth of the Jakobshavn ice fjord near Ilulissat in Greenland. FILE PHOTO

authors, the avalanche triggered a submarine landslide. Roughly 25 million cubic metres of ice and rock, enough to fill 10,000 Olympic-sized swimming pools, splashed into the fjord, displacing the water enough to give rise to a 200-metre-high mega-tsunami, nearly three times the height of the iconic Srirangam Temple in Tamil Nadu.

Slashing waves

The mega-tsunami did not kill anyone but it damaged an unstaffed research facility on the island of Ella, some 72 km away, as well as monuments of cultural and archaeological importance in the area.

A tsunami's waves in an ocean would have spread and dispersed. But in the 540-metre-deep and 2.7-km-wide fjord, the waves were reflected back and forth by the opposing banks. The rebounding waves reached a height of almost 110 metres.

This back-and-forth sloshing in the fjord is called a seiche. About five minutes after the material plunged into the water, the waves settled slowly into a seiche with a maximum amplitude of 7.4 m and a dominant frequency of 11.45 MHz, oscillating every 90 seconds.

For more than nine days, the waves in the Dickson Fjord kept up their dance, moving from side to side around 10,000

For more than nine days, the waves in the Dickson Fjord kept up their dance, moving from side to side around 10,000 times

times. These oscillations matched the strange waves the seismic stations had recorded.

The alarm bell

The ice-rock avalanche and the waves' motions rang the earth's surface like a gong, and the reverberations spread across the globe, causing the entire earth to ring like a bell.

Researchers also examined the cause of the enormous landslide. Before the collapse, the ice at the glacier's foot had supported the rocky slopes. Satellite pictures and other data revealed the foot had been shrinking rapidly the last few decades thanks to global warming. As the ice thawed, it could not support the weight at the top. The rock breached it and slid violently downslope, concluding with the mega-tsunami.

"It is a stark reminder that we are navigating uncharted waters," Hicks and Svennevig wrote. "Just a year ago, the idea that a seiche could persist for nine days would have been dismissed as

absurd. Similarly, a century ago, the notion that warming could destabilise slopes in the Arctic, leading to massive landslides and tsunamis happening almost yearly, would have been considered far-fetched. Yet these once-unthinkable events are now becoming our new reality."

Nature's earthshakers

A melting glacier led to a planet-wide tremor, and it may not be the last.

Arctic and subarctic regions are warming at a pace two-to-three times that of the rest of the planet. As the ice cover melts, the darker rock surfaces are exposed. They absorb more light, leading to faster melting of the ice cover in the Arctic. And we can expect glacial melting will only increase the rate of ice-related landslides.

"This certainly won't be the last such landslide mega-tsunami," Hicks and Svennevig cautioned. "As permafrost on steep slopes continues to warm and glaciers continue to thin we can expect these events to happen more often and on an even bigger scale across the world's polar and mountainous regions."

(T.V. Venkateswaran is a science communicator and visiting faculty member at the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, Mohali. tvv23@gmail.com)



A white rhino calf next to its mother at Bulo Zoon in Santiago, Chile, on April 7, 2024. AFP

Number of rhinos slightly increases, but so does threat of poaching

Associated Press

The rhinoceros population across the world has increased slightly but so have the killings, mostly in South Africa, as poaching led by huge demand for rhino horns remains a top threat, conservationists said in a new report.

The number of white rhinos increased from 15,942 in 2022 to 17,464 in 2023, but the black and greater one-horned rhino stayed the same, according to the report published by the International Rhino Foundation ahead of World Rhino Day on September 22.

Another subspecies, the northern white rhino, is technically extinct with only two females being kept in a secure private conservancy in Kenya. A trial is ongoing to develop embryos in the lab

ONLY FOR NEWS: <https://thehindu.com/thispersonthat>

With all five subspecies combined, there are just under 28,000 rhinos left in the world, from 5,00,000 at the beginning of the 20th century

from an egg and sperm previously collected from white rhinos and transferring it into a surrogate female black rhino.

A total of 586 rhinos were killed in Africa in 2023, most of them in South Africa, which has the highest population of rhinos at an estimated 16,056. The killings increased from 551 reported in 2022, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

With all five subspecies combined, there are just under 28,000 rhinos left in the world, from 5,00,000 at the beginning of the 20th century.

Rhinos face various environmental threats like habitat loss due to development and climate change. But poaching, based on the belief that their horns have medicinal uses, remains the top threat.

Philip Muruthi, the vice president for species conservation at the Africa Wildlife Foundation, said protection has played a big role in increasing rhino population. In Kenya, their numbers rose from 380 in 1986 to 1,000 last year, he said. "Why has that happened? Because the rhinos were brought into sanctuaries and were protected."

Muruthi advocates for a campaign that will end the demand for rhino horn and adopt new technologies to track and monitor rhinos for their protection while also educating communities on the benefits of rhinos to the ecosystem and the economy.

Known as mega herbivores that mow the parks and create inroads for other herbivores, rhinos are also good for establishing forests by ingesting seeds and spreading them across the parks in their dung. Muruthi lamented that the northern white rhino should have never gotten so close to the brink of extinction.

The body of the last male northern white rhino, named Sudan, that died in 2018 has been preserved and displayed at the Museums of Kenya in Nairobi.

A research scientist and curator of mammals at the museum, Bernard Agwanda, said preserving Sudan will tell the story of how the species lived among humans and why conservation is important.

THE SCIENCE QUIZ

Unearthing the science of archaeology

Siva Shakthi A.

QUESTION 1

The term _____ reveals details about the composition and depositional environment of a rock, helping geologists interpret ancient landscapes and climate conditions by analysing the rock's characteristics. Fill in the blank.

QUESTION 2

Name the robust archaeological technique predominantly used to map and detect subsurface features. It can't be used very well in conductive soils like dense clay and salt marshes, where signal penetration and resolution are considerably reduced.

QUESTION 3

In archaeology, _____ refers to determining the age of artefacts in relation to one another, using methods like seriation, which arranges items based on changes in style or frequency

of different events over time. On the other hand, _____ refers to determining a specific chronological age using techniques like radiocarbon dating or dendrochronology. Fill in the blanks.

QUESTION 4

What archaeological method — initially devised for geophysical studies, rooted in the principles of electricity, and explored by scientists in the late 16th century — measures how electrical currents interact with subsurface materials to locate and map buried structures?

QUESTION 5

What groundbreaking technology, which allows researchers to extract and sequence the genetic material from excavated ancient remains, was first successfully applied in archaeology to study Neanderthal fossils, significantly advancing our understanding of human evolution and ancient populations?



Visual question: Name this 17th century Danish scientist known for formulating the laws of stratigraphy, based on which he proposed that the earth's crust evolved in a series of events over time. PUBLIC DOMAIN

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

Answers to September 17 quiz:

1. Concept requiring scientific theories to be capable of being proven wrong — Ans: **Falsifiability**
 2. Historian who described changes in science with paradigm changes — Ans: **Thomas Kuhn**
 3. Quantum mechanics interpretation against which Popper argued — Ans: **Copenhagen interpretation**
 4. Popper's influential 1934 book — Ans: **The Logic of Scientific Discovery**
 5. Belief that science could establish truths with empirical studies alone — Ans: **Inductivism**
- Visual: **Johannes Kepler**

First contact:

Seema Das | Anand Singh Anmol
Agrawal | K.N. Viswanathan |
Dalbeer Singh Pharswan

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QUAD'S SUBTLE YET STRONG MESSAGE TO CHINA

EVEN as the members of the Quad, or the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, have decided on forging closer ties among themselves, US President Biden indirectly let the cat out of the bag that China is indeed the main concern. All other issues paled before it.

PM Narendra Modi, US President Joe Biden, Australian PM Anthony Albanese and Japanese PM Fumio Kishida just met at the Quad Leaders' summit at Wilmington in Delaware state in the US to open their hearts on issues specific to Asia Pacific region and other global issues such as wars being waged by Ukraine and Israel. If at all the summit achieved anything, it is their greater resolve to come closer and strengthen the bonds.

"A free, open, inclusive and prosperous Indo-Pacific is our shared priority and shared commitment," they affirmed, while also exploring initiatives in areas such as health, security, critical and emerging technologies, climate change and capacity building.

All being democracies, where rule of law reigns, they are now more strategically aligned than ever before to counter any threat to international rules-based order. The summit decided on extending new maritime technologies to their regional partners in the Indo-Pacific region. For the first time, a convergence among coast guards will be forged to improve interoperability and advance maritime safety. The four leaders strongly committed to "maintenance of peace, safety, security and stability in the maritime domain, underpin the sustainable development, and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific. We emphasize the importance of adherence to international law, particularly as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)..."

We are seriously concerned about the situation in the East and South China Seas."

It is in a way strong yet subtle message to China over its growing aggressive behaviour in both China Seas. China claims sovereignty over the areas covered by its nine-dash line, a set of line segments on maps, in the South China Sea, such as Prata Islands, Paracel Islands, Macclesfield Bank, Scarborough Shoal, and the Spratly Islands. Its claims overlap with those of Brunei, Indonesia,

Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam. It even defies an order in 2016 by the Permanent Court of Arbitration at Hague against its territorial claims.

More than one-fifth of global trade, estimated at about \$3.4 trillion in 2016, passes through the South China Sea. Its Strait of Malacca is a key crossroads between the Pacific and the Indian Oceans. It is also rich in oil, natural gas, and fish. If China has its way, it can use Taiwan Strait, East China Sea and South China Sea to stall cargo traffic to Korean Peninsula and Japanese Archipelago, and hence the involvement of Japan in the Quad.

In East China Sea (ECS), China has high tensions with Japan and South Korea over its claims on exclusive economic zones. Connected

to the SCS, the Yellow Sea, the Sea of Japan and the Pacific Ocean, the ECS is at the crossroads of global commerce.

Amidst these developments, Australia which quit the Quad in 2008, a year after its inception, over fears of hurting its interests with China later rejoined it, realising the dragon's threat to regional peace and global commerce. India's stand at the Quad is a balanced one. In a clear signal to China, PM Modi said that they "are not against anyone", but are together only to support a rules-based international order, respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, and peaceful resolution of all issues. China is given a subtle, yet strong, warning not to attempt to unilaterally change the status quo in maritime disputes by force or coercion.

'IRREVERSIBLE HARM'

Norwegian deep-sea mining threatens Arctic biodiversity

OLIVIA ROSANE

NORWAY's plans to move forward with deep-sea mining could do irreparable damage to unique Arctic ecosystems and even drive unobserved species to extinction. That's the warning issued Friday in a Greenpeace report titled Deep Sea Mining in the Arctic Living Treasures at Risk. The environmental group argues that Norway's mining plans contradict its previous ecological commitments, such as its 2020 pledge to manage 100% of its ocean area sustainably by 2025.

"The measure of a nation's success is not how many promises it makes, but how it honors them and how much of its ecosystem is safeguarded for present and future generations," Greenpeace Nordic campaigner Haldis Tjeldflaet Helle said in a statement. "While Norway claims to be a respectable nation with responsible policies on ocean management, it's rolling out the red carpet for deep-sea mining companies to deploy machines that will cause irreversible harm to the Arctic's unique and vulnerable biodiversity. Somehow Norway's words and ocean commitments get forgotten when profit opportunities arise. We cannot let that happen."

"Mining will cause permanent damage to those ecosystems and it will remain impossible to assess the full extent of those

impacts, let alone control them."

Norway's parliament sparked a global outrage when it voted to explore its Arctic seabed for minerals in January 2024. Its Ministry of Energy then released a plan for the first round of licenses in June. The country aims to extend its first licenses next year and see mining begin by 2030.

Now, the Greenpeace report details what would be at stake if it does so. "The Arctic is a unique and vital marine environment, home to one of the world's most fragile and diverse ecosystems, crucial for global climate regulation and supporting a wide array of species found nowhere else on Earth," Greenpeace International executive director Mads Christensen wrote in the report foreword. "The recent decision by Norway to open up 281,200 square kilometers of its claim to an extended continental shelf to deep-sea mining is putting ocean life and the livelihoods of those who depend on it at grave risk."

The mining would threaten life at all levels of the ocean and all nodes in the marine food web. Norway is hoping to mine for metals in the manganese crusts around hydrothermal vents, but these vents have also enabled a diverse array of life.

"They are home to creatures such as stalked jellyfish, tube worm forests, and hairy shrimps hosting



Norway's parliament sparked global outrage when it voted to explore its Arctic seabed for minerals in January 2024. Its Ministry of Energy then released a plan for the first round of licenses in June. The country aims to extend its first licenses next year and see mining begin by 2030. Now, the Greenpeace report details what would be at stake if it does so

colonies of bacteria that can convert toxic hydrogen sulphides and methane into energy," Christensen wrote. "These are unique habitats with endemic species that can be found nowhere else on Earth, including ones that have yet to be scientifically described."

Deep-sea species like sponges, stony corals, sea pens, sea fans, lace corals, and black corals are also particularly vulnerable because they grow slowly, mature late, reproduce infrequently, and live for a long time. The habitats they form are therefore classified as

Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems. Mining would disturb these ecosystems directly as "underwater robots" would both damage and remove them in the hunt for metals.

However, the impacts of deep-sea mining extend beyond the seabed and include sediment plumes, the release of toxins, the alteration of the substrate and its geochemistry, noise and light pollution, and moving some organisms from one part of the sea to another. These could harm both marine and human communities, as unique conditions in the Arctic Ocean create

a spring phytoplankton bloom that feeds important fisheries like herring, mackerel, and blue whiting. The area also draws migrating seabirds and several species of marine mammals. In particular, 12 species of marine mammals are commonly found in the area slated for mining: minke whale, humpback whale, fin whale, blue whale, bowhead whale, northern bottlenose whale, sperm whale, orca, narwhal, white-beaked dolphin, harp seal, and hooded seal.

"Although it has long been documented that whales and dolphins live in this area, we still know remarkably little about their abundance, distribution, and behaviors, including how much they rely on healthy ecosystems around seamounts," Kirsten Young, a science lead at Greenpeace Research Laboratories at the University of Exeter, said in a statement. "Mining will cause permanent damage to those ecosystems and it will remain impossible to assess the full extent of those impacts, let alone control them."

"What is clear is that Norway's plans not only directly threaten species and habitats on the seabed, but also the wider marine ecosystem, from the tiniest plankton to the great whales," Young concluded.

Norway's plans also come as the region is already undergoing changes due to the burning of fossil fuels and the heating of the atmos-

phere and oceans. A 2023 assessment of the ecosystems of the Norwegian Sea found that both water temperatures and ocean acidification had increased.

Acidification in particular is of "grave concern" in the sea because it is moving more quickly than the global average. (<https://www.commondreams.org>)

"As the waters of the Nordic Seas become more acidic, there will be impacts to species, ecosystems, and ecosystem functioning as a result of changes to organisms' structure, distribution, and ability to function," Greenpeace wrote. Greenpeace is calling on Norway to abandon its plans for deep-sea mining and add its name to a list of countries backing a moratorium on the practice. In addition, the group urges Norway to instead facilitate more scientific research in its Arctic waters and to protect a network of 30% of them by 2030 in keeping with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and work with other nations to preserve all marine environments under the global ocean treaty.

"Now, when six of the nine planetary boundaries have been exceeded, is not the time to be opening up a new frontier to extraction, but one when we should all be doubling down on doing what is needed to safeguard the wildlife and ecosystems that we share this wonderful blue planet with," Christensen said.

LETTERS

Lanka presidency takes left turn

A NURA Kumara Dissanayake, 55, has become a symbol of political transformation in Sri Lanka, rising from a humble rural background to claim the country's presidency in a groundbreaking election. While in university in the early 1990s, his growing political activism drew him to the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), a left-wing Marxist-Leninist party that was characterised by armed uprisings in 1971 and 1987-89 and represented the oppressed Sinhalese rural youth. The violent insurrections led by the JVP were fuelled by a hardline Marxism ideology aimed at overthrowing the existing political and economic systems, which they viewed as exploitative and feudalistic. Thus we could witness Lanka taking a left turn and moving fast for a new era in island politics.

Dorai Ramani Suresh, Ghaziabad

Laddu row: SIT will achieve little

WHY didn't devotees complain any illness after consuming laddus? Many malpractices are happening without any fear of God. Are Charvakas appointed in the holy shrines? All our epics and puranas are delving deep on what is Dharma and Adharma. What surprises is we are committing all these sins knowingly. But change is not seen towards righteousness. It is pitiable and unpardonable.

N Ramalakshmi, Secunderabad

REQUEST horrible Chief Minister to conduct a full investigation into the developments at Tirumala and punish the culprits severely. People who have faith in moral values and are not involved in politics should be appointed as members of the governing body. A law should be made to ensure that the income generated by the devotees of Sri Varu is used only for the development of Tirumala Kshetram and for the construction of facilities. The government should take steps to ensure complete transparency in the utilization of funds by protecting the assets of TTD.

Appanna Gonapa, Visakhapatnam

THIS refers to "SIT" to probe Tirumala laddu adulteration (23 Sep). I think it is clearly proved that whole Laddu prasadam adulteration has come as "Varaprasadam" for both TDP Chief Minister CBN and JSP DCM PK. Instead of directing the TTD to book the supplier of adulterated ghee, both of them are adulterating sentiments of the people with politics, and no wonder CM is leading Shanti Pariharam and DCM is performing Deeksha in Guntur. The disunity itself proves that both want to take credit for fighting for devotees. The SIT by police officials is of no use and they have zero scientific knowledge about food safety and even if they take the assistance of food analyst, their report would not be fair which can lead to another round of blame game etc.

N Nagarajan, Hyderabad

IT is astonishing to note that TDP was sleeping for two months on the lab report before making it public. There is no valid reason for this delay and the two months period was surreptitiously used by TDP to cook up evidence and buy support to corner YSRK, which in turn launched counter offensive by demanding CBI investigation or a probe by a former judge of SC. But for using the media to finish the opposition in AR, the TDP or for that matter the NDA did precious little to effectively win the confidence of the people who voted them to power, by implementing their electoral promises including Super 6 guarantees.

Govardhana Myneddu, Vijayawada

ANR award at IIT-H ill-advised

THE instituting of the ANR award in the field of acting and performing arts is an otherwise highly technologically-oriented academic prestigious institution like Indian Institute of Technology-Hyderabad (IIT-H) seems quite odd and out of place. Instead it is baffling if such an award is instituted in the Films and Television Institute of India (FTII), Pune.

Seshagiri Row Karri, Hyderabad

Will Congress gambit pay off?

THOUGH the grand old party still needs allies in most states, its attitude towards ally AAP after the seat-sharing talks in Haryana not coming through is a clear revelation of its old policy of sidelining a party after it served the needs in Lok Sabha polls. Congress duplicity is exposed which may prove counter-productive to the party in the coming polls in Haryana on account of AAP deciding to go it alone in the home state of Kejriwal, where his popularity has not fully diminished.

K R Srinivasan, Secunderabad

thehansreader@gmail.com

Impediments to economic growth

SATYAPAL MENON

INDIA'S inherent potential to scale many notches up the economic scale have been stymied by lethal combination of lopsided policies, gross mismanagement of resources, dysfunctional and malfunctioning official machinery, omnipresent corruption and unscrupulous political regimes.

One of the major impediments to the overall economic progress is the massive drain on the exchequer caused by the huge cost escalation due to protracted implementation and completion of infrastructure projects. For obvious reasons, this crucial fact is either downplayed or pushed under the carpet, while showcasing performance indicators.

Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) data on delayed projects and its financial implications, reflects gross irresponsibility and laid-back style of implementing agencies. According to the

latest data, time and resultant cost overruns of 448 projects - worth Rs 150 crore and above - amounted to 5.55 lakh crore. The original cost of 1,838 projects, which was Rs 27,64,246.50 crore at the implementation stage, is estimated to increase by over 20 per cent to Rs 33,19,601.84 crore at the time of completion. A total of 792 projects have overshot their deadlines for completion, of which, the completion of 380 projects will be delayed by 5 years to more than 5 years beyond schedule. Can India afford the huge loss incurred from avoidable delays in project implementation?

Project cost and resultant time overruns have proved to be main impediments to development and growth of the country. An economy starved or deprived of resources and infrastructure will become brittle and unsustainable. For instance, agriculture output would have increased manifold if irrigation projects had been completed according to



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schedule. Increased water resources would have facilitated more areas including drought prone areas to be brought under cultivation. Dearth of infrastructure could mean stagnant or sluggish growth. Projects completed after a long duration could also result in their possible redundancy

- the infrastructure would no longer be of any use after completion. Such an eventuality has become a possibility in view of fast paced state-of-the-art developments.

Indian economy has incurred huge losses due to delay in completion of projects. According to reports, on an average project delays have

been in range of 5 to 20 years. Cost and time overruns will not only impose heavy burden on the finances, but also incapacitate the country to keep pace with the growing demands for infrastructure.

The ramifications of cost and time overruns are many and it impacts every area of economy. Cost escalation would force the government to opt for more borrowings or make adjustments in the budgeted allocations for other purposes. Such unplanned expenditure and debts to meet project cost escalation will inevitably create a huge burden on the government coffers apart from considerable increase in debt servicing. According to the finance ministry India's external borrowings as on March 2024 was at a whopping \$663 billion and its interest payments on these debts is reported to be around 20 per cent of the country's total expenditure.

The narrative continues with financial burdens accumulating to insurmountable proportions. The Comptroller and Audit General

of India - CAG - have very often exposed innumerable deficiencies and improprieties in the implementation of government projects and the resultant cost and time overruns. It has also, frequently, pointed out flimsy and irrational reasons given by the governments to justify their indiscretions.

Shockingly, there have never been any attempts on the part of the various governments to rectify the faults within and prevent cost and time overruns. Establishments, over the years have been quick to come out with excuses and reasons for delays, but demonstrated an innate incompetence in preventing the resultant fiscal anarchy. India is also paying a heavy price due to omnipresent corruption in the corridors of power. Projects are overvalued to a level many times higher than the original cost to accommodate bribes for those at the helm of affairs.

(Writer is a senior journalist)

FIRST COLUMN EMBRACING CONVENIENCE

By purchasing convenience are we not risking our skills and self-reliance



RACHNA LAKHPATRI

Advanced gadgets in today's world offer convenience and enhance our daily lives. However, at some point, it appears that we have lost sight of the delicate balance between tools that improve productivity and objects that simply encourage laziness. Similar to our homes, the market is currently filled with a wide array of devices that seem to serve little purpose other than solving problems that we never really had to begin with. Consider the salad mixer or the corn stripper, for instance. At first glance, these products offer a convenient solution for busy households looking to save time. But are they truly necessary?

Is it really necessary to rely on machines to mix our salad or remove kernels from a cob, when these tasks can be effortlessly accomplished using our own hands? The consumer market is saturated with a plethora of gadgets and products that claim to simplify our lives. In reality, they contribute to the mess in our homes and encourage a lifestyle focused on convenience that is quite lazy. It's not simply about the quantity of these devices; it's about their significance. In the past, advancements such as washing machines and microwaves were highly praised for their ability to liberate people from mundane household tasks, allowing them to focus on more meaningful activities.

These products had a significant impact on productivity, allowing for more efficient use of time without any negative effects on individuals. However, in this era of excessive consumerism, the notion of convenience has been taken to extreme levels. We're bombarded with a never-ending array of products that promise to make our lives easier,



allowing us to save time and avoid any sort of physical exertion. What is the outcome? We are growing more disconnected from basic, everyday tasks, relying instead on gadgets that often end up forgotten in the cupboard once their initial excitement wears off.

This crowded marketplace is a clear outcome of a society consumed by materialism. Our lives are constantly bombarded with advertising, convincing us that every small inconvenience can be solved by purchasing the latest product. Is life meant to be devoid of challenges? Or does it include striking a balance between making life simpler and limiting ourselves to doing things ourselves? We should consider whether the items we buy fulfil a genuine need or if they are making us passive participants in our own lives. Our goal is to find ways to make daily routines less burdensome.

We should be discerning consumers; the aim is to invest in products that genuinely enhance our lives, rather than filling our homes with things that pretend to be convenient but encourage laziness. Furthermore, the excessive consumption of products has significant consequences for the natural environment. Each unnecessary item contributes to the escalating issues of waste and resource depletion. In addition, the ongoing cost of constantly chasing after the latest and most desirable gadget is something that many households simply cannot afford.

As consumers, we hold the power to create change through the choices we make. We should strive for sustainable purchases that would help simplify life but not erode our self-reliance. In essence, life is about investing time and energy wisely in what matters, not buying something we don't need. So, the next time you feel tempted to purchase something new, take a moment to reflect: does this item genuinely simplify my life, or am I simply becoming more inclined towards laziness?

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

Women's fight for equality expands to the digital space

In today's world, women are asserting their rights not only in public but also in digital spaces, demanding equality across all aspects of life



PRIYANKA CHATURVEDI



Women were the original "computers." Back in the late 1800s, these women computer workers in the sciences, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, manually crunching large amounts of data through tedious computations, a task often deemed too trivial for male scientists. Somewhere between then and today, not only has our role as being seen as the backbone of STEM research diminished, but we have also lost an equal stake in the development of modern technologies.

Today, women around us actively demand equality in all aspects of life, including the digital space. Innumerable women-led protests have driven change around the world and have taken over digital spaces as well. However, relics of historical marginalisation have crept into our virtual spaces and settled as obstacles for women in their paths to achieving digital equity, as a result of which they face biases, are actively silenced, and are subject to abuse.

Recently, I visited Warsaw to attend the Vital Voices Global Action Summit, which focused on women for rights and democracy, where I witnessed a convergence of voices of women across countries and spheres of work - activism, policy, and politics. The convergence of these voices was not limited to advocating for increased women's representation and highlighting how women are fighting back for stronger democracies as their rights form the bedrock of democratic countries; but also on how women have unequal access to technology, how tech creates a skewed idea of democracy by actively invisibilising and silencing women, how social media algorithms are not addressing the challenges women face on various platforms that "promote the idea of free speech" and how that very "free speech" is used as a tool by bullies and autocrats with no definitive action against trolling. These challenges are globally acknowledged, and all countries are committed to addressing them through ideas of rights and democracy.

In India, the most significant obstacle has been the lack of access to mobile phones and the Internet.



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According to the latest NFHS survey, only one-third of our female population between the ages of 15 and 49 have ever used the Internet, compared to more than half of the male population in the same age group. The digital divide worsens with factors like an increase in women's age, a decrease in their family incomes, and for those women belonging to marginalised communities and living in rural areas. Additionally, women often lack ownership of mobile phones, with their devices shared or monitored by other family members, further hindering their digital participation.

For those women who manage to overcome these access barriers, the next challenge emerges - an alarmingly high rate of cybercrimes comprising threats, violence, pornography, stalking, and more. This poses a double-edged sword, with Indian courts reportedly taking cases of sexual harassment and other forms of online bullying less seriously than offences committed in the physical world. Together, the two sides create a chilling effect and inhibit women from being vocal on social media platforms and taking up roles that bring them to the digital limelight, including politics. Moreover, Indian female politicians face significantly more trolling than those in the US or UK, with those from minority groups and those challenging societal norms and male political leaders facing more vicious attacks of hate campaigns. The Bulli Bai and Sulli Deals scandals should serve as reminders of the severity of threats and bullying that target women in order to silence them - a case which remained unaddressed by the central government for long. It was the Mumbai Police, under the Maha Vikas Aghadi government led by Uddhav Thackeray, which had cracked the case and brought the accused to book after the victims' relentless hopes that the central gov-

ernment would step in and take it up with the social media platforms. The third obstacle is strange and ever-evolving: the social media algorithm. Despite its perceived progressiveness, this algorithm seems to propagate long-held biases that we have been trying to eliminate from society. Artificial intelligence technologies came with promises to improve user experiences and make social media platforms safer for all its users. However, these promises seem to have been limited to certain sections of society. Human biases have translated into AI biases and reflect sexist and racist tendencies. For instance, photographs of men and women in similar contexts are judged differently by AI technologies. Images of women in sportswear or lingerie have been scored much higher in AI's "racy" scale compared to comparable photos of men. Avatar-generating AI apps have demonstrated similar patterns, with AI seeing men as astronauts, warriors, or on music album covers and women's avatars being mostly nude and over-sexualised versions of themselves. The AI's bias becomes more evident when female faces are labelled male and the avatars turn into more assertive-looking and fully-clothed characters.

The problem with the algorithm hurdle extends beyond individual images. The technology behind these tools is clearly flawed, yet the same is being used to control what comes in our social media feeds. Depending on how racy AI rates an image, it is suppressed from reaching its audiences without the creator being aware. Similar kinds of censorship have been noted on posts containing political messages. In different instances, algorithms have rapidly amplified misogynistic content, particularly to younger audiences, with increased content on anger and blame directed at women, indicating clear issues with the algorithm disparately affecting women.

It is unfortunately left up to women to find ways to beat the algorithm and find creative ways to fight these biases as they remain severely under-represented in the technology sector. Even at the 20 largest global technology companies, women comprise 33% of the workforce and only 25% hold leadership positions as of 2022. The challenges of policy and representation put India at an opportunity to pave the way to attain digital equity. With the world's highest number of STEM graduates - 40% of whom are women - a large fraction of the female population can be included in developing future technologies. Yet, despite these numbers, the representation of Indian women in the tech workforce remains disproportionately low.

As India positions itself as a global leader in STEM, harnessing its untapped pool of female talent through targeted policies could drive systematic change, advancing both digital and physical equity for women worldwide. Our policies need to reflect this and should become the facilitators to have more women in workplaces, that encourage having women techpreneurs, pushing industries to bring in more equity, dealing with online harassment with an iron fist and, more importantly, focussing on tech access, consequently making India a role model for the world to follow. By including more girls and women, particularly from diverse backgrounds, on technical and scientific teams, we can ensure that the development of new technologies addresses women's unique challenges around access, digital literacy, and online abuse. Training women not only for technical roles but also for leadership positions will allow them to shape tech-related policies and decisions, ultimately leading to safer, more inclusive digital spaces.

(The writer is a Shiv Sena -UBT, Rajya Sabha MP; views are personal)

The Decline of Malayalam literature: A tale of nepotism and fading standards

Driven by favouritism and political influence, prestigious literature awards are no longer a reflection of literary excellence they once used to be

The reasons for the downfall in the standards of Malayalam literary works have come out thanks to an octogenarian literary professional who is passionate about the high quality of novels, short stories, and poems authored by the likes of G Sankara Kurup. Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, Kesava Dev, S K Pottekkatt, etc.

Malayalam novels, poems and stories, a trendsetter of modern literature during the 1940-1970 period and which hogged the national limelight have paled into insignificance over the last four decades because of the poor standard of writing. The modern day writers are obsessed only with awards and the resultant cash prizes that come with it, according to C K Anandan



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

Pillai, the 81-year old editor of Sahitya Vimarsham, a quarterly publication exclusively focusing on literary works. In his pursuit to find out the reasons for the fall in the standards of Malayalam literary works, what Pillai found out is shocking. "More than the quality of the works, the writers are vying with one another to get the awards instituted by Kerala Sahitya Academy,

monopolised by the CPI(M) and Left intellectuals." The modern day Malayalam writers are ignorant about the great works of Kalidasa. They do not have any idea about Premchand, Saraswathichandrar, K M Munshi or Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyaya or even Kalki of neighboring Tamil Nadu," said Dr Ravi Shankar S Nair, leading literary critic as well as a puritan of Malayalam language.

Dr M Rajeev Kumar, himself a proponent of modern literature in Malayalam said that what is being published nowadays as novels and stories are mere juggling with words and sentences. Kesava Dev, always considered a rebel as well as revolutionary in Malayalam literature had said in the 1970s that

unless one gets hands-on experience in life and the world in which we live, no literature would be possible. Dev was the first Malayalam writer to write about head load workers, rickshaw pullers and subalterns in the Kerala society. His interactions with people in this category resulted in eternal classics like Odaly Ninnu (From the Gutter) which was written in 1940. Since the story had its origin from the bottom of his heart, the work remains an eternal classic more than eight decades after it was published. Anandan Pillai has shocking disclosures to make to the readers. The works that bag the top honours from Kerala get recognised by the National Academy of Letters in New



Delhi. Standards and qualities are dumped into gutters as third-rate writers walk away with awards and cash prizes. What happens is that the truly deserving writers never make it to the victory stand. The Vilasini Award for 2024 declared by the Kerala Sahitya Academy to P K Pokker has opened a can of worms. The Award was meant for studies in the branch of Malayalam novels and was instituted by M

K Menon (1928-1993), the author of India's longest novel The Inheritors (Avakashil) published in 1980. When Menon found that there were no serious studies about Malayalam novels, he set apart Rs five lakh as a corpus fund and instituted an award for the best study undertaken on Malayalam novels. The award carried a prize money of Rs 50,000 and a citation. The one stringent condition by Menon was that the award should be given to a serious and quality study on a novel. He also wanted the award should be named after O Chandu Menon, author of Indulekha, the first ever Malayalam novel. The Marxists ruling the Kerala Sahitya Academy threw to

the winds all the norms prescribed by M K Menon and selected Pokker's collection of essays "The Blue Light of Creativity" for this year's award. Menon had instructed in his will that there is no need for the academy to honour the writers as a ritual every year. "He had mentioned that if no quality studies are available, the award need not be given at all," said A B Raghunathan Nair, who helped Menon to draft the will. Pillai points out that this is not just one case of nepotism and favouritism which are the hallmarks of Sahitya Academy. K P Ramanunni, executive committee member of the National Academy of Letters chose Unni Ammayambal, a hitherto unheard writer for

a sub-standard work on children's literature. "The reason? Unni who was the chairman of Pottakkat Memorial Award Committee had ensured that Ramanunni got the award for the best story. Self-styled poets are all members of the award mafia ruling the roost in Malayalam literature. The National Academy of Letters, as part of a cover-up mission, has stopped publicizing the names of jury members, books that were considered and what made the selection process have put an iron curtain on queries under the RTI Act. Well, it is better to leave certain things unsaid, unexplained and undisclosed. (The writer is the south India Bureau chief of the Pioneer; views are personal)

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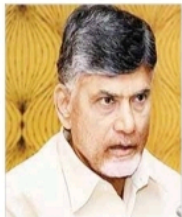
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PAPER WITH PASSION

Fixing the accountability

The possibility that Tirupati laddus contain animal fat has sparked outrage and fueled bitter political battle

Whether driven by apathy or greed, the Tirupati laddus have been found to contain substandard ingredients, with reports of adulteration, including animal fat, an act that many consider a sacrilege against faith. For decades, the Tirupati laddu has been offered as prasadam to millions of devotees at the Tirumala Venkateswara Temple in Andhra Pradesh. The mere thought of it being adulterated, let alone made with animal fat, is revolting, something no devout Hindu could have ever imagined. The Tirupati Laddus became the centre of a major controversy when Chandrababu Naidu, accused the previous Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy-led Government of using animal fat in the laddus, sparking outrage among devotees and political factions. On September 18, 2024, Chandrababu Naidu made a startling claim during an NDA legislative party meeting, alleging that under the YS Jagan Mohan Reddy Government, substandard ingredients including animal fat were used in the preparation of the laddus. To give his allegations weight his party's spokesperson, Anam Venkata Ramana Reddy, presented a lab report from the National Dairy Development Board's Gujarat laboratory. According to this report, the ghee used in the laddus contained beef tallow, lard (pig fat), and fish oil.



The report, dated July 16, 2024, confirmed the presence of these substances, which Naidu and his supporters described as a grave affront to the Hindu faith. In his defence YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, the former Chief Minister accused Naidu of engaging in political opportunism and using religion to gain mileage. Reddy emphasised that the ghee procured for the laddus came from National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories certified companies and underwent rigorous testing before being used. He accused Naidu of trying to divert attention from his own administration's failures. While nothing has been definitively proven yet, there are clear indications of possible wrongdoing. The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam board procures approximately five lakh kilograms of ghee annually through an e-tender system. The Karnataka Milk Federation (KMF), a former supplier of ghee to the temple, clarified that it had stopped supplying ghee four years ago due to pricing issues. This leaves open the question of where the current ghee supplies are sourced from. This must be probed and established before reaching any conclusion and fixing the responsibility. It has to be handled carefully, as this could become a serious issue as sentiments of people are involved. YS Sharmila, president of the Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee, called for a CBI probe to uncover the truth. The BJP too, has expressed concern. Right now it would be premature to fix responsibility without in-depth investigations. As calls for investigations grow louder, the controversy has not only shaken faith but also placed the sanctity of religious offerings at the centre of a bitter political battle.



A peacock spreads its plumage at the National Zoological Park, in New Delhi

PTI

Letting go of habits that harm environment

As our modern conveniences push us closer to environmental catastrophe, it becomes crucial to reflect on the small, mindful steps that can lead to lasting change

Transitions are always difficult, more so when one is asked to break away from habits formed over an entire lifetime. We are hurtling towards a certain catastrophe if we do not change and start caring for nature.

I used to leave the tap running while brushing my teeth, shaving, or even washing my hands until a few years back. We installed water aerators in our taps to conserve water. I realised that my shave with running tap water without an aerator was resulting in an additional three-fourths of a bucket going down the drain. Even with the aerator it still resulted in some wastage. I had forgotten that my grandfather shaved with just a mug full of water. As I narrated the results of my experiment to others, I realised that a few were aware and were already into conservation, but many needed that extra push. I remember drinking tap water till much later in adulthood. I moved to Calcutta for my first railway posting. My well-wishers asked me to filter and boil water if I were to sur-



vive. The initial filters were simpler devices with candles in the container or those screwed onto the tap. We started going up the professional ladder, and salaries increased. The devices also became more advanced, their advertising even more aggressive. We also switched to RO. We were now generating more wastewater and depleting essential minerals. We partly resolved the issue by utilising the drain water for plants and wet mopping the floor. We are now contemplating switching to ultraviolet filters, a technology-driven improvement upon the earlier devices. A few years back I was in the market with my wife. As I carried the shopping of the day in

bright-coloured polythene bags, we were approached by a couple of young women. Their tone was aggressive as they asked us the reason for the synthetic bags. I brushed them aside rather rudely at this transgression in my private space. A snip here, and a tuck there by Mother and it was a changed dress. Peels or rinds of fruits or vegetables were used to the last ounce. The cattle thrived on it. My wife prepared a tasty chutney recently grinding the pourd peels with herbs and spices.

These are small steps; nonetheless, they are a move forward. American Professor of Psychology, Ellen Langer's words are appropriate, "There is always a step small enough from where we are to get us to where we want to be. If we take that small step, there's always another we can take, and eventually, what used to be too far to reach becomes achievable."

(The author is an electrical engineer with the Indian Railways and conducts classes in creative writing; views are personal)



SANJAY CHANDRA

fully taken out from the previous year's notebooks, and bound at home, to be used at home. Old newspapers were used as covers to protect books. Younger siblings used the hand-me-downs from the older ones. A snip here, and a tuck there by Mother and it was a changed dress. Peels or rinds of fruits or vegetables were used to the last ounce. The cattle thrived on it. My wife prepared a tasty chutney recently grinding the pourd peels with herbs and spices.

(The author is an electrical engineer with the Indian Railways and conducts classes in creative writing; views are personal)

ANRF: A catalyst for India's R&D

Backed by substantial funding and strategic direction, Anusandhan National Research Foundation seeks to address societal challenges while creating a research culture

The role of research and development (R&D) in nation-building is pivotal, as it drives economic growth, boosts global competitiveness, provides solutions to societal challenges, equips learners with 21st-century skills, and enhances defense capabilities critical to national security and strategic positioning. R&D investment not only strengthens global influence but also allows for the development of tailored solutions to local needs. A strong focus on research fosters a technically empowered youth, who, in turn, fuel entrepreneurship and innovation.

India's current R&D expenditure is only 0.66 per cent of its GDP. Despite this, the country boasts a robust scientific foundation, ranking third globally in research publications and PhD graduates. In 2022, India published over 300,000 research papers, demonstrating its commitment to knowledge advancement. Furthermore, India ranks sixth in the world for patent grants. The scientific community has long called for increasing R&D spending to at least 2 per cent of GDP to scale up research that addresses societal needs. As Bill Gates once said, "I believe in innovation, and that the way you get innovation is you fund research and you learn the basic facts." Similarly, Albert Szent-Gyorgyi noted, "Research is all about four things: brains to think, eyes to see, machines to measure, and money."

India's research ecosystem is set for a transformative shift with the launch of the Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF), a significant initiative by the Modi government aimed at enhancing research and innovation across the nation. ANRF is poised to promote interdisciplinary research, cultivate a strong research culture, and position India as a global leader in science and innovation. ANRF will receive Rs 50,000 crore over five years, with contributions from industry, philanthropists, and both domestic and international sources, including government funds. Industry participation is crucial to ensure that research outcomes align with real-world needs and are effectively implemented. ANRF's mandate covers strategic direction in research, innovation, and entrepreneurship across disciplines such as natural sciences, engineering, technology, environmental sciences, health, and agriculture. Its goal is to foster collaborative research essential to solving the pressing issues facing humanity. The transition from the Science and Engineering Research Board (SERB) to ANRF marks a significant shift in research priorities. Initiatives such as doubling private sector involvement in R&D, increasing full-time researchers, boosting women's participation, and creating a national repository of STI data are expected to spur innovation. According to Dr. Abhay Karandikar, Secretary of the Department of Science and Technology, this shift will be crucial for fostering an innovation-driven environment. At ANRF's first Governing Board meeting, chaired by PM Narendra Modi, key



decisions were made to overhaul the research ecosystem. Modi emphasised the need to remove obstacles in research, set ambitious goals, and pursue breakthrough research that addresses national needs. He stressed that while problems may be global, their solutions must be tailored to India's unique context. Several initiatives were approved, including the launch of programs to build research capacities in universities with underdeveloped research cultures, using a hub-and-spoke model with established institutions. ANRF will also focus on mission-mode research in priority areas such as Electric Vehicles, Advanced Materials, Smart Infrastructure, Solar Cells, and Health Technologies. Additionally, the decision to establish Centers of Excellence for interdisciplinary research in humanities and social sciences will promote multidisciplinary efforts. The board also highlighted the need for flexible funding mechanisms to ensure ease of conducting research and emphasised the importance of fundamental research alongside applied research. The ANRF faces the monu-

INDIA'S CURRENT R&D EXPENDITURE IS ONLY 0.66 PER CENT OF ITS GDP. DESPITE THIS, THE COUNTRY BOASTS A ROBUST SCIENTIFIC FOUNDATION, RANKING THIRD GLOBALLY IN RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS AND PHD GRADUATES

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

India's extreme summer



According to Climate Central, a non-profit news website based in New Jersey, India lived through its second hottest summer, between June and August, 2024, in the last 54 years. There were as many as 143 heatwave deaths in the country during the period. More, there were nearly 42,000 heat stroke cases reported in the country in the above three months. Interestingly, both man made

climate change and El Niño were blamed for the scorching summer this year. In El Niño, the ocean surface warms unusually above the normal average level in the tropical Pacific Ocean. Many Indian cities bore the brunt of very high temperatures running into almost 70 days in some cases.

The website has said that a mind boggling 429 million people if India experienced severe heat conditions for at least a week. Alarmingly, this may not be a one-off year and the ensuing years can witness a similar kind of intense heat months if different levels of global warming are not scientifically assessed and tackled with the utmost seriousness it deserves. In the past, experts have warned that India is going to witness more frequent heatwaves with severe intensity. The entire South Asia will experience more and more heatwaves in the future.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

ernments have tried to curb that expression by calling it a tampering with the security of the country. Like the Government of India has done. In 2023, by making amendments in the IT rules, the so-called Fact Check Unit was formed. Through which the comment made against the government has been allowed to be rejected by calling it fake and action has also been recommended against its account holder. The Mumbai High Court has directly declared it a threat to freedom and democracy.

The Bombay High Court has abolished the Fact Check Unit which curbed freedom of expression. Justice Atal Chandurkar has considered it a violation of Articles 14, 19, 19(1)(g) and 21 of the Constitution. The court said that the interpretation of FCU is vague and does not stand the test of logic. Senior advocate Navroz Sirvai, who represented stand-up comedian Kunal Kamra, clarified before Justice Chandurkar that the purpose of FCU is to impose censorship on those discussions which the govern-

ment wants to suppress. This is a direct attack on freedom of expression. The system of Fact Check Unit was created by the central government with the aim of cracking down on fake, misleading and false news on social media forums Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

Jang Bahadur Singh | Jamshedpur

ASHWIN ACHIEVES A LANDMARK
Madam—Scoring a hundred and taking 5 wickets in Innings in match most times. Ashwin 4 times is just behind Botham's record. Ashwin captured his 37th five wickets haul and scored 61st test century as a lower down batsman. Again he is the only all rounder to have 20 fifty plus scores and 37 five wickets haul.

He is the second most wicket taker for India after Anil Kumble and joint most 10 wickets haul with him. He was the fastest to complete 250, 300 and 350 wickets in international test cricket.

C.K. Ramanathan | Ghaziabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

1977 J&K Assembly elections were a watershed



WAJAHAT HABIBULLAH
FORMER BUREAUCRAT, J&K CADRE

EVEN though these are but UT elections today, the 1977 J&K Assembly elections were a watershed. All shades in Kashmir's political firmament had leaped eagerly into the fray. Pro-independence Mirwaiz Farooq of the Awami Action Committee put up candidates but, like the Jamaat-e-Islami now, not under the party's name. The pro-Pakistan Jamaat-e-Islami led by Ali Shah Geelani was a contender, as it had been in 1972, when it won five seats, and is contesting again today, in thin disguise. Former supporters of Sheikh Abdullah became antagonists and set up a branch of the Janata Party, the ruling party at the Centre. Among its leaders was Hameed Karra, nephew of Mohiuddin Karra — one of the Sheikh's lieutenants in the 1940s and 1950s. Maulana Masoodi, another of the Sheikh's former close associates and the Assembly Speaker in 1953, threw his considerable clout with his Gujjar community behind

the Janata Party. Maulana Itikhar Ansari, the leading Shia cleric, was a formidable opponent. The Sheikh's party stood alone. Yet, his appeal, as always, was his promise to restore to the people their dignity. His son Farooq is heir to that promise. The Janata Party pulled out all stops in its campaign. Among the leaders who descended on Kashmir were Home Minister Chaudhary Charan Singh, Industries Minister George Fernandes, Minister for Works and Housing Sankar Datta and Defence Minister Babu Jagjivan Ram, once a pillar of the Congress. Finally, on the eve of polling, then Prime Minister Morarji Desai, like the present PM, made a campaign visit. The initial effort of the state administration was to 'arrange' the election, as had been the practice. As deputy commissioner, I was the returning officer for the district of Srinagar. Hameed Karra soon came calling to ask that I make appointments of the election staff in consultation with him. He was the secretary to the state unit of the Janata Party. When I stated clearly that any such step was illegal, he was surprised. I was a promising young Muslim officer, he averred, and it would break his heart to have to destroy his career. The morning after my meeting with Karra, my boss, the commissioner of Kashmir called me to his office. Upon entry to his chamber, whom did I find but Karra! What is the dif-



HISTORIC: Then PM Morarji Desai (left) visited J&K during the 1977 Assembly elections, in which Sheikh Abdullah led the National Conference to victory. FILE PHOTOS

culty Karra sahib is facing? asked Commissioner Ghulam Mustafa Khan. I told him of Karra's demand. But the commissioner's response, uttered with endearment, was that I was an innocent person, that administering Poonch, where I had just conducted parliamentary elections, was another matter, and I should now recognise that the demands of Srinagar were different. As the election approached, the strong support base of Sheikh Abdullah's National Conference (NC) became increasingly manifest. He suffered a heart attack that confined him to his home, but that led to an upsurge of support, causing his opponents to claim that the reports on the Sheikh's health were fake. The administration decided to attempt to cripple his elec-

tion campaign. All deputy commissioners in Kashmir were given orders requiring that leading NC volunteers be arrested under the Preventive Detention Act, which permitted detention without trial. Up all night, I approved nine arrests, only to receive a call early next morning from Chief Secretary Pushkar Nath Kaul, asking why I had been so slow. He told me that the deputy commissioners of other districts had each issued 30 to 80 warrants in one night. When I protested that a deputy commissioner was expected to satisfy himself that the grounds for detention made a convincing case of a threat to public security, he suggested that time spent scrutinising grounds was time wasted. Prime Minister Desai paid a visit on June 25, 1977. As we

prepared for our meeting, I was told by the IG of the state police, Peer Ghulam Hassan Shah, that the PM would ask that we ensure his party's victory and that we should comply, for this was a duty to the nation. I told him that in that event, I, inexperienced in this art, must be replaced. As it happened, our meeting with the PM witnessed an amiable chat. When asked by the chief secretary if he had any advice for the state's administration on the elections, the PM's response was simple: "One doesn't know whom to trust in Kashmir." The state police, frustrated with my insistence on adhering to the law, launched a flurry of arrests of NC activists, particularly of its youth wing, under Section 107 of the CrPc. Then party president Ghulam Mohiuddin Shah, brother of the Sheikh's son-in-law, visited my office to object formally to this repression. I explained that this was the way the police wished to display their national commitment and asked him whether this would hamper or, in fact, strengthen his campaign. At this, Shah allowed himself a grin. On election day, as I need about the city, responding to calls, allegations and threats, Farooq Abdullah called on the IG, ensconced in the police control room, to complain that the elections were a farce. When results began to be announced and it was clear that the NC would win, I drove around Srinagar with the IG. The city rejoiced. Our car was

repeatedly stopped, our hands kissed, blessings showered, as is the Kashmiri's wont. The June 1977 elections were a milestone in the political evolution of the state. Because of the high public participation and the healthy state of candidates across the state's political leadership, some believe that these were the fairest elections ever held there. Others have gone even further to declare them the only real elections ever held in J&K. Are the 2024 elections a renaissance of that? After his father's death in 1982, Farooq became the CM. Then PM Indira Gandhi expected a political alliance with him and strengthening of the Congress' presence in the state. She was to be rudely disappointed. And so the elections of 1983 again saw a confrontation between the ruling party at the Centre, the Congress, and the state's ruling NC. Although former prime ministers had visited the state to boost their parties' election prospects, it was unprecedented for a serving PM to run a campaign for a state election, visiting every constituency to canvass support, as did Indira in 1983. But the Congress lost roundly, winning only one seat in the Kashmir valley, 23 in the Jammu region and one in Ladakh, while the NC got 38 of the 42 seats in the Kashmir division, eight in the Jammu division and one in Ladakh's Kargil. So, once more, J&K returns to a semblance of democracy, although not yet to the substance.

The initial effort of the state administration was to 'arrange' the election, as had been the practice.

Punjab's agri draft policy fails to tick all the boxes



SUKHPAL SINGH
PROFESSOR, IIM, AHMEDABAD

THE absence of an agricultural policy in Punjab is baffling, given that there are policies for the industry and other sectors. In the past decade, two drafts remained on paper only. Now we have a draft of the much-awaited agricultural policy in the public domain almost a year after it was submitted. Let us hope that this will not meet the fate of previous drafts. However, it had a flawed start as the policy committee was set up without any terms of reference (ToR); the committee, too, did not deem it fit to frame the ToR. The policy vision "to continuously improve the livelihoods of farmers, farm workers and those dependent on agriculture by making farming healthier, profitable and globally competitive... for future generations" is silent on the sector's social sustainability, which includes equity, concern for small producers, etc. In 2018-19, 27.8 per cent of the area in Punjab was under lease. Some field-based stud-

ies suggest it to be even 50 per cent in some regions. The practice of reverse tenancy and a reduction of small and marginal farmers in the state's agriculture, both in terms of numbers (35 per cent of the total, compared to India's 86 per cent) and the area operated by them (9 per cent against 45 per cent in the country), underline the need for incorporating this sustainability dimension. The draft proposes land leasing reforms but fails to mention the draft land leasing Bill, which is problematic. Punjab can end up with only large farmers with higher incomes if the policy remains blind to social sustainability. The report terms the task of rejuvenating the agriculture sector as a 'holistic' one by setting up a system and the use of science, which can lead to agricultural per capita income being comparable to other sectors of the economy. It is difficult to understand how the farm sector can create value comparable to that in other sectors. The very idea of such a 'holistic' makes the theory of structural transformation stand on its head. The major objective of the policy — to promote healthier agricultural production, value addition and marketing systems for globally competitive agriculture — is intended to be achieved through the coopera-



LACUNA: The draft doesn't offer ways to ensure social sustainability in the agriculture sector. FILE PHOTO

tive mode. This is like betting on a lame horse, as traditional and state-controlled cooperatives have failed in Punjab or are no more than a part of the state system. The report itself confirms this when it says that these public sector organisations should not behave like private enterprises to earn super-normal profits. Terminating these agencies as PSUs also reflects the poor understanding of the committee. Unfortunately, the more promising alternative of farmer producer organisations (FPOs) is not even recognised in the draft policy when the Centre is promoting it with plenty of resources. There are more than 25,000

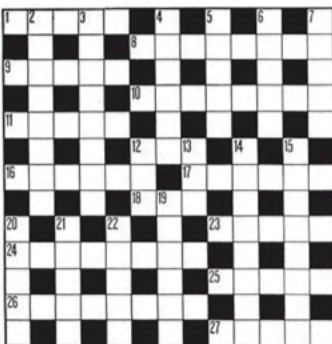
such entities in India, while Punjab has only a few dozen despite having a so-called FPO policy since 2018. It is surprising that the draft has not specified any time frame for achieving the objectives and has no milestones, except in saving water. It was important to specify these, as by the time the policy is finalised and as when accepted for implementation, just two years will be left for the present government to deliver on it. The biggest weakness of the draft is its neglect of the marketing issues of the state's farm sector, which are well known and debated for long. It recognises that there

is a potential (not real) exploitation of farmers by commission agents. But it does not suggest the abolition of commission agents unlike Madhya Pradesh, which did it decades ago. It is a sad commentary on the agricultural markets of the state that today no farmer can sell directly, and no buyer can buy directly in the state's agricultural markets, especially grain markets. The irony is that the state has not conducted elections to APMCs (Agricultural Produce Market Committees) for more than 40 years, and this absence of governance has not been even pointed out. Opening up of regulatory market space can provide alternative marketing channels for farmers; that too has not been discussed. Another double mechanism that can protect farmers from low prices and exploitative credit linkage — warehouse receipts — does not even find a mention in the report. The draft recommends a legal guarantee of procurement of all crops, including perishables like milk and poultry, at the MSP and a state-level commission to provide cost estimates for all produce to determine the MSP. How can a committee make such definitive recommendations regarding the MSP issue that is not even a state mandate? It is also not clear why the committee

did not propose a state-level mechanism for MSP for perishable produce like in Kerala or Haryana. It could have mandated all purchases in APMC mandis at or above the MSP for all buyers under the APMC Act as in MP's legislation. It also goes beyond its mandate while recommending 200 days of MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) work as this is not a state government programme. The report points out that the power subsidy per connection varies from a low of Rs 21,234 to as high as Rs 89,556 across districts. Sadly, it does not recognise the equity issue in this wherein bigger and better-placed farmers get bigger subsidies and those who don't own tubewells (mostly small and marginal farmers) are left out. It is also a wasteful subsidy which perpetuates the cultivation of paddy (except basmati), which should be eliminated from the state. The committee should not have been so mindful of political considerations if it was serious about addressing the issues of the sector and farmers therein. A policy should be framed at the level of ideas and innovations with adequate reference to various worldviews on the state's farm sector, which, unfortunately, are found missing in this draft policy.

The draft policy proposes to promote production and marketing through the cooperative mode, even though state-controlled cooperatives have failed in the state.

QUICK CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- 1 Force of explosion (5)
 - 8 A few (3,2,3)
 - 9 In the present age (5)
 - 10 High-ranking military (3,5)
 - 11 Considering (5)
 - 12 Uncooked (3)
 - 16 Accustom (6)
 - 17 Brief pleasure trip (6)
 - 18 Small secluded room (3)
 - 23 Conceded between people (5)
 - 24 To free from restraint (3,5)
 - 25 A wild card (5)
 - 26 If justice were done (2,6)
 - 27 Lacking spontaneity (5)
- DOWN**
- 2 Examine (4,4)
 - 3 Drastic retrenchment (8)
 - 4 Country of southwest Africa (6)
 - 5 Hesitate to believe (5)
 - 6 Thick slice of meat (5)
 - 7 Promote reputation of (5)
 - 12 Supposedly revolutionary (3)
 - 13 Gained (3)
 - 14 Be conspicuous (5,3)
 - 15 Intrinsically (2,6)
 - 19 Inferior substitute (6)
 - 20 The planet earth (5)
 - 21 Sharply evident (5)
 - 22 Approximate (5)
- Yesterday's solution**
- Across:** 1 Lucky break, 6 Flip, 10 Comic, 11 Dissemble, 12 Software, 13 Realm, 15 Adamant, 17 Explain, 19 Stellar, 21 Bitumen, 22 Upper, 24 Pugilism, 27 Terminate, 28 Maize, 29 Rule, 30 Ne'er-do-well.
- Down:** 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30.

SU DO KU

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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

CALENDAR

SEPTEMBER 24, 2024, TUESDAY

- Shaka Samvat 1946
- Ashwin Shukla 2
- Ashwin Purnimite 1446
- Hiji 9
- Krishna Paksha Tithi 7, up to 12.39 pm
- Vyatipata Yoga up to 1:27 am
- Mrigshirsha Nakshatra up to 9:54 pm
- Moon enters Gemini sign 9:56 am

FORECAST

SUNRISE: 06:12 AM
SUNSET: 06:12 PM

CITY	TUESDAY MAX	TUESDAY MIN
Chandigarh	37	27
New Delhi	37	26
Amritsar	37	28
Bathinda	38	26
Jalandhar	35	27
Ludhiana	37	27
Bhivani	35	28
Hisar	37	26
Sirsa	38	28
Dharamsala	30	18
Manali	26	14
Shimla	27	15
Srinagar	33	15
Jammu	35	25
Kargil	26	08
Leh	23	05
Dehradun	34	24
Mussoorie	26	18

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Dousing farm fires

Much more is expected of Punjab

IT's that time of year again, when Punjab and Haryana come under intense scrutiny to gauge the success of their efforts to control farm fires. Punjab claims to have taken several proactive, even penal, measures. A series of reports in The Tribune has brought out the trials and tribulations as well as the hits and misses in the state's campaign. Red entries are being made in the revenue records of farmers who burn crop residue. They can't apply for or renew farm licences. In Amritsar, as stubble management plans falter and baler operators cry foul, quickfix options are being tried out. In Sangrur, the district with the most farm fires in the state, scientific solutions have been chalked out. Ludhiana, strangely, is seeing opposition to such interventions. It's a long, tough road ahead. Much more is expected than a strategy that can at best deliver a slight drop in count.

Like last year, paddy harvesting, and stubble burning as a result, has started early in Punjab this season. Those setting stubble on fire insist that since the window for sowing wheat is short, this is the quickest way to get rid of the paddy residue. Several districts have been identified as stubble-burning hotspots. Teams of government staff have been activated. With farmers' unions warning against coercive methods, any stringent action is unlikely. A reassuring aspect is the growing awareness among farmers of the need to desist from stubble burning and how it is in everyone's interest, in particular their own. The worrying part is the inefficacy of policy initiatives. State support and optimum incentivisation have to be at the core of plans to counter the resistance.

The farm fire season often becomes a rallying point against the farmers. Irresponsible and uninformed reactions only complicate the pressing issue and dilute the debate.

Chess success

India's Olympiad golden double a great feat

OUR cricket-crazy nation is going gaga over a sport that usually doesn't grab many eyeballs. That's because the Indian men's and women's teams have touched the stars by winning the gold in the 45th Chess Olympiad in Hungary. With this magnificent achievement, India has joined a select club of nations, which includes China as well as the erstwhile Soviet Union — both clinched the golden double in the same edition of the Olympiad. It is befitting that Viswanathan Anand, the colossus of Indian chess with five World Championship titles, was present to watch these young players assert their dominance in the global arena.

The men's team comprised World Championship challenger D Gukesh, R Praggnanandhaa, Arjun Erigaisi, Vidit Gujrathi and P Harikrishna. Barring Harikrishna, none of them was even born when Anand became India's first Grandmaster in 1988. Gukesh is just 18 years old, while Erigaisi is 21. Both are among the top 10 players in the world. At 54, Anand is a 'semi-retired' player who is still good enough to be ranked World No. 11. What's more, he has been a huge source of inspiration for Gukesh and Praggnanandhaa. On the eve of the Olympiad, he said: 'If I had to roll the dice, these are good teams to roll them with.'

The team triumph will surely boost Gukesh's confidence for his World Chess Championship summit clash with reigning world champion Ding Liren in Singapore later this year. The women's team — Harika Dronavalli, R Vaishali, Divya Deshmukh, Vantika Agrawal and Thania Sachdev — deserves kudos for emerging victorious despite the absence of star performer Koneru Humpy. These are good days for Indian chess, which is no longer a one-man-one-woman show. The Global Chess League, whose second season will begin in London early next month, will provide another big opportunity to these players to sharpen their skills and further popularise the sport in India.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 1924

Hindu-Muslim unity
IT is obvious that the fast which the Mahatma has imposed upon himself has roused the great heart of India. From one end of the country to the other there is a strong and unanimous feeling in all who have reached the stage of national self-consciousness and many who have not yet reached it that nothing should be left undone that could contribute to the solution of the Hindu-Muslim question and so restore peace to the Mahatma's agonised heart. As might have been expected from the very nature of the case, this feeling has found particularly strong expression among our Muslim fellow countrymen. Along with such men as Hakim Ajmal Khan, Maulana Mahomed Ali and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, whose love of the country and the Mahatma is as well-known as their position in the public life of the country is eminent, and who were bound in any case to take a conspicuous part in this movement, even the average Mussalman seems to have been touched by the Mahatma's penance as few other things could have touched him. The Mussalman seems to think that while this great act of self-sacrifice is a challenge to the patriotism of the whole country, it is particularly a challenge to his own patriotism. At Delhi, the Anjuman Islamiya has adopted a resolution to recommend to its Working Committee to accept the Mahatma as the sole arbitrator in all disputes between Mussalmans and Hindus, and has also resolved to send a Mussalman deputation to the Mahatma to assure him that they would do everything in their power to bring cordial relations between the two communities and to request him to give up his fast.

The rise of Anura Kumara Dissanayake

India must recognise the mandate as an expression of the Lankan people's will for real political change



IN January 2020, weeks after becoming the President of Sri Lanka, Gotabaya Rajapaksa set up a commission of inquiry 'to investigate allegations of political victimisation, 2015-19'. Anura Kumara Dissanayake, or AKD, sworn in as Sri Lanka's ninth President on Monday, was among the many named by the commission for punitive action as he was part of an anti-corruption panel set up after Mahinda Rajapaksa's authoritarian and nepotistic presidency was voted out in 2015 to investigate the alleged misdeeds of the Rajapaksa clan and cronies. Had the economic meltdown in 2021 not interrupted the Rajapaksa's nightmarish rerun from 2019, Dissanayake may have been stripped of his civil rights for seven years and imprisoned.

The incident may be a footnote in Dissanayake's political journey from a student cadre of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) in rural Sri Lanka during its blood-soaked armed insurrection of 1987-90 to a pragmatic leader of his party and its National People's Power (NPP) alliance, and now to the country's most powerful office, the executive presidency. It is also true that this historic, politically shape-shifting election victory may not have come about had it not been for the Rajapaksa, and not just for their mismanagement of the economy.

A quick flashback: Through the first dozen years of the new millennium, the JVP split twice on the question of whether its alliances with the main ruling coalitions of that period, led by President Chandrika Kumaratunga first and then her successor, Mahinda Rajapaksa, had identified the party with Sri Lanka's entrenched power elite, robbing it of its unique identity as an anti-establish-



HIGH HOPES: Huge expectations are riding on Anura Kumara Dissanayake. He has to deliver, and quickly, upon

ment, 'pro-people' entity. In those years, the JVP was an eager partner in the war against the LTTE, with no daylight between it and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, of which Rajapaksa was then the leader. JVP's charismatic leaders of that period favoured the alliance and quit the party, hoping to reap electoral benefits from the war. AKD, who had been a parliamentarian since 2000, stayed put. By 2014, he had risen to the leadership of the JVP.

In the presidential elections of 2015, held against the backdrop of popular discontent against the authoritarian regime of Mahinda Rajapaksa, AKD's JVP backed the common Opposition candidate, Maithripala Sirisena, the main challenger to Mahinda. But the association with the dysfunctional successor government — this was the period in which AKD was part of the anti-corruption committee against the Rajapaksa — burnt the JVP once more.

In 2019, AKD stepped out of the mould. He formed a 'socialist coalition', the NPP, with 27 other leftist and like-minded groups such as trade unions, women's rights groups and youth organisations, and announced himself as a candidate in the presidential election of that year. He polled just 3.16 per cent of the votes. Gotabaya Rajapaksa won with 52 per cent of the votes, while Sajith Premadasa, then the main Oppo-

The seeds of AKD's victory were sown when people saw the Rajapaksa sowing their way back to power by propping up Wickremesinghe as the President.

sition candidate, representing the United National Party (UNP), polled 42 per cent.

In the parliamentary elections of 2020, the NPP did just as badly. It won just three seats. This was still slightly better than Ranil Wickremesinghe's UNP, which was wiped out after most of its members walked out with Premadasa, whose new party, Samagi Jana Balawegaya, emerged as the main Opposition party in Parliament. Undeterred by the double defeat, AKD set to work. He saw the 2022 Aragalaya, the people's movement to demand accountability from the Rajapaksa for the economic crisis, as an opportunity to stay relevant in the Sri Lankan polity. The JVP's participation in the movement leading to the ouster of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, without grabbing its leadership from the disparate stu-

dent and youth entities at its helm, was the turning point for the party. The seeds of AKD's victory were sown right then, when people saw the Rajapaksa sowing their way back to power by propping up Wickremesinghe as the new President.

What this means is that AKD is perhaps the most pragmatic leader that the JVP has had since it was founded in 1965 as a Marxist-Leninist group that wanted to bring total revolution in Sri Lanka. In this election, Sri Lanka's Tamil question was not an issue, and the JVP's past as a vehicle for Sinhala nationalism did not come into play. To the Tamil community that expectedly did not vote for him, AKD's message is that he will be an inclusive President. The true test will come with the 13th amendment, made in the Constitution at India's behest, for devolution to the Tamil north and east. It was the trigger for the JVP's 1987 armed insurrection. Will AKD do away with it? The new President himself has been keen to anchor the party in economic policies, but not of the radical left with which it was earlier associated. Observers have noted that the NPP flag is not red but a shade between purple and pink, also the predominant colour at its rallies. Dissanayake's sartorial choices, too, eschew the bright red of the JVP's past.

What this also means is that huge expectations are riding on

AKD. He has to deliver, and quickly. He will be judged within months on his promise that he has the solutions to fix the economy without imposing financial burdens on the people. He has promised to renegotiate the terms of the \$2.9-billion IMF package that was negotiated by Wickremesinghe. He will be expected to dismantle the punishing regime of indirect taxes set up by his predecessor. AKD has proclaimed himself open to foreign investments, including from India, though the non-tendered, secretive Adani deal with the hated Rajapaksa in 2021 will certainly come under scrutiny. A parliamentary election will have to be held soon in which the JVP/NPP will need to win many more seats than the 33 it had at its peak in 2005. A majority may remain elusive, so it will need to find coalition partners that will not taint it.

India has not been unprepared for this moment. AKD visited India in February this year on Delhi's invitation, as opinion polls began to read the tea leaves. He had also visited as a minister in 2005, when the JVP was in the coalition with President Kumaratunga. He is as much a pragmatist on foreign policy as he is on domestic issues. Early on, he declared that it was China and India in geopolitical rivalry with each other, not Sri Lanka. Good ties with India were in Sri Lanka's best economic interests, he said. AKD has also said his party is mindful of India's security concerns. Setting loyalty tests for him or painting him as pro-China-leftist in the media will not help.

True, the JVP has long-standing ties with the Communist Party of China. But India must recognise this peaceful but momentous political change in Sri Lanka for what it is — an expression of the Sri Lankan people's will for real political change. Just as Delhi walks a tightrope between Moscow and Washington to get the best for itself from both, other countries too have their strategic autonomy. Unless India's security is threatened, the highly valued Indian Foreign Service should be able to deal with a not entirely unexpected change in Colombo.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Change is inevitable, change for the better is a full-time job. — Allia E Stevenson

Ghosts of Shoghi's foggy hills

SAURABH MALIK

THE mist in Shoghi was so thick that afternoon, I could barely see a few feet ahead. I hadn't been back here in years, and everything felt unfamiliar — shrouded in this heavy, ethereal veil.

As I made my way to the old family cottage, I heard footsteps behind me — slow and deliberate, almost in sync with mine. I turned, peering into the swirling haze, but saw nothing. A chill crept up my spine.

I reached the cottage, its outline barely visible through the dense vapour. I fumbled with the keys before finding my way in. The cottage was just as I remembered it — rustic and simple.

Just as I started to relax on the creaky rocking chair, there was a knock at the door.

I froze. The footsteps, the feeling of being followed... had someone really been out there?

I opened the door slowly. But there was no one. Amidst the thick mist rolling in waves, I saw something on the ground — a crumpled piece of paper. I picked it up, my hands shaking slightly. It was damp from the moisture in the air, and the writing was smudged, but I could still make out the words:

'Welcome back.'

My heart skipped a beat. It looked like my handwriting.

The knock came again, louder and more insistent. I yanked the door open. A man, soaked to the skin, with an umbrella hanging limply at his side, asked with a sheepish grin: 'Lost in the fog, too?'

He introduced himself as Ruhana: 'We played cricket as kids.' The name evoked a distant memory. Ruhana had been the neighbourhood kid always hanging around. I hadn't thought about him in years.

As we sat by the fire, his presence seemed strangely comforting, though something about him felt odd. The murk outside began to lift, and Ruhana stood up to leave.

As he stepped out, he turned back with a grin. 'You were right to leave this place. It's easy to get stuck here, lost in the fog,' he said.

As he walked away, disappearing into the thinning haze, I suddenly remembered something — Ruhana had fallen off a cliff and died shortly after I left Shoghi, nearly two decades ago.

I called out his name, but there was no answer; just the empty path stretching into the vaporous gloom. Had my mind played tricks on me, weaving memories with reality?

As I dozed the door, a thought struck me — perhaps Ruhana had never left, and maybe it was I who had been lost, wandering in the mist of my memories. As I sat by the fire, I realised that the real ghosts aren't those of the dead, but the memories that linger, shaping our present with echoes of the past.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A new dawn in Sri Lanka

Appropos of the editorial 'Lankan mandate', the outcome of Sri Lanka's presidential election is of a piece with the global trend that has seen voters reject parties that have an old frame of mind. The electorate has had enough of leaders who fail to provide solutions to the everyday difficulties that the masses face. As the President, Ranil Wickremesinghe turned to the IMF in a bid to tide over the extraordinary economic crisis in the country. But the fact is that most Sri Lankans were better off in 2022 than they are now. The tax burden on the middle class must be eased. Adopting a people-centric approach on the economy is the need of the hour.

ABHIRAM ROY, JAMSHEDPUR

Scrapping subsidies is pragmatic

Refer to 'Balancing the books'; state governments generally do not have too many options to earn revenue. Hence, withdrawing power subsidies to large industries is a pragmatic move on the part of the Himachal Pradesh government. Even the withdrawal of subsidies for domestic consumption is not a drastic step that can adversely impact people. Besides, the state government must focus on boosting tourism, which is a key source of revenue for the hill state. The state authorities should take steps that can enhance the experience of tourists, both domestic and foreign. Further, the state government can attract investments by creating more opportunities for industrialists to grow their businesses.

BAL GOVIND, NOIDA

'One nation, one poll' not feasible

Apropos of the article 'One nation, one poll faces trust deficit'; the Union Government's decision to accept the Kovind Committee recommendations on holding simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and state Assemblies and that of local bodies within 100 days from then is fraught with several challenges. Since the proposal involves making the term of state Assemblies coterminous with that of Par-

liament, will it not in a way diminish the status of the Vidhan Sabha? Moreover, even if the panel's recommendations are accepted, how would it be ensured that polls are held only once every five years? It is better to leave the issue open for debate by academics, legal luminaries, political parties and other stakeholders.

RAJ KUMAR GOYAL, PATIALA

Uphold the rule of law

Refer to the article 'Don't let the State trample over the law of the land'; the author has brilliantly presented 'bulldozer justice' as the unconstitutional overreach of power — which it is — that has left an indelible scar on our nation's conscience. Such discriminatory, high-handed steps — which run counter to the notion of due process — undermine the very foundation of our democracy and blatantly violate the principles enshrined in Article 21 of the Constitution. The judiciary's intervention, although belated, is a much-needed response to restore the sanctity of constitutional governance. The government must abandon retributive justice and demonstrate accountability, lest it should erode public trust. Citizens deserve a State that respects their dignity, not one that shamefully tramples on it.

HARBINDER SINGH DHILLON, UNA

Farmers get a raw deal

Farmers under the banner of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (non-political) and the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha recently held a 'Kisan Mahapanchayat' in Pipli, urging people to defeat the BJP in the upcoming Assembly polls. The farm leaders have also decided to hold a 'rail roko' protest next month to push for their demands. The growers' demand for a legal guarantee of MSP is vital for their survival. The failure of the government to address their demands or act on critical agricultural reforms highlights its indifference to the growers' concerns. It is time for the powers that be to take steps to ease the agrarian distress.

BIKRAM SINGH, PATIALA

OUR VIEW



The Quad should deter Chinese misadventures

This group of four may soon be better placed to combine forces if need be. India's strategic autonomy, meanwhile, demands a faster rejig of our armed forces into theatre commands

The latest summit of the four-nation Quad, which brought together the leaders of Australia, India, Japan and the US, ended over the weekend with agreements to extend cooperation in areas varying from fighting cervical cancer and ensuring cybersecurity to joint development of port infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific, the creation of an air-logistics network and a group effort to keep chip supplies secure. This reflects a broad agenda, with the well-being of the region's people at its heart. Yet, although no official mention was made of China, the summit's outcome had tell-tale signs of the breath of a dragon in the room. For the past half decade or more, ever since this Quadrilateral Security Dialogue formally adopted the goal of a free and open Indo-Pacific region, the threat foreseen has been clear: Beijing's advancing appetite for power projection across the eastern hemisphere. It had once seemed that the Quad would test India's professed neutrality in geopolitics. But, to New Delhi's credit, its embrace of the group has been nuanced enough for that resolve to be held firm.

Nobody should fret about a military alliance in the making. The Quad has no pact of mutual defence. This is in harmony with India's insistence on strategic autonomy and full control of its armed forces. "We are not against anyone," stated Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "We all support a rules-based international order, respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, and peaceful resolution of all issues." On an item-wise perusal, the Quad has civilian aims like calamity relief and disease prevention. Yet, the message for Beijing is clear: that the Quad is here to stay. That US President Joe Biden was

heard speaking of China's Xi Jinping "looking to buy himself some diplomatic space" to "focus on domestic economic challenges" would not have escaped Beijing's attention either. The agreements signed include a maritime training initiative, a port-resilience effort and a plan to develop a logistical network in pursuit of airlift capacity for response to natural disasters. These add up to collaboration on dual-use capabilities. All the better, one could say, for the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea to be upheld and shipping lanes not to be disrupted.

Still, what's unknown at this juncture is the Quad's potency as a China deterrent. Apart from Taiwan, a crucial chip-maker that Beijing has been eyeing for historical reasons, Japan and the Philippines have faced the stirring dragon's heat in recent years. Militarily, the US may be relying on its Aukus plan of arming Australia for stability in the Far East, but boosted Quad capacity across a wider expanse of this hemisphere could potentially help stare down Chinese misadventures. India may not be ready to join the wars of others, as a matter of democratic sovereignty, but will surely act to secure its vital interests. It makes sense for New Delhi to keep our options open on making common cause with other powers should any threat materialize. After the Galwan clashes of 2020, friction with China has risen sharply. While the Quad focuses on maritime aspects of security, we cannot afford to slacken on fortifying the country along its land borders. Indeed, we must accelerate the reorientation of our armed forces into theatre commands, so that all three wings of combat can respond jointly to aggression with due operational efficiency. Regardless of partnerships, India's defence, ultimately, will be in Indian hands. That's how it should be.

THEIR VIEW

The path to eternal life on the cloud is full of questions

SAMIRAN GHOSH



is a technology advisor and podcast host.

Eternal life has fascinated humans since time immemorial. Ancient Egyptians mummified their pharaohs, Chinese emperors sought the elixir of life, Greek myths spoke of ambrosia granting eternal youth, and India has had its legendary 'Chiranjeevi' immortals. Fast-forward to the 21st century, and we find ourselves still chasing that dream of immortality—but now, computer code is turning it into silicon reality.

Welcome to digital immortality, where the line between human existence and a hard drive is blurred. We are now uploading consciousness to the cloud, where our digital doppelgängers can live on forever, free from the constraints of biology and bad hair days. While ancient Egyptians preserved bodies, we are now looking to preserve human minds.

Our journey begins in 2018 with Nectome, a startup that snagged an incredible \$960,000 federal grant to work on preserving brains in microscopic detail. Its ultimate goal? To digitally upload minds. There's just

one tiny catch: its process is currently fatal. For \$10,000, it will turn your brain to rubber and freeze it. The idea is that at some point later, technology will advance enough that you could be revived—in this case, most likely by 'scanning' and 'uploading' your brain. Talk about a killer app!

In 2019, scientists created an artificial neural network mimicking a worm's brain, essentially uploading its mind into a computer. It's a far cry from human consciousness, but hey, even Facebook started with just rating college students' photos.

The EU's Human Brain Project, launched in 2013, aims to create a functional computer model of the organ. It's like trying to recreate the entire works of Shakespeare using only emojis—ambitious, slightly mad, but utterly fascinating.

Since then, public awareness of this digital afterlife has been soaring. A 2023 YouGov survey revealed that 42% of respondents were familiar with digital immortality, a significant increase from 28% in 2020. The startup landscape is abuzz. The brain-computer interface market is expected to surge from \$2.2 billion in 2023 to \$8.1 billion in 2033, by one estimate. The race for immortality has attracted some heavy hitters. Amazon's Jeff Bezos invested \$116 million in

Unity Biotechnology. Peter Thiel, PayPal co-founder, has been vocal about his interest in life extension and has even signed up for cryonic preservation.

But would an uploaded mind be 'you' or just a compelling simulation? It's the digital age version of "I think, therefore I am," but with more RAM. Imagine a world where the wealthy can live forever in the cloud while the rest of us have an 'expiry date' (ardon the phrase).

Ethical quandaries abound. A 2022 *Journal of Medical Ethics* study found that 72% of surveyed bioethicists believe consciousness uploading raises significant ethical concerns. It's like opening a Pandora's hard drive. Once we start, there's no 'ctrl-Z' to go back.

But why wait for future revival when we can keep our loved ones 'alive' right now? Enter the world of digital afterlife services. Companies like Replicia and HereAfter AI create chatbots and virtual avatars based on people's memories, personalities and social

media footprints. Imagine conversing with a digital version of your late grandmother, telling you to eat more and asking why you're still single.

Speaking of preservation, we already have our modern-day mummies: the cryogenically frozen. As of 2024, about 500 people worldwide have taken the plunge (quite literally) into liquid nitrogen, hoping to come alive in a future where death is just a minor inconvenience.

Ted Williams, the baseball legend frozen in 2002, is probably the most famous cryopreserved individual.

I would argue that creating 'backup copies' of ourselves introduces some existential questions worthy of thought. If you die, do your upload lives on, are you dead? If your upload gets a virus, do you need digital Tylenol? As we stand on the brink of this digital frontier, one thing is clear: there are more questions than answers on the path to digital immortality. It's a journey that will force us to re-examine the very nature of

consciousness, identity, and what it means to be human. And I do not mean identifying traffic lights in a 4x4 captcha grid.

Before we rush to trade our carbon-based existence for a silicon one, let's consider a few profound questions: Will our digital selves still enjoy the taste of pizza? How about flossing after that? Can a virtual consciousness experience the joy of a belly laugh or the comfort of a warm hug? And most importantly, will we finally have time to clear our inbox?

My submission is that the secret to a life well lived isn't extending it indefinitely, but making it rich in experiences, relationships and terrible dance moves that will live on in family legends. After all, what's the point of an eternal digital existence if we can't even feel the satisfaction of finally finding that matching Tupperware lid?

A word of caution, then. Before you sign up for Immortality.com, take a moment to savour the beautiful imperfections of your flesh-and-blood life. Living is about leaving a legacy of laughter, love, and a few embarrassing photos that your great-grandkids will gleefully share on whatever passes for social media in the future. And now, if you'll excuse me, I have some living to do—and even a backup to run, just in case.

Our tryst with semiconductors: What is well begun is half done

It's not possible to skip ahead but tie-ups can grant access to technology and accelerate the journey



NILESH JASANI
is a Singapore-based innovation investor for LC Geninnov Fund.

The semiconductor industry, the bedrock of modern electronics, operates on a scale both microscopic and colossal. Fabs, or semiconductor fabrication plants, are where silicon wafers undergo a complex metamorphosis, transforming into the chips that power our smartphones, laptops, cars and countless other devices. Each new fab generation, denoted by nanometre measurements (28nm or 2nm), signifies a leap in technological prowess, enabling smaller, faster and more energy-efficient chips.

The journey from one node to the next is arduous, demands billions of dollars in investment and years of painstaking research and development. It's estimated that moving from a mature 28nm node (where India is starting) to the cutting-edge 2nm kind could take upwards of a decade and over \$100 billion in current times.

Few nations possess the technological and financial muscle to embark on this semiconductor odyssey. Yet, India, with its burgeoning tech sector and ambitious leadership, is poised to join this exclusive club. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent agreements in Singapore, alongside the landmark announcements by Adani and Tower Semiconductor, signal a promising start. These initial steps represent India's intent to climb the semiconductor Everest, one innovation at a time.

The complexity of process innovations: The reason that fabs are so difficult for all but a handful of corporates is the accumulating nature of the innovations required. Moving from one cutting-edge fab generation to the next involves a massive ecosystem of innovations, research and refinements. This journey is not just a leap in transistor density, but an intricate process requiring the collaboration of thousands of experts, engineers and corporations.

While much of the world focuses on flashy research papers announcing groundbreaking discoveries, the less celebrated process advancements make transitions possible. Each company, and each fab, will have hundreds of undocumented unique features, and even tiny differences can lead to two fabs making the same products with differing yields, say, one of 70% and the other 10%.

These process innovations are in the thousands, representing the lessons learnt during the day-to-day development within semiconductor fabs, involving everything from yield management and defect reduction to optimising supply chains. Together, these innovations enable each new generation of semiconductors.

In other words, it is not just about buying expensive machines, like for extreme ultraviolet (EUV) lithography, although these also represent an accumulation of innovations. Our engineers will learn about transistor architectures like FinFET or gate-all-around (GAA) and the integration of advanced materials like high-k metal gates in research papers. But, what makes everything work in the fab-building business goes beyond what could be learnt from books or bought with money.

Why you can't skip ahead in the fab journey: For nations or companies looking to make semiconductors, there is no easy skipping ahead. Jumping straight to advanced nodes without the cumulative knowledge gained from mastering older generations is like trying to run a marathon without training.

Consider the advancements made in transistor architecture. At the 7nm node, the FinFET transistor was the standard, but now, at the 3nm and 2nm nodes, gate-all-around (GAA) architectures are being explored. These changes require innovations in everything from transistor design to how these components are integrated into chips. The refinement of these technologies took years and thousands of process papers, experiments and real-world testing.

But short-cuts are possible in alliance with industry leaders: While starting with mature technologies is a good strategy, the most effective short-cut to cutting-edge nodes is partnering with industry leaders like TSMC of Taiwan or Samsung Electronics of South Korea. This is precisely what the US, Germany, and Japan have recognized as they provide incentives in billions and tens of billions of dollars to these giants to set up fabs within their borders.

The evolving geopolitical landscape, particularly India's warming ties with South Korea and Taiwan, opens new doors for strategic partnerships. Leveraging these relationships, India can leapfrog years of development, gaining access to cutting-edge technologies and expertise. The onus lies on industrialists and the government to seize this moment, aligning their visions and resources to accelerate India's semiconductor ascent.

In the world where chips are the new oil: One destination is a self-reliant India capable of designing and manufacturing its own chips to fuel its digital economy and bolster its geo-strategic autonomy. This could also be a way to harness the nation's top-quality engineering talent, particularly if the technology sector overall witnesses a change in the balance between the hardware and software segments, as this author expects. We must encourage higher ownership of hardware assets by Indians, and there are many avenues that policymakers and regular investors could explore to that end.

10 YEARS AGO



JUST A THOUGHT

Only by thinking tragically can tragedy be avoided.

IAN EASTON



MY VIEW | A VISIBLE HAND

MINT CURATOR

Re-imagine knowledge creation to accelerate innovation in India

We need far greater public and private investment in research, promotional policies and a scheme to attract diaspora talent



NARAYAN RAMACHANDRAN
is chairman, InKlude Labs. Read Narayan's Mint columns at www.livemint.com/visiblehand

India's frugal moon mission, Chandrayaan 3, achieved the pioneering feat of landing near the south pole of the Moon. In STEM fields—of science, technology, engineering and mathematics—India and the Indian diaspora have nearly as many Nobel laureates (two in Physics, one in Chemistry and one in Medicine) as the People's Republic of China and the Chinese diaspora (three in Physics, one in Chemistry and one in Medicine). Two Indians have won the prestigious Fields Medal in Mathematics (only one Chinese mathematician has done so). India participates in several global mega science projects, such as the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO), Large Hadron Collider at CERN and the Square Kilometer Array (SKA).

On this evidence and more, you might well be sceptical that India faces a challenge of higher education and innovation.

A closer look suggests something different. According to the QS Global ranking of universities for 2025, the highest ranked Indian university, the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bombay, ranks 118th. The Indian Institute of Science (IISc) in Bengaluru, IIT Delhi and IIT Madras are ranked in the next 150. Apart from those IITs and IISc, of the 1,168 registered universities in India, only University of Delhi and Anna University make it to the top 500. While India files applications for about 80,000 patents a year, this is one-twentieth that of China and one-eighth that of the US. The vast majority of universities in India do not produce any globally competitive new knowledge, preferring to remain teaching colleges and student factories. A digitised higher education system ensures that even their teaching is not as up-to-date, multi-disciplinary and agile as it needs to be in this fast-changing world.

The responsibility for much of India's innovation and new knowledge creation rests with government laboratories set up 60 or 70 years ago in emulation of a Soviet model.

The Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) coordinates the work of 37 laboratories that span entities such as the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology, National Chemical Laboratory and Institute of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants. The highest-paid scientists of CSIR, who are classified as Scientist 'H' or 'Out-standing', receive an annual compensation not exceeding ₹36 lakh (\$40,000). In contrast, the minimum compensation for a post-doctoral fellow at Harvard University for this academic year is \$67,400. Add to this the difficulties of establishing and maintaining a world-class laboratory and the near impossible task of obtaining cutting-edge lab consumables through a thicket of red tape. It is little wonder that the most innovative minds, particularly in STEM areas, choose to live and work outside India.



This third column in a series on the need for a quantity to quality transformation in India is focused on higher education and the process of knowledge creation. For India to progress from middle-income to developed-country status, it will not only have to adopt knowledge born elsewhere, but also contribute to the stock of new knowledge. The countries of Western Europe, the US, and more recently Japan, South Korea and China have all moved through these stages. Other countries that have not been able to follow this path, such as Thailand, Mexico and Malaysia, remain in middle-income traps.

For India to become a knowledge economy, we must radically reimagine the way knowledge is created in the country. There are two distinct elements that need to be fixed. First, the government needs to step up its funding of fundamental research. A Niti Aayog report says that India's gross expenditure on research and development (GERD) is one of the lowest among large countries, at 0.7% of GDP. Second, the participation and collaboration of the private sector in funding, leading and co-creating knowledge needs to dramatically increase. The first element may require a complete structural change in how research is conducted, by merging several labs with universities. At the very least, it will require a hybrid model of research cen-

tered on both universities and centrally funded laboratories. There is evidence that the most creative breakthroughs in science come at an early age for scientists. This pipeline of young scientists working with older guides is impossible to replicate at scale in anything other than a university setting. Private sector spending on R&D is a mere 0.3% of GDP, compared to 1.5% or more in many developed countries. The private share of GERD is only about 40% in India, while it is well over 70% in China, the US, Korea and Japan. So far, few private R&D labs work on projects beyond adaptation and adoption. Private R&D spending is led by the pharmaceutical sector, with transportation a close second.

Other policy changes, such as restoring a large tax-deduction for R&D expenditure, an ease-of-doing-business initiative for lab consumables and steps to 'unbox' India's patent box regime, are also required to kick-start R&D spending.

Diaspora scientists have been a critical factor in the R&D revolutions of Taiwan, China and South Korea. India could experiment with a more democratic and flexible version of China's 'Thousand Talents' programme to attract the best from India's diaspora and help catalyse an R&D revolution in India.

P.S. "From a little spark may burst a flame," said Dante Alighieri

The US and China could find common ground on AI rules

Stop mutual finger-pointing and go by what AI's 'godfathers' say



CATHERINE THORBECKE
is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist covering Asia tech.

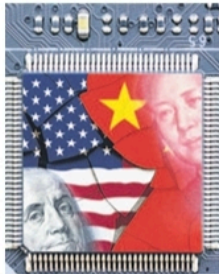
Earlier this month, OpenAI released its most-advanced models yet, saying they had the ability to "reason" and solve complex math and coding problems. The leading AI startup, valued at some \$150 billion, also acknowledged that they raised the risk of artificial intelligence (AI) could be misused to create biological weapons.

You would think the potential of such a consequential outcome would raise alarm bells that stricter oversight of AI is critical. But despite almost two years of existential warnings from industry leaders, academics and other experts about the technology's potential to wreak havoc, the US hasn't enacted any federal regulation. A chorus of voices inside and outside the tech industry dismisses doomsday warnings as distractions from AI's more near-term harms, such as potential copyright infringement, deepfakes and misinformation, or job displacement. But lawmakers have done little to address these too.

One core argument levelled against regulation is that it will impede innovation and could result in the US losing the AI race to China. But China has been rapidly advancing in spite of heavy oversight—and all-out US efforts to block it from accessing critical components and equipment. US export controls have hampered China's progress, but one area where it leads the US has been in setting standards for how the most sweeping technology of our time can be created and used.

China's autocratic regime finds it easy to impose tough rules, as suffocating as they may seem for its tech industry. Beijing has different motives, including retention of social stability and party power, but also sees AI as a priority and is working with the private sector to boost innovation under its supervision.

Despite political differences, there are some lessons the US can learn. For starters, China is tackling near-term concerns through a combination of new laws and court precedents. Cyber regulators rolled out laws on deepfakes in 2022, protecting victims whose likeness was used without consent and requiring labels on digitally altered content. Chinese courts have also set standards on how AI tools can be used, issuing rulings that protect artists from copyright infringement and voice actors from exploitation. Broader interim rules on GenAI require developers to share details with the government on how algorithms are trained and pass stringent safety tests (alignment with socialist values is one such). But regulators have also shown balance and rolled back some daunting requirements after



The argument that US regulation would let China get ahead has worn thin. *istockphoto*

feedback from China's AI industry. This is in stark contrast to efforts in the US. Lawsuits over current AI harms are making their way through courts, but the absence of federal action has been stark. A lack of guidelines also creates uncertainty for business leaders. US regulators could take a leaf out of China's playbook and narrowly target laws focused on known risks while working more closely with the industry on guardrails for far-off threats.

In the absence of federal regulation, some states are taking matters into their own hands. Californian lawmakers okayed an AI safety bill that would hold companies liable if their tools are used to cause "severe harm," such as to unleash a biological weapon. Many tech companies, including OpenAI, have opposed the bill, arguing that such legislation should be left to the US Congress. An open letter from AI entrepreneurs and researchers also said that the bill would be "catastrophic" for innovation and would let "places like China take the lead in development of this powerful tool."

Such loud voices have long used this line of argument to fend off regulation. And it's a worry that the US can't seem to agree on laws to prevent worse-case AI scenarios, let alone address the more immediate harms. China should not be cited as an excuse to avoid meaningful oversight. Approaching AI safety as a zero-sum game between the US and China leaves no winners. Mutual suspicion and geopolitical tensions mean we won't likely see the two working together to mitigate AI risks anytime soon. But it doesn't have to be this way.

Some of the most vocal proponents for regulation are pioneers who helped create AI. A few so-called AI godfathers, including Turing Award winners Yoshua Bengio, Geoffrey Hinton and Andrew Yao, sat down earlier this month in Italy and called for global cooperation across jurisdictions. They acknowledged the geopolitical climate, but also improved that of control or malicious use of AI could "lead to catastrophic outcomes for all of humanity." They offered a framework for a global system of governance. Many argue that they may be wrong, but the risks seem too high to write off. Policymakers from Washington to Beijing should learn from scientists who have at least shown it is possible to find common ground. *BLOOMBERG*

GUEST VIEW

India's merger control regime has had a big overhaul

NISHA KAUR UBEROI



is a partner and chair of the competition law practice at JSA Advocates & Solicitors.

The date 10 September 2024 marked a watershed moment for the Indian merger-control regime. Notified by the ministry of corporate affairs and the Competition Commission of India (CCI), the amendments represent a major overhaul. They are expansive and include several industry-friendly changes. On the flip side, the introduction of a deal value threshold (DVT) for merger approval, hike in filing fees, lower threshold for 'control' and narrowed scope of approval-exemptions for minority-stake acquisitions are likely to result in a spike in transactions notifiable to the CCI and an increased regulatory burden on industry, which would necessitate massive capacity enhancement at the already overburdened CCI to ensure ease of doing business.

With the sector-agnostic DVT, India joins a number of jurisdictions such as the US, Germany, Austria and South Korea whose merger-control regimes include a value-of-transaction test with a local nexus require-

ment. In India, any deal valued above ₹2,000 crore now needs CCI approval. But just because a regulator scrutinizes a deal does not mean it has anti-competitive effects.

Combination regulations have clarified that the amended provisions would also apply to deals that are yet to be consummated, wholly or partly. This will impact transactions where definitive documents have been signed but the deals are yet to be closed. The silver lining is that for partly completed deals which were earlier exempt and are now notifiable (on meeting the DVT), a complete safe harbour has been provided where no gun-jumping proceedings are initiated.

In a welcome move for acquisitions of listed companies, the CCI has also eased the approval regime for open-offer-oriented share purchases in the public market, which no longer attract gun-jumping penalties, subject to certain conditions, which include voting-right curbs except in cases of insolvency or liquidation. This will not help hostile takeovers, where the exercise of voting rights is key.

Shorter timelines for the assessment of a notified combination, while good on paper, may have some unintended practical consequences. The CCI has a proven track record

of efficiency; where multiple regulatory approvals are needed, it is usually the CCI nod that comes first. But shorter timelines without boosting CCI capacity could mean delays. Phase II reviews are now more complex, though the CCI's ability to recommend modifications during a Phase I review should quicken processes.

The Competition (Criteria of Combination) Rules, 2024, formalize the 'green channel' route for same-day approval of merger notifications, initially introduced by the CCI in 2019. However, the new rules also restrict the scope of this facility. The definition of 'affiliate' has been amended and 'overlaps,' which map the activities of an acquirer with its target, now need to be mapped all the way till the 'ultimate controlling person' of the acquirer. These changes effectively make the green channel route harder to use.

The rules have also introduced some new categories of combinations that are exempt from the need for approval and narrowed the applicability of minority-stake investment

exemptions, which are now only available in a few instances, like when there are no overlaps, no shift in control and no access to commercially sensitive information.

The new bar for 'control' has been set lower than current practice across corporate law, rules of the Securities and

Exchange Board of India (Sebi) and FDI norms, with a move from "decisive" to "material" influence as the new operative standard.

This, in and of itself, coupled with the new commercially sensitive information-access criterion, will increase the CCI's regulatory burden, as many more deals will need CCI approval.

With 1,101 approved combinations and a merger clearance track record of an average 19.4 working days from 2020 to 2024, it is clear that the CCI has not stood in the way of merger and acquisition (M&A) activity and has maintained a fine balance of the need for investment (and ease of doing business) with its mandate to foster healthy competition.

Given this overhaul of the Indian merger regime, until jurisprudence evolves, the coming year is likely to witness many interpretational challenges in relation to various amendments, be it the 'deal value threshold' or application of 'substantial business operations,' 'control' and 'commercially sensitive information' rules.

In general, we can expect enhanced pre-filing consultations and an uptick in merger notifications filed. The CCI's merger unit would need to expand capacity quickly.

To its credit, the CCI has been at the forefront of merger jurisprudence. Even global regulators, including US antitrust authorities, have followed the CCI's stance on common directorships across companies.

The amendments offer the CCI an opportunity to rewrite Indian merger control history and consolidate its reputation as an industry-friendly regulator, one that can walk a tightrope between encouraging scale, appreciating efficiency and encouraging investment on one hand, while safeguarding competition on the other.

The CCI is based in Delhi, while Sebi and RBI are in Mumbai, India's financial centre. Perhaps the time has come for the CCI to establish a merger unit in Mumbai. It would enhance regulatory efficiency.

Many more deals will need approval and the CCI must expand capacity fast to handle the new burden

The EDITORIAL PAGE

The IndianEXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA
BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

THE NEW COLOMBO

Anura Kumara Dissanayake's election is a rejection of politics as usual in Sri Lanka. Delhi must continue to build on ties

FOR THE FIRST time in its recent history, Sri Lanka has elected an "outsider" — from a Marxist-Leninist party that once led violent insurrections — as its president. Over the years, however, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) has become more mainstream, with a social-democratic agenda. The newly elected 55-year-old president, Anura Kumara Dissanayake, has played a significant part in this transformation. Dissanayake was also a key figure in the popular "Aragalaya" uprising against inflation, price rise, and economic mismanagement, which led to the ouster of the Rajapaksa. That Opposition leader Sajith Premadasa and incumbent Ranil Wickremesinghe lost to a political player till recently seen as fringe can be read as a sign of how much the people of Sri Lanka are tired of politics as usual. Given some of the new president's positions — ideological and on policy matters — there is an apprehension that his government will be "pro-China" and detrimental to India's interests. But it is important that, as it deals with Sri Lanka's new political establishment, Delhi not pay heed to such binaries.

The victory of the National People's Power (NPP) coalition — of which the JVP is the major constituent — did not take India by surprise. Dissanayake visited India in February and met External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and National Security Advisor Ajit Doval. Clearly, Delhi had a sense of the anti-incumbency mood in Sri Lanka. A major political change like the one in Colombo will, however, still present challenges. The JVP's opposition to the 13th Amendment of Sri Lanka's constitution — which provides for devolution of power to the Tamil minority — as well as talk on the campaign trail of cancelling the Adani Group's wind power project could be issues of contention between the two countries. At the same time, Dissanayake has hinted at continuing close ties with Delhi. India did not feature prominently in the election campaign — unlike, say, in the Maldives where President Mohamed Muizzu led an "India Out" campaign — and Delhi enjoys some goodwill for the assistance it provided during Sri Lanka's economic crisis. It is important, then, for Delhi to continue to build on the bilateral engagement — Dissanayake has responded warmly to congratulatory messages from PM Modi. India has the advantage of a shared history and geographic proximity with the island nation and the two countries have much to gain by deepening bilateral ties. It is important to deal with unfolding political changes as they occur, and not over-emphasise the China factor.

President Dissanayake has his task cut out for him. His anti-corruption, pro-welfare plank has certainly found resonance. At the same time, Sri Lanka's economy remains the greatest challenge facing the country. The bailout provided by the IMF in 2023 has helped bring some stability. Dissanayake has promised to pay back the debt and also said that he will seek amendments to the taxation targets under the deal. Given that the NPP does not have a legislative majority yet, passing a budget that engages in such a fine balancing act is one of the difficult tasks ahead.

THE MEDAL SWEEP

India's performance at the Olympiad underlines it: The future of chess is increasingly looking Indian

AT THE BUDEPEST Chess Olympiad, the Indian teams have reiterated what the rest of the world has seen coming for a while now: A golden generation of chess has come of age in the country where the sport originated. Not only did the Indian chess team win golds in the open section and the women's event, there were also four individual gold medals for Gukesh D, Arjun Erigaisi, Divya Deshmukh and Vantika Agrawal. While the women's team came back from a defeat and a draw in the middle, the Indian team in the open section was so dominant that in the 44 games they played over the course of the tournament, they lost just once. Both teams were fuelled by a heady combination of battle-hardened veterans like Harikrishna and Harika Dronavalli and players deemed to be future of chess.

There was always abundant talent in Indian chess. But a multitude of factors has contributed towards this sweep of medals. One of the critical reasons behind this chess boom is the tech revolution, with chess engines, software and access to good coaching becoming more accessible for anyone, even those sitting in tier II and tier III cities. This is the reason why players like Divya Deshmukh (Nagpur) and Arjun Erigaisi (Warangal) got quality coaching early on. Technology is how a player like Praggnanandhaa can work under Russian maestro Peter Svidler or a Gukesh can train with Poland's Grzegorz Gajewski without needing to fly abroad every few months. Another factor aiding the meteoric rise of the current generation is the expertise that the likes of Gukesh, Prag, Arjun and Vaishali got from the previous generation of grandmasters like RB Ramesh, Sandipan Chanda, Srinath Narayanan and Abhijit Kunte when they were very young. Add to this, the support the country's chess stars are getting from every quarter: Parents are more willing to let their kids play chess, private sponsors are pouring in money and even schools and colleges are more liberal when it comes to youngsters pursuing chess as a primary vocation. Not to mention the growing government support for chess players.

The success stories at Olympiad come in a year that has already seen unprecedented achievements for India, be it at elite events like the Candidates, where 17-year-old Gukesh became the world's youngest player to qualify for the world championship and Norway Chess or on the world rankings list where Arjun Erigaisi now owns real estate in the world's top 5 spots. And the year can get even better if Gukesh can win the world championship at the age of 18. Whether or not that happens, the future of chess is increasingly looking Indian.

THE COMMON TOUCH

Hanif Kureshi had the incredible ability to use his art to create a bridge between the street and the people

A FONT PULLED a city out of bankruptcy in the 1970s, when American graphic designer Milton Glaser fashioned the "I <3 NY" logo. It was a back-of-the-envelope design, inspired by hearts carved on tree trunks. The logo went on to become a pop-culture phenomenon that features as a coffee cup merch and a signpost for a city, all at once. Like Glaser, Gujarat-born, multidisciplinary urban artist Hanif Kureshi, who died on Sunday, was someone who used typography to bring India to the world. That design is about being personal, was Kureshi's calling card.

"Typfaces are like people," he said. "You knew them by the clothes they wore. You could take Helvetica to a party and it would fit it, while the single font, red box of *The Economist* is so distinct." Kureshi had an incredible ability to not just bring people to the streets, as he did in Mumbai's Sassoon Dock Art Project and Delhi's Lodhi Art District through his Street Art initiative, but he also brought the street to the people. His Handprinted Type project came from the streets, seen on shop boards of juice sellers and pawnshops — thick, unabashedly bold and vibrant in tone and lettering. He democratised art, taking the edge off the white cube, blunting its stuffiness and unreal price tag.

Kureshi inspired an underground graffiti movement. While he elevated the streets with murals, he also reminded people at traffic signals to "Stop Shopping", "Stop Gossiping", "Stop Posting". It was not an attempt to find his voice, but to lose it in experiments with paints and fonts, stickers and shipping containers, walls and boxes. Not to say a provocateur, he valued collaborations with artists, musicians, designers, creating works that traveled to festivals abroad, where they dined with kings but never lost the common touch.



SHYAM SARAN

THE YEAR 2024 HAS witnessed several setbacks to India's Neighbourhood First Policy. The recent election results in Sri Lanka may be the latest among them. Pakistan has reverted to escalating cross-border terrorism against India. Nepal has had yet another change of government and K P Oli, who had presided over an unprecedented worsening of bilateral relations, is Prime Minister again. A students' movement in Bangladesh morphed into a much wider anti-government revolt against Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. She had to flee from her country and seek refuge in India. India has been seen as complicit in her anti-people and corrupt policies, and there is widespread popular anger and resentment against it. More worrying is the resurfacing of radical Islamic elements of the Jamaat and a revival of Pakistani influence in the country. There is a serious security situation looming large in India's sensitive Northeast, where a dangerous inter-ethnic conflict in Manipur, a violent civil war in Myanmar and now an unstable and hostile situation in Bangladesh, could become intertwined and make India's eastern flank both unstable and volatile.

Another zone of unpredictability is emerging in India's southern maritime domain. This may multiply security threats over a wide swath of India's periphery. A hostile regime in the Maldives has already tested our diplomatic mettle. There is a real possibility that Sri Lanka's recent presidential elections could become another inflection point. Anura Kumara Dissanayake has been elected President at the head of the National People's Party (NPP), of which the chief constituent is his left-wing radical Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP). This is the first time that none of Sri Lanka's mainstream political parties will be ruling the country. A pervasive sense of resentment and frustration with successive governments, which mismanaged the economy and were guilty of widespread corruption, opened the doors to an outsider who skillfully exploited the popular angst against the ruling elites.

The JVP has reinvented itself politically, shedding its historical baggage as a violent left-wing and ultra-nationalist movement, which was involved in two bloody insurrections, one in 1971 and the other in 1987. Its

Result of recent polls in Sri Lanka is another reason for India to draw up a South Asia policy

ultranationalism was, of course, directed against India, as is the case with most of our neighbours. While in its present incarnation, the JVP may have forewarned its violent tactics, it continues to harbour a radical wing. It is likely to serve up populist policies, which will inevitably derail the fragile economic recovery of the past two years. Dissanayake has declared his intention to renegotiate the terms on which Sri Lanka has received IMF support, which the latter is unlikely to accept. There is likely to be greater state intervention in the economy and a review of several major private sector projects. Dissanayake has threatened to cancel the solar power project being undertaken by India's Adani group in northern Sri Lanka. The group is also undertaking a very large container port project in Colombo with \$553 million in financial support from the US International Development Finance Corporation. Would that be in jeopardy as well?

India cannot afford prolonged political turmoil and economic disruption in its southern periphery. Could the responsibility of office bring about a more sober and realistic approach from the new government in Colombo?

Things may not be entirely clear until the current parliament is dissolved, and a new Prime Minister is appointed after parliamentary elections. This may take place sooner than later. The NPP would want to profit from the political momentum it currently enjoys and hope to win a majority, but elections are always uncertain. It may be better to let the new politics play itself out before passing judgement over what one may expect from the new government in Colombo.

financial package. These are estimated to be about \$4 billion.

Such economic interdependence may serve to smoothen the jagged edges that politics may serve up. The Maldives template is a good one to follow for Sri Lanka.

The Modi government has been charged with putting all its eggs in the Sheikh Hasina basket in Bangladesh and not reaching out and engaging with political constituencies other than the ruling Awami League. Some lines of communication were maintained with the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party, but not with the anti-Indian Jamaat. In the case of Sri Lanka, it was apparent several months before the elections that Dissanayake and his NPP may win the elections. He was invited as a guest of the Indian government in February 2024 and held talks with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and with National Security Advisor Ajit Doval. This was a good move.

Dissanayake has recognised the importance of India for Sri Lanka's security and economic development. He has not given any indication of prioritising relations with China over India. One should expect that he will seek to maintain a careful balance in Sri Lanka's relations with India and China. Balance is preferable to leaning towards China.

There is a tendency to consider our policies towards each of our neighbours as independent variables. To some extent, the specificity of each neighbourhood relationship must be kept in mind. But there is an urgent necessity to draw up a comprehensive neighbourhood strategy. This should identify who are the assets and what are the liabilities in engaging with each of our neighbours but also pursue these bilateral relations in a larger pursuit of regional economic integration. This would seek to leverage the role that India could play as the engine of growth for all its neighbours, as the node for a regional transport and communications network and, increasingly, as the leader in helping the region tackle, collaboratively, for example, the urgent challenge of climate change. Leading the Global South must begin with our own subcontinental neighbours.

The writer is a former foreign secretary



M RAJIV LOCHAN

IN HIMACHAL PRADESH, the recent flare-up in popular anger against the illegal construction of a mosque in Sanjauli was not a Hindu-Muslim issue at all. It was merely a manifestation of the anger against the absence of governance. In its absence, communities — angry about the hundreds of pinpricks that mark their daily lives — start fighting with each other in the name of religion, caste, etc., latching on to long-standing fault lines. Few today recall that these are the same people who, for the past 10 years — during which period they were governed by both the BJP and Congress — refused to allow sundry "gau rakshaks" the freedom to operate in Himachal Pradesh, unlike in neighbouring states.

The issue here is not so much the political or communal dissonances that characterise India. Nor is it about municipal administration being partial or inefficient. It is about the governance of a locality being completely disconnected from the concerns of those who live there. There is no "citizen" in India; only *labharthis*, people who have to be given some *labh*, some privileges, some benefits, by superior beings who run the government from a remote location. That could be an MLA or an MP or even an IAS officer. All people can do is plead before them to shower some *manna*.

The simple fact is that good governance is based on the principle of subsidiarity — de-

THE DISCONNECTED CITIES

Recent communal tensions in Himachal Pradesh point to a deeper predicament

Civic bodies have existed in India since the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments made local self-government bodies mandatory in the states. However, these amendments failed to allocate any subjects to local self-government. State governments, which were enjoined by the Constitution to devolve power to local bodies, refused to do so. Instead, newer ways were found to emasculate the latter; their ability for action further eroded.

decisions should be made at the level closest to the people. This means that if roads are not being cleaned, street lights don't work, illegal civil works keep coming up in a locality, and shops and buildings are used for purposes that upset the civic balance, it is the locality's people who are best placed to keep an eye and escalate the matter to authorities empowered to take corrective actions. This subsidiarity simply does not exist in India.

Civic bodies have existed in India since the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments made local self-government bodies mandatory in the states. However, these amendments failed to allocate any subjects to local self-government. State governments, which were enjoined by the Constitution to devolve power to local bodies, refused to do so. Instead, newer ways were found to emasculate the latter; their ability for action further eroded. No wonder the actual concerns of the people in their localities remain routinely unaddressed. Worse, the comprehensive monopoly of action that the government exercises substantively prohibits the people of a locality from taking any action to resolve their local issues.

Big issues, ones that have been created by political bigwigs — akin to the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan — get some official response but not so much the smaller problems that impact the normal life of citizens — like actually getting roads and gutters cleaned daily.

Or, ensuring that the random parking of buses, trucks, cars, scooters, etc., does not block roads.

Simple matters of public law and order, providing clean drinking water, collecting property tax, building and maintaining roads, religious places and/or community health and schools — all legitimate concerns of the local body — get decided upon and carried out by remotely located administrators. Local bodies have neither the money nor the administrative wherewithal to adequately manage any of them.

State governments routinely control what should be a local matter. Whether it is policemen, doctors, teachers or municipal clerks, local bodies have no powers. This makes the administration of a locality entirely disconnected from the concerns of the local population. Good governance becomes *manna* that is showered on the locality at the whims and fancies of remote beings.

In India, we have created a system in which citizens have been taken out of governance. Every once in a while, they push back, seeking some say in how a locality is governed. In the absence of formal powers to govern, they create conditions of chaos, increase mutual acrimony, and find new ways of hurting each other.

The writer teaches history at Panjab University, Chandigarh

SEPTEMBER 24, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO

PRESIDENT JOINS TALKS

PRESIDENT ZAILSINGH's emissary, who did not want to be identified, held talks with three of the five Sikh high priests and some functionaries of the SGPC as part of the President's "direct efforts" to reach an amicable settlement with the Akalis who have threatened a "massive march" to the Golden Temple on October 1. The emissary said that a final settlement could be possible in two to three days if everything went well.

RESTORE POPULAR RULE

THE MOVE to restore popular rule in Punjab

has been revived. Top central leaders are believed to have told some state Congress (I) leaders that the Centre is considering re-installing the party's government in the state. This has given a fillip to the activities in the state Congress (I) Legislature Party. Punjab was placed under President's rule on October 6, last year following the massacre of six bus passengers by terrorists.

34 PILGRIMS KILLED

THIRTY-FOUR PILGRIMS BELONGING to Hapur in Maharashtra were killed and 11 others injured when their bus returning from Badrinath met with an accident near

Maletha village, about eight km from Srinagar in Tehri Garhwal district. Those killed included the driver of the bus, 12 women and one child. The injured were taken to Srinagar hospital.

PROTEST AGAINST IMF

FACED WITH OPPOSITION from the US and its supporters, the interim committee of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which set policy for the Fund, refused to allocate any more special drawing rights (SDRs) for the present. It also reduced access rights over the opposition of the Third World, but in doing that the US accepted a compromise.



"For BNP to really stop its errant members and to credibly support the present campaign of reforms, it must first demonstrate its ability to reform itself. The changes it envisions for the state must start within its own rank and file."

— THE DAILY STAR, BANGLADESH

THE IDEAS PAGE

One nation, one fantasy

At the deepest level, One Nation One Election is a desire to cut down the clutter of democratic politics. It originates in the middle-class fantasy to save the republic from the public



DESHIKAAL

BY YOGENDRA YADAV

THE WORLD IS full of clever answers in search of a genuine question. When talk of One Nation One Election (ONOE) began, it looked like a grand policy solution in search of a real problem. Either a remedy in search of a disease, or a medicine worse than the disease, it looked like a sequel to demonisation, another brainchild of a modern-day Tughlaq's penchant for something grand sans a vision or a blueprint.

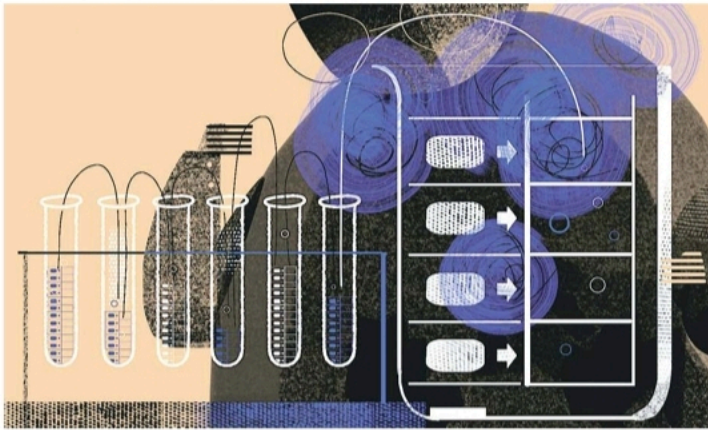
Noting the alacrity with which the present regime has gone about pushing this scheme and reading the Report on Simultaneous Elections in India of the High Level Committee (HLC), I am now convinced that One Nation One Election is not just a quixotic yet harmless fantasy. It fits into a larger political design that has been in the works for long. Originating in the middle-class fantasy to save the republic from the public and the bureaucratic quest to evacuate democracy of its popular content, this design has now fused with the rulers' desire to tame and defang democracy.

The 281-page report (18,345 pages with annexures) is a made-to-order document whose conclusions were written into its terms of reference. Just as the RBI was asked to invent virtues of demonisation, the HLC was designed to discover the rationale for ONOE. Packed with pro-regime cheer-leaders of ONOE, the HLC has obediently filled in the details of the legal-constitutional formalities and administrative logistics required to roll it out.

The compulsion to discover a rationale makes for strange reading. The report claims that constant elections account for a loss of "about 300 days in an average year" in some states like Maharashtra (p.167). The ONOE would offer "equitable opportunity to political workers" (p.155) since the same leader won't contest for MLA and MP. Not just that, ONOE would lead to "reduction in instances hate speeches" (p.156). It would solve the problem of "voter fatigue" (pp.153-4) — a problem I never heard about in two decades of doing research on Indian elections.

Here is a nugget of constitutional wisdom coming from the "Constitutional Expert" member of the HLC: India is "a combination of Presidential and Parliamentary forms of government" (p.109). Consider this piece of reasoning: "The synchronised conduct of elections fosters a sense of civic cohesion and national unity, as citizens across the country participate in the festival of democracy collectively, reinforcing the bonds of citizenship and fraternity." (P145) This reminded me of school children expounding on the countless benefits of their latest "invention" for a science project.

Shorn of such verbiage, or a dubious polling exercise, the core argument is that simultaneous elections would improve the quality of governance: Cutting down on the diversion of government machinery, saving in state expenditure and reduction in the time window of policy freeze due to the operation of the Model Code of Conduct. These are valid arguments whose weight needs to be assessed carefully. How disruptive is the diversion of government machinery (typically



C.R. Sankar

three disruptions in five years that ONOE would reduce to two, not one) for elections? How does this compare to other disruptions caused by visits by big leaders or large religious congregations, for example? What proportion of the government's budget is spent on elections? How does it compare with the money spent by candidates and parties? As for the much touted argument about "policy paralysis", for each state government this amounts to a period of just four months in five years. The idea that the central government is hamstringing by state assembly elections is belied by the big-ticket announcements on health and agriculture (not to mention the cabinet approval of ONOE itself) made by the Modi government in the last fortnight when the MCC is in operation.

Besides, this rationale for ONOE must contend with an alternative solution. The Election Commission has the powers to club all the assembly elections falling within six months of one another (which it chose not to exercise in the case of Maharashtra, Jharkhand and Delhi); this can be extended to 12 months. The EC that is willing to club all the Lok Sabha and assembly elections in one go can surely be asked to reduce the duration of the election to a fortnight and no more than three phases. And the Model Code of Conduct can be amended to provide for continuity of regular governance during the election period. When ordinary pills can do, why go for a surgery?

Even if you grant all the benefits of ONOE, these need to be weighed against the serious damage this scheme would do to our constitutional democratic structure. As many as 15 recognised political parties, mostly from the INDIA bloc, have opposed ONOE. The undeniable fact is that ONOE is not the simple administrative change in the electoral calendar that it is made out to be. It would upset the basic principle of accountability of the executive to the legislature inherent in our parliamentary system of governance. The HLC suggests a solution to this problem by creating another problem of holding elections for the remaining part of the tenure even if it is for just one year. The proposal to align the tenure of state assemblies as well as municipal and panchayat bodies with Lok Sabha is a violation of the federal principle of governance. In this

The Election Commission has the powers to club all the assembly elections falling within six months of one another (which it chose not to exercise in the case of Maharashtra and Jharkhand); this can be extended to 12 months. The EC that is willing to club all the Lok Sabha and assembly elections in one go can surely be asked to reduce the duration of the election to a fortnight and no more than three phases. And the Model Code of Conduct can be amended to provide for continuity of regular governance during the election period. When ordinary pills can do, why go for a surgery?

sense, ONOE seems to be in violation of the "basic structure" of our Constitution.

More than the administrative, legal and constitutional issues, the deepest problem with the ONOE is the political design inherent in it. Clearly, holding the national and state elections together would give an edge, a small to moderate vote swing, in favour of a national party and against regional parties. My hunch is that the BJP may not have won a clear majority in the Odisha assembly but for simultaneous elections in 2024. The political vision underlying ONOE assumes that nation-wide political players are the only trustworthy custodians of national interest.

At the deepest level, ONOE is a desire to cut down the clutter of democratic politics. It is no coincidence that the HLC Report devotes maximum attention and space to discussing the political economy of simultaneous elections. Through an elaborate economic modeling — elegant in its math but dubious in its assumptions and conclusions — it argues that ONOE would lead to political stability, faster economic growth, predictable policy environment and lower populist pressures. This is very much in line with a long strand in our public life that had once identified as "middle class fantasies" of electoral reforms.

Those who dominate the social and economic life of this country are increasingly impatient with its messy politics and have been coming up with one solution after another to "clean" the world of politics — reduction in the number of candidates, minimum threshold of votes for regional parties, law against "freelancers" so on. Certain sections of the political class — led by, but not confined to, the BJP — are in sympathy with this reasoning and would like to cut down on the headache of elections, of constantly being on tenterhooks, of the sword of accountability.

They can't do away with elections altogether, but the next best thing is to limit this mess to just once in five years. So that the business of governance can be carried out undisturbed by the people for four years and nine months. In its essence, ONOE is antithetical to democracy.

The writer is member, Svaraj India and National Convenor of Bharat Jodo Abhiyaan

It isn't broken, don't fix it

Going back on inflation targeting or making substantial changes to the framework would erode central bank's credibility, damage economy



RAJESWARI SENGUPTA

SHOULD INDIA MODIFY its inflation targeting (IT) framework, or even abandon it? Several commentators have raised this question recently, ahead of an official review of the monetary policy framework. Periodic policy reviews are important — that's why they are mandated in the IT law. It's also true that policies can always be improved. But the big picture needs to be kept in mind, which in this case is that IT has succeeded beyond expectations, making it one of the most important reforms of the last decade. Going back on it or making substantial changes to "loosen" the framework would erode the credibility of the central bank, damage the economy, and backfire in a political sense.

It is important to recognise what the review entails. According to the amended RBI Act, "the Central government shall, in consultation with the Reserve Bank of India, determine the inflation target in terms of the Consumer Price Index, once in every five years". Strictly speaking, this refers to the numerical target of 4 per cent with a band of plus/minus 2 percentage points. However, this can be interpreted more broadly. If some of the changes proposed are adopted — in particular, the suggestion that only a subset of CPI be targeted, perhaps excluding food prices — they would have an enormous impact.

Three points are worth noting. First, it is important to remember why IT was implemented in the first place. During 2009-2012, the output gap led inflation to go out of control. CPI inflation reached 15 per cent in March 2010. And yet no one was held responsible because the RBI was following a "multiple objectives" approach, under which it wasn't firmly committed to any particular target. The resulting public confusion was so strong that UPA was voted out of office (for this and other reasons) and a new government was voted in, which pledged it would not allow such an episode on its watch. To make this promise concrete, it enshrined IT into law.

Second, the reform has proved successful, far more so than many people anticipated at the time IT was adopted. RBI has generally kept inflation within the 4-6 per cent band; even when inflation has breached the upper limit, the deviations have been modest. Inflation has never gone back to double digits, despite serious food, oil, and pandemic shocks in recent years.

Third, this success has brought economic and political benefits. Price stability has helped fuel growth because it has allowed businesses to plan without worrying too much that surging their projections will be upset by surging costs. It has also reduced interest rates because it has improved central bank credibility, meaning that the RBI no longer needs to raise interest rates by as much as it did in the 2010s to convince people that it is serious about tackling inflation. Research by Vaishali Garga, Aeiim

Lakdawala and this writer shows that market participants view RBI's commitment to IT as credible. And price stability has paid political dividends, or at least allowed the NDA to avoid the political costs of high inflation suffered by the UPA.

But what about the argument that the RBI should narrow its target, to exclude food prices which it cannot control? The problem is — this is a theoretical argument. And in the end, the theoretical points are not relevant. After all, the purpose of a government is to provide services that the public needs and desires. And the Indian public has made it clear that it desires price stability. Not for a subset but for its entire consumption basket, especially including food. Put another way, there's a reason why all major central banks target inflation. And there's a reason why they all include food in their target index. Because it is what the public wants, indeed demands.

That said, there are indeed theoretical factors that the RBI cannot ignore. Central banks worry about rising food prices because of what is referred to as "second-round effects" such as the spillover of food inflation to non-food inflation through a wage-price spiral. Workers faced with higher food prices demand higher wages to compensate for their rising cost of living and this, in turn, pushes inflation up even more. Some have argued this consideration does not apply in India, noting that recent food price increases have not had any spillover. That may be true, but again is irrelevant, as it confuses the particular for the general.

In recent months, declining core (non-food, non-fuel) inflation implies that the second-round effect is weaker right now. This is because there is pervasive unemployment. When there is surplus labour or a lack of adequate jobs, as is the case now, workers are not in a good position to demand. They have less bargaining power to demand higher wages when food prices go up. In such a situation, the wage-price spiral may not get triggered and hence we are not seeing steep increases in non-food inflation. But in the mid-2000s when the economy was booming and the labour market was tight, high food prices set off a wage-price spiral. This situation could easily recur if the economy grows rapidly over the medium-term, in which case changing the framework to tell RBI to ignore signals from rising food prices could prove disastrous.

What is instead required is for the RBI to strengthen its analytical framework, given that its inflation and growth forecasts have frequently been subject to large errors. This, in turn, requires improving the underlying data which are outdated and have methodological issues. It also requires a better understanding of agriculture, to assess whether food inflation is temporary or a reflection of some deeper, structural issues.

Implementing reforms in a messy democracy requires years of work. Even after a decade, the IT framework is in its nascent stages and is being put to test by various shocks. It's important to let it mature, making incremental rather than major changes that would endanger the overarching goal of price stability. As they say: If it isn't broken, don't fix it.

The writer is associate professor of Economics, IGIDR



PULPAPRE BALAKRISHNAN

THE GUILLOTINE HAS fallen again in Kerala. The first time it fell was on landlordism in 1956, when the government of EMS Namboodiripad legislated reforms that ended centuries-old feudalism. In a single stroke, agricultural labourers were free to sell their labour power to whom they pleased. That this did not lead to a dynamic agricultural sector does not take away from its potential to have ushered in a social revolution. Social distance between labourer and landlord, a prominent aspect of Kerala society, was ended once and for all. And the labour movement received an impetus. However, while the economic and social power exerted by way of class declined, the asymmetry of power — whereby men rule over women in almost all spheres of social life — remained untouched. Left politics in Kerala remained fixated on economic inequality and Western imperialism. In the meanwhile, unexpectedly, religion assumed a far greater role in social life, cementing the hold of patriarchy. But now, in a completely unexpected turn, patriarchy is under the scanner. It may have taken a while to come, but it could lead to that much-needed social and social revolution in Kerala and serve as an example of what can be achieved elsewhere in a country where women endure toxicity in the workplace.

The particular development in Kerala has

Social justice must include her

Hema Committee report shows why its ambit must be widened

taken the form of a group of women in the film industry coming together under the banner of Women's Collective in Cinema (WCC). The first act was to curtail the misogynistic dialogues in Malayalam films, spoken by some of the biggest stars of the industry. While it is difficult to gauge its impact, the WCC's second intervention was more powerful. Following the case of a young woman actor being sexually assaulted, WCC pressured the government to set up a committee to investigate the working conditions for women in the film industry. The Hema Committee was the first instance in Kerala when a group of women were able to pressure a government to such a degree. But the results took a long time to come. A government reluctant to publish the findings of the Committee had to be directed to do so following a ruling of the Right to Information appellate body. The Hema Committee report has been redacted but its main message, national news since, is that women in the Malayalam film industry are subjected to discrimination and sexual exploitation. The storm that broke out has led to resignations in both the state film body, Kerala Chalachitra Academy, and the actors' union, Association of Malayalam Movie Actors (AMMA), led exclusively by men, has come across as wedded to patriarchy. The Kerala government has set up a

Special Investigating Team, comprising senior women of the IPS to investigate the recent allegations.

This uprising in Kerala has lessons for the movement to bring about gender justice in the country. First, do not expect even an elected government to take the initiative to address patriarchy, even when it comes down to something as simple as ensuring a safe workplace for women. When politicians speak of "social justice" they appear to not have women in mind. But a government can be pressured to take action, which brings hope to the project. Second, women will have to take the lead in ensuring that their demands are accepted by employers, without waiting for social attitudes to change. WCC has shown that a move towards this can be made, but the struggle is unlikely to ease up. It took a small group of mostly young and articulate women seven years to bring things to this stage in Kerala. If the question of women's safety in the workplace becomes a movement, easier now that WCC has brought national-level awareness to the matter, much can be achieved, and sooner, without individuals having to place their careers on the line.

For years, economists have wrung their hands over the low female worker participation in the labour force, which is one factor keeping India at a low level of income.

World Bank data reveals that this statistic is lower in India than in even Saudi Arabia, reflexively thought of as a more conservative socially. The answer to the question of low presence of women in India's workforce is easier to comprehend after the revelations in Kerala. In the aftermath of the Ahlaya case in Kolkata, with the national media reporting on the state of the infrastructure in India's government hospitals, it is possible to see how little needs to be done to move the needle on women's safety — basic infrastructure such as separate, functioning toilets and safe resting areas, especially when they are on long work shifts. Merely the absence of a secure place to sleep stood between the young doctor in Kolkata and her life.

India's labour laws had once disallowed night shifts for women in factories and decreed that spittoons be provided in the workplace. They are in severe need of revision. In India, women constitute neither a class nor a caste. They are not financially independent and have lower health and education endowments within every caste group. After recent events in Bengal and Kerala, it cannot be business as usual for India's talkative political class. They will have to widen their definition of "social justice".

The writer is an economist

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A CULTURE PROBLEM

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'Nirmala calls for lessons to tackle stress' (IE, September 23). The fact that our young face immense stress and strain in our competitive education system is now well known. The death of a young professional in Pune, unable to bear the heavy burden of work assigned to her, adds another terrifying dimension to the situation. Surprisingly, the finance minister has called upon only higher educational institutions to teach students stress management skills to prepare them for the future. She did not spare a word against the growing toxic corporate culture that tries to extract the most out of its employees. The loss of a budding life should propel the government to enact appropriate rules to protect employees from such exploitation.

Kamal Laddha, Bengaluru

A NEW DAWN

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'Marxist Dissanayake wins Lanka presidential election' (IE, September 23). The people of Sri Lanka have mandated a big change in the latest presidential election by voting Anura Kumara Dissanayake of the National People's Power (NPP) to power. It is to Dissanayake's credit that despite having only 3 seats in 225-seat parliament, he managed to bring together a

broad coalition called NPP, comprising activists, student leaders and women's rights activists. AKD is expected to be closer to China, Lanka's largest investor and creditor, whose debt culture on Sri Lanka has encouraged it to make frequent naval strikes into Sri Lankan seas threatening India's regional security. It remains to be seen how the new president will translate his words into actions. Dissanayake, who assumes charge in a not-so-congenial atmosphere, needs support and cooperation from every section of Sri Lankan society.

Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

QUAD & THE WORLD

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Quad's light touch' (IE, September 23). From its earlier ignominious demise in 2007 to its revival in 2017, Quad has gained significant stature. Quad members do realise the growing assertiveness of Chinese power in the Indo-Pacific region but they make sure that their actions are not directly seen as anti-China. The Quad has successfully transformed from a budding security dialogue into a multifaceted partnership with far-reaching goals. It has been one-on-one meetings between Narendra Modi and Xi Jinping can foster warmer ties between the countries.

Barit Govind, Noida

How SC strengthened child pornography law

The Supreme Court expanded the definition of what constitutes 'possession' of child pornography to include viewing or displaying such content as well

AJOY SINHA KARPURAM
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 23

TIGHTENING THE law on child pornography, the Supreme Court on Monday said that even viewing, possessing, and not reporting such content is punishable under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act regardless of whether it is shared or transmitted further.

In doing so, the SC set aside a Madras High Court decision from earlier this year where a single-judge Bench had quashed criminal proceedings against a 28-year-old man who had downloaded two pornographic videos involving children on his phone.

In a 200-page judgement, a Bench comprising Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud and Justice J.B. Pardiwala outlined a strict interpretation of what constitutes an offence of "storage of child pornography".

POCSO Act was amended to introduce three connected offences under Sections 15(1)(2) and (3) with increasing grades of punishment — from fines to a three to five year jail sentence. These punish

■ Any person, who stores or possesses pornographic material in any form involving a child, but fails to delete or destroy or report the same to the designated authority, as may be prescribed, with an intention to share or transmit child pornography;

■ Any person, who stores or possesses pornographic material in any form involving a child for transmitting or propagating or displaying or distributing in any manner at any time except for the purpose of reporting, as may be prescribed, or for use as evidence in court; and

■ Any person, who stores or possesses pornographic material in any form involving a child for commercial purposes.

The court's verdict, authored by Justice Pardiwala, refers to these as "inchoate" offences — offences that are in anticipation or preparation for committing a further criminal act. The court said that Section 15 was not limited to possessing the sharing or transmitting of child pornographic material, and could even be used to punish the "intent" to commit such an act.

The law in these cases, the court held,

punishes "overt steps" taken towards committing a crime and not "the mere thought of committing an offence". For instance, the court held that a failure to "delete or destroy or report" child pornography would allow the court to "indirectly" infer that the concerned individual intended to share or distribute it under Section 15(1).

What was the case before the SC?

On January 11, the Madras HC quashed the criminal proceedings against a man charged with downloading and possessing child pornography on his mobile phone. The FIR filed against the accused only mentioned Section 14 of the POCSO Act which punishes using children for "pornographic purposes", and the offences under Section 15 were added in subsequent chargesheets.

However, the High Court confined it's ruling to Section 14 alone and held that "mere possession" child pornography would not violate the provision "since he has not used a child or children for pornographic purposes".

The court also held that the offences under the POCSO Act could only be made out if the accused had transmitted or published the material, and there was no evidence to suggest that this took place.

What did the SC rule?

The Supreme Court expanded the definition of "possession" in child pornography cases to include cases where the individual may not have physical possession of child pornographic material, but they have "the power to control the material in question and the knowledge of exercise of such control". The court termed this "constructive possession" and held that "viewing, distributing or displaying" such reports the same to the specified authorities".

This puts emphasis on reporting of child pornographic content. The penalty for not reporting is a fine "not less than five thousand rupees and in the event of second or subsequent offence, with fine which shall not be less than ten thousand rupees."

never downloads or stores the same in his mobile. Here 'A' would still be said to be in possession of such material, as while watching he exercises a considerable degree of control over such material including but not limited to sharing, deleting, enlarging such material, changing the volume etc. Furthermore, since he himself on his own volition is viewing such material, he is said to have knowledge of having control over such material."

Another illustration dealt the responsibility of an individual who receives child pornography unwittingly from an external source:

"For instance, say, 'A' is sent an unknown link by 'B', which upon clicking opens a child pornographic video on the phone of 'A'. Now if 'A' immediately closes the link, although once the link is closed 'A' is no longer in constructive possession of the child pornography, this by itself does not mean that 'A' has destroyed or deleted the said material by merely closing the link. 'A' will only be absolved of any liability if he after closing the link further reports the same to the specified authorities".

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The court also held that the offence under Section 15 will apply even if the accused does not have physical possession of child pornography at the time when the FIR is filed. Charges can be made if it is established that the accused possessed child pornographic material "at any point". The court said that if a person "immediately after storing and watching child pornography in his mobile phone deletes the same before an FIR could be registered" could still be found liable under Section 15.

How will such cases be registered?

The court held that the intention of an accused can be determined based on the "manner in which such material is stored or possessed and the circumstances in which the same was not deleted, destroyed or reported". From these actions and circumstances, the court will determine the mens rea or the intention of the accused.

The court also cautioned the police and courts from limiting their inquiry to one of the sub-sections under Section 15. Even if an offence under one sub-section is not made out, the court held that the police and courts must not "jump to the conclusion" that there is no offence at all. Instead, the police must see if an offence has been out in one of the other sub-sections.

Travel may slow down premature ageing: Study

TRAVEL MAY be the most effective weapon to slow down the process of ageing, a new study published in the *Journal of Travel Research* in August found.

'Entropy increase' & health

The study is the first to look at the principle of "entropy increase" as a theoretical basis for assessing the link between travel and ageing.

Entropy is a concept in thermodynamics that measures the degree of disorder or chaos within a system. Simply put, higher the entropy, more the disorder and vice versa. First proposed by German physicist Rudolf Clausius in 1865, the concept today sees use in a wide range of fields including economics, biology, sociology, and information theory.

According to the second law of thermodynamics, as time passes, the entropy of an isolated system can increase, but not decrease. This is the idea of "entropy increase". This is what the study's authors use to describe the decline in human health, specifically the process of ageing. A healthy and functioning human body can be said to have low entropy. As one ages, one's body witness an entropy increase. Humans, however, combat this with a combination of medicine and healthy lifestyle choices.

Travel & ageing

Researchers found that the link between tourism and human health is multifaceted. Positive travel experiences can lead to improved physical and mental health "through exposure to novel environments, physical activities, and social interactions. This can slow down ageing."

"Ageing, as a process, is irreversible. While it can't be stopped, it can be slowed down," Fangli Hu, the lead author of the study, told *Science Daily*. "Put simply, the [human body's] self-defence system becomes more resilient. Hormones conducive to tissue repair and regeneration may be released and promote the self-healing system's functioning," she said.

Additionally, physical activities like hiking, climbing and cycling can boost metabolism and energy spent, aiding the body to maintain its self-healing system. Further research could explore how travel therapy could benefit different groups of people.

However, negative travel experiences may increase ageing and lead to further entropy increase. "Conversely, tourism can involve negative experiences that potentially lead to health problems, paralleling the process of promoting entropy increase," Hu said. Contracting infectious diseases, accidents, injuries, violence, water and food safety issues, and concerns related to inappropriate tourism engagement, can all contribute to faster ageing.

AGATHA JAYAKUMAR


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Why dengue cases have surged this year

The 12.06 million cases reported globally in 2024 are more than twice the number recorded all of last year

ANONNA DUTT
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 23

AS CITIES across India report a surge in dengue cases, a record number of cases have been reported around the world this year with Brazil and other South American countries worst affected. Data from the World Health Organisation (WHO) show that the number of dengue cases have been increasing year-on-year (see Graphic).

What is dengue?

Dengue is a viral infection which is transmitted by the Aedes aegypti mosquito. Most people with the infection report mild symptoms, but the disease is known to cause fever, severe headache, muscle and joint pains, nausea and vomiting, pain behind the eyes, and rashes. In severe cases, however, the infection can lead to internal bleeding, and if not managed properly, even death.

Over the past two decades, there has been a "tenfold increase in reported cases" an editorial by *The Lancet* said, adding that "even this figure is likely an underestimate". This makes dengue the "only infectious disease for which annual mortality is rising".

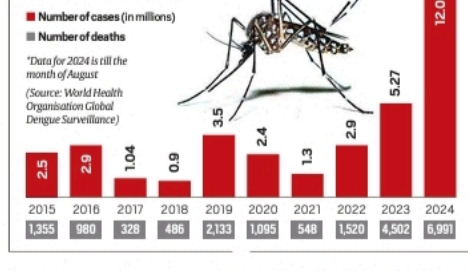
How many people have been infected this year?

More than 12 million cases and 6,991 deaths have been recorded globally till August this year, according to data from the WHO's global dengue surveillance. This is more than double the 5.27 million cases recorded in all of last year, which itself was a record. Prior to last year, over the past decade, around two to three million annual cases of dengue had been reported at best.

Experts say that even 2024's record numbers are likely to be an undercount. This is because not all countries — including India — report their data to the global surveillance network. Even among countries which report the data, not every dengue patient might have been tested and reported to the health authorities.

What is the situation in India?

Several cities have reported a surge in



dengue cases over the past two months. More than 32,000 cases and 32 deaths attributable to dengue were reported till June end, according to the latest available data from the National Vector Borne Disease Control Programme.

This number is likely to have shot up in the last two months. Union Health Secretary Anurag Chandra, in an early August, had said that India had seen an almost 50% rise in the number of dengue cases reported this year, as compared to the same period in 2023.

Notably, India is also witnessing an increase in the geography of the infection. The disease spread from only eight states and Union Territories in 2021 to every single state and UT in 2022, with Ladakh reporting the first two cases this year.

aegypti mosquito which breeds in clean, stagnant water. An increase in cases is generally reported during and just after the monsoon.

If you just look at Delhi, we have been experiencing rains with warm spells in between, which are the best conditions for the mosquito to proliferate," said Dr Sujatha Sunil from the Vector Borne Diseases Group in New Delhi's International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology.

CLIMATE CHANGE: An increase in temperatures allows mosquitoes to breed in places where they previously could not — in higher altitudes for instance.

"Global warming has definitely led to an increase in the prevalence of the vector in geographies it might previously not have been found," Sunil said.

Moreover, climate change has also led to the virus becoming more robust and transmitting better. On the current outbreak, the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention said: "Higher temperatures can expand the range of the mosquitoes that spread dengue, as well as affect other factors that facilitate virus transmission like faster viral amplification in the mosquito, increased vector survival, and changes in reproduction and biting rates."

MOVEMENT OF PEOPLE: The global

movement of people and goods has, in general, led to a greater spread of infections that these people carry with them. However, better testing and reporting might also add to the "increase," Sunil said.

Apart from dengue, other infections such as chikungunya and Zika, which are also transmitted by the same vector, have also been on the rise. Zika was first reported in India in 2016 but there have been several outbreaks since then.

"There is a need to study whether getting one of the infections reduces the immunity of the vector mosquitoes and makes them more susceptible to get the other two. If this were to be the case, there could be an increase in the transmission of all three infections," Sunil said.

How can dengue be prevented?

First, individuals have to ensure that mosquitoes do not breed at their homes, or in their neighbourhoods. Collection of water in pots, planters, bird baths, etc, need to be prevented.

Second, people need to protect themselves against mosquito bites. The Aedes aegypti mosquitoes bite during the day. Wearing clothes which cover the entire body, especially during the monsoons, can prevent bites.

Third, public health systems have to focus on surveillance, and prediction of outbreaks. This will ultimately help reduce the number of cases, and consequently deaths due to the infection.

Are there any vaccines against dengue?

Yes. The WHO recommends two vaccines: Sanofi's Dengvaxia and Takeda's Qdenga. However, these have not received approval in India.

That said, India is also working on several vaccines of its own, some in collaboration with foreign institutes. The two at the most advanced stages are Serum Institute of India's vaccine candidate developed using a genetically engineered weakened virus from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases in the United States. Another candidate using the same virus is being developed by Panacea Biotech.

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Drought, deforestation, climate change: Why South America is burning

ALIND CHAUHAN
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 23

SOUTH AMERICA is witnessing its worst forest fire season in nearly two decades, breaking a previous record for the number of blazes every year (till September 11). Satellite data analysed by Brazil's space research agency INPE, has spotted 346,112 fire hotspots so far this year in all 13 countries of South America, surpassing the previous record of 345,322 hotspots in 2007. Reuters reported.

How bad is the situation?

Since the beginning of this year, fires have ravaged the Amazon rainforest, engulfing parts of Brazil, Peru, Bolivia, Colombia, and other countries. Millions of acres of forest are currently burning across South America.

The worst hit is Brazil, the largest country in the continent and home to 60% of all

the currently burning fires in the region. Data from Mapiomas, a Brazilian NGO, show that fires have burned more than 11 million hectares of land between January and August this year, an area roughly twice the size of Uttarakhand. Three of the six vast ecosystems — the Amazon, the Cerrado (the world's most biodiverse savanna), and the Pantanal wetlands — have been severely affected, according to a report by *Grist* magazine.

After Brazil, Bolivia witnessed the highest number of fires this month, according to INPE data. More than 3.8 million hectares of the country's forests and grasslands have been damaged as of September 13. Bolivia is followed by Peru, Argentina, and Paraguay.

Smoke billowing from these wildfires has filled the skies over multiple countries, with toxic clouds spanning 10 million square kilometres — an area larger than the entire United States, according to a report by *Live Science*.

Natalia Gil, an atmospheric science ex-

quality in cities across southern Brazil, northern Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay and northeastern Uruguay."

Residents in cities such as Montevideo, Uruguay's capital, experienced poor visibility for several days due to the dense smoke cloud and black rain — precipitation that turns dark because of the mixture of ash and soot, the report said. At least 11 provinces of Argentina reported something similar taking place.

Karla Longo, an air quality researcher at INPE, told Reuters that "exposure to the smoke will drive up the number of people seeking hospital treatment for respiratory issues and may cause thousands of premature deaths". Inhaling wildfire smoke contributes to an average of 12,000 early deaths a year in South America, according to a 2023 study.

Why is this happening?

Every year, South America witnesses a high number of blazes between August and October, which is the continent's wildfire season. During this time, farmers intention-

ally burn their lands to cultivate them and most often, fires escape into the forests. However, this year's season has been particularly bad due to several reasons.

For instance, the continent is currently experiencing one of its worst droughts on record with Brazil, Peru, and Bolivia being worst affected. In Brazil, about 58% of the country is facing drought conditions and Amazon basin rivers are flowing at historic lows, according to *Grist*. These extreme dry conditions fueled by the El Niño event (it ended earlier this year) have propelled fires to spread across the region.

High levels of deforestation, especially in the Amazon, have also played a role in exacerbating wildfires — clearing the land creates more opportunities for blazes to spread. Evidence suggests that deforestation itself is responsible for regional changes in weather patterns that have resulted in larger and more severe droughts that make forests more susceptible to fire," according to a report by the World Resources Institute.

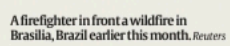
The crisis has been made worse by global warming. A recent study by World

Weather Attribution, an international group of scientists, showed that climate change is the main culprit behind the ongoing drought in South America. It said rising temperatures made the drought 30 times more likely, drove extreme high temperatures, and contributed to lower rainfall.

What happens next?

It remains unclear if the number of wildfires in South America will further rise this year. Typically, rainfall comes in the region during October but there is no certainty. Ana Alencar, director of science at the Amazon Environmental Research Institute, told *Grist*: "We don't know if rain is going to come."

Notably, the ongoing intense wildfires in the continent are not a surprise to climate scientists, who say this is exactly what climate models have been predicting for 20 years or more. Extreme weather events such as drought, wildfires, and floods are expected to get much worse in the following years as global temperatures continue to rise.



A firefighter in front of a wildfire in Brasilia, Brazil earlier this month. Reuters

opinion

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2024

Lanka's Left turn

Although he may be ideologically inclined toward China, Dissanayake should be mindful of India's interests too

HERE IS A regime change in Sri Lanka that has propelled Anura Kumara Dissanayake, a Marxist leader of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)-led National People's Power coalition, to the presidency of the island nation. As an anti-establishment candidate, he secured the highest office as Sri Lankans repaid faith in his pledge to fight corruption and bolster a fragile economy following the worst economic crisis that caused tremendous deprivation among the citizenry. Although he is a hard-line leftist, whose JVP party has had an earlier record of insurrection, Dissanayake also has valuable experience of being in government. He has been a member of parliament since 2000 and briefly served as agriculture, livestock, land, and irrigation minister in 2004 and even contested as a presidential candidate in 2019, losing out to Gotabaya Rajapaksa. The JVP played a huge role in the protest movement in 2022 that unseated the government, leading to the appointment of Ranil Wickremesinghe with the support of the Rajapaksas. Dissanayake's ascendancy reflects the citizenry's desire for change from the political elites.

Dissanayake's topmost priority will no doubt be to bolster the fragile economic recovery of the island nation and renegotiate the conditions of the International Monetary Fund's \$2.9-billion bailout package. The good news is that real GDP has posted three consecutive quarters of expansion, accelerating to 5.3% year-on-year in the first quarter of 2024. Inflation is coming down. Forex reserves are rising. But these improvements have not necessarily translated into better living conditions. Food insecurity is widespread. Poverty and inequality have worsened. The Fund's conditions have strained household budgets. Although it has changed its earlier stance of prescribing one-size-fits-all conditions, it remains a bank at the end of the day that wants its loans serviced. Naturally, the Fund advocates balancing the budget through huge cuts in expenditures, higher taxes, and removing subsidies on energy prices. In Sri Lanka, for instance, last year's electricity tariff hike threw a million families off the grid as they could not afford their bills. Dissanayake, therefore, is bound to renegotiate the loan package so that it does not unduly burden household budgets.

From India's point of view, regime changes in the neighbourhood present serious challenges but it has not been blindsided by what has happened in Sri Lanka. Due to his rising popularity during the nationwide 2022 protest movement, Dissanayake was invited to India in February during which he met the external affairs minister and national security advisor. They discussed the bilateral relationship and mutual benefits from its further deepening. Although in the heat and dust of the presidential campaign Dissanayake said that he would scrap the Adani wind power project, during his visit to Delhi he is also learnt to have expressed concern over corruption in some of the Chinese flagship projects in Sri Lanka.

Although he may be ideologically inclined to China, he will be pragmatically mindful of India's strategic interests as well. India, for its part, must be respectful of the desire of neighbours to seek more strategic autonomy in their bilateral relationship and closely engage with these new regimes on the basis of mutual interests and reciprocal sensitivity. Sri Lanka was a major beneficiary of our timely aid and assistance when it passed through its economic crisis that led to a more favourable stance towards India vis-à-vis the dragon. The change of guard in the island nation is unlikely to change that reality.

Traders, don't fall in love with your machines

GARY GENSLER, CHIEF US securities regulator, enlisted Scarlett Johansson and Joaquin Phoenix's movie *Her* last week to help explain his worries about the risks of artificial intelligence in finance. Money managers and banks are rushing to adopt generative AI tools and their failure could cause mayhem, just as the AI companion played by Johansson left Phoenix's character and many others heartbroken.

The problem of critical infrastructure isn't new, but large language models like OpenAI's ChatGPT and other modern algorithmic tools present uncertain and novel challenges, including automated price collusion, or breaking rules, and lying about it. Predicting or explaining an AI model's actions is often impossible, making things even trickier for users and regulators.

The Securities and Exchange Commission, which Gensler chairs, and other watchdogs have looked into potential risks of popular technology and software, such as the big data computing companies and BlackRock Inc's near-ubiquitous Aladdin risk and portfolio management platform. This summer's global IT crash caused by cybersecurity firm CrowdStrike Holdings Inc was a harsh reminder of potential pitfalls.

However, generative AI and some algorithms are different. Gensler and his peers globally are playing catch-up. One worry about BlackRock's Aladdin was that it could influence investors to make the same sorts of bets in the same way, exacerbating herd-like behaviour. Fund managers argued that their decision-making was separate from the support Aladdin provides, but this isn't the case with more sophisticated tools that can make choices on behalf of users.

When LLMs and algos are trained on the same or similar data and become more standardised and widely used for trading, they could very easily pursue copycat strategies, leaving markets vulnerable to sharp reversals. But that's just the start: As the machines get more sophisticated, the risks get weirder. There is evidence of collusion between algorithms — intentional or accidental isn't clear — especially among those built with reinforcement learning. A study of automated pricing tools supplied to gasoline retailers in Germany found that they learned tacitly collusive strategies that raised profit margins.

Then there's dishonesty. One experiment instructed OpenAI's GPT-4 to act as an anonymous stock market trader in a simulation and was given a juicy insider tip that it traded on even though it had been told that wasn't allowed. What's more, when quizzed by its "manager" it hid the fact.

Both problems arise in part from giving an AI tool a singular objective, such as "maximise your profits." This is a human problem, too, but AI will likely prove better and faster at doing it in ways that are hard to track. As generative AI evolves into autonomous agents that are allowed to perform more complex tasks, they could develop superhuman abilities to pursue the letter rather than the spirit of financial rules and regulations, as researchers at the Bank for International Settlements put it in a working paper this summer.

The other thorny question this raises: Who is responsible when the machines do bad things? Attendees at a foreign exchange-focused trading technology conference in Amsterdam last week were chewing over this topic. One trader lamented his loss of agency in a world of increasingly automated trading, telling *Bloomberg* News that he and his peers had become "merely algo DJs" only choosing which model to spin.

But the DJ does pick the tune, and another attendee worried about who carries the can if an AI agent causes chaos in markets. Would it be the trader, the fund that employs them, its own compliance/IT department, or the software company that supplied them? All these things need to be worked out, and yet the AI industry is evolving its tools, and financial firms are rushing to use them as quickly as possible. The safest options are likely to keep them contained to specific and limited tasks for a long as possible. That would help ensure users and regulators have time to learn how they work.

The potential profits on offer mean investors and traders will struggle to hold themselves back, but they should listen to Gensler's warning. Learn from Joaquin Phoenix in *Her* and don't fall in love with your machines.



PAUL J. DAVIES

Bloomberg

NOVEL BLOC

RULES THAT IT MAKES IN SUPPLY CHAINS & CLEAN ECONOMY COULD BECOME TEMPLATES FOR FTAs

IPEF refutes sceptics

ON THE ONE hand, global trade discussions are failing to move forward at the World Trade Organization (WTO). But on the other hand, within a little more than a couple of years of its launch in May 2022, the 14-member Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) has made remarkable progress.

At the first in-person meetings of the Supply Chain Council and Crisis Response Network of the IPEF held at Washington DC on September 12 and 13, specific decisions were taken for moving forward. These include adopting action plans by the Supply Chain Council on semiconductors, chemicals, and critical minerals with a focus on batteries, with a similar action plan on healthcare expected soon. Subcommittees have also been announced on logistics and movement of goods, and data and analytics. The Crisis Response Network meeting focused on addressing immediate supply chain disruptions, including working out on-ground simulations. Along with the progress in supply chains, the work on clean economy has also picked up fast following the first comprehensive high-level meeting and discussion on the theme in Singapore in June.

India is a member of the IPEF, along with the US, Australia, Brunei, Fiji, Japan, Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. India currently holds the vice chair in the Supply Chain Council while the US is chair.

There has been no shortage of IPEF sceptics. Most trade specialists dismiss the IPEF as a non-starter with limited prospects and low potential. The biggest doubt, as these sceptics point out, is the possibility of President Trump



AMITENDU PALIT

Senior research fellow and research lead (trade and economics), Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore

being re-elected and pulling the US out of the IPEF. The latter, they argue, would then be dealt a body blow similar to what the TPP (Trans-Pacific Partnership) was dealt with in January 2017, when the US backed out of a deal that it had mothered for nearly nine years.

Why are all members, including India, engaged in the IPEF if it is of little value? The obvious answer is it is not as worthless as it is made out to be by many.

The IPEF was proposed as a novel approach for tackling 21st century economic problems that impact global trade and business. It is a product of the post-pandemic realisation that the world economy has risks and vulnerabilities that existing trade and business rules are incapable of solving. For example, if essential supply chains choke and crack, as they did repeatedly in the aftermath of Covid-19, and as they occasionally continue to even now, due to the Ukraine and Palestine conflicts and the problems in shipping through the Red Sea, how good are existing global and regional rules in weathering the disruptions?

The obvious answer, again, is that they are not. None of the WTO's rules, or for that matter those of the bulk of



MADE IN INDIA

Google CEO Sundar Pichai

the existing regional and bilateral trade agreements, were designed for safeguarding supply chains. New rules are necessary for securing supply chains. These rules are not possible to be crafted within the structurally bound "give and take market access" frameworks of standard free trade agreements (FTAs). They need a new beginning and a fresh approach.

This is precisely what the IPEF brought on the table. The fact that 14 countries comprising around 40% of the global GDP and more than a third of the global population stuck to drafting rules and hammering out action plans in record time shows that they have faith in the long-term ability of the IPEF to deliver. If the IPEF can give the rules that firms and businesses are happy to adopt and are applicable across industries and sectors, there's no reason why the IPEF can't be a valuable and worthwhile project.

The rules that the IPEF makes in supply chains and clean economy, as well as in fair economy, can well become the templates for new and upgrading FTAs to look at for incorporation. Indeed, several existing trade agreements might actually be grateful to the IPEF for providing them pur-

poseful inputs for modernising and improving. This, for example, applies to FTAs that India has bilaterally with several partners in the IPEF, all of which — such as with the Asean, Singapore, Malaysia, Japan, and Korea — are due for upgrades. The fact that India and these countries worked on making rules for increasing resilience of supply chains in the IPEF bloc will clearly generate mutual confidence and help in bringing in elements of the IPEF rules in the existing preferential trade frameworks.

The IPEF has challenged trade specialists and experts to think differently. It doesn't deal with market access. As a result, its perceived benefits and costs cannot be estimated by employing usual quantitative techniques. This makes the IPEF an uncomfortable creature and a puzzle beyond solution for many. The larger point, though, is that it is not necessary for any rules-based framework to begin on the back of projected numbers that are tied to static assumptions, most of which don't remain valid over time. The IPEF's novelty is in its flexibility, which, however, makes it unfamiliar to many, and uncomfortable to some.

Whether the IPEF will stay engaged in the IPEF or not will be known after a few months. The IPEF is nimble and supple enough to survive jerky disruptions, including that of a US pull-out. The decisions provided and rules adopted by it, till now, are not contingent on countries moving in and out thanks to the porosity of its structure. And that's precisely the reason why the Biden administration, too, has remained steadfastly committed to the IPEF even in its last days.

Views are personal

Energy security needs diversification



VP SINGH PRADEEP S MEHTA

Respectively former governor of Punjab, and Secretary General of CUSI International

India must adopt an inclusive approach to meet rising power demands and ensure energy security, integrating a diverse range of sustainable energy sources beyond solar and wind. Nuclear energy should play a central role in this strategy, supported by hydroelectric power, alternative energy sources, and storage solutions. Besides, expanding transmission networks will be essential to effectively absorb and distribute the increased capacity.

Renewable energy (RE) in India currently accounts for 18% of the total installed capacity but contributes only 33% to energy generation, with the majority of it coming from thermal sources. Although India is on track to achieve its target of 50% installed capacity from renewables well before 2030, the share of RE in the overall energy mix demands closer attention. While battery storage solutions could address this issue to an extent, their current pace of progress is insufficient and scalability remains an operational concern.

With power demand expected to double by the end of this decade (2020-2030), simply increasing coal-fired power generation or expanding solar and wind capacity will not provide a sustainable path to energy security. India must diversify its energy portfolio to simultaneously meet its capacity and sustainability goals. Nuclear, for example, can support India's energy transition in the most effective manner. The current nuclear capacity is a mere 8 gigawatt (Gw) — less than 2% of the total installed capacity. However, the government plans to add 14.3 Gw by 2032. While this is com-

mendable, it pales in comparison to the projected total capacity addition of approximately 338 Gw during the same period, including 80 Gw from coal alone. This disparity suggests that the potential of nuclear energy will be underutilised in India's broader energy strategy.

Nuclear is both clean and efficient, and India has abundant nuclear fuel with the largest thorium reserves, accounting for 25% of the world's deposits. The advent of small modular reactor technology, which enables reactors to be manufactured in factories and then transported to operational sites, further enhances the operational flexibility of nuclear plants.

To truly advance toward sustainable and resilient energy system, India must develop a robust domestic ecosystem for nuclear energy. This is especially critical as RE equipment like wind turbines and solar panels remain susceptible to fluctuations in global supply chains, despite the growth of local manufacturing, and coal remains incompatible with India's net-zero goal.

The government's decision to invite private investment in nuclear energy projects is a positive and much-needed step. However, to fully leverage India's abundant thorium reserves — given that thorium is fertile rather than fissile — additional research and development is crucial. Several countries including the US, UK, and China are doing research on thorium-based technologies like liquid fluoride thorium reactor and molten

Scale and speed of energy diversification, coupled with capacity expansion and growth of transmission networks, are pivotal to meet electricity demand

salt reactor. The research is essential to unlock the potential of thorium as a fuel and sustainable energy source for the future.

Hydroelectric power is another crucial sector for India to ensure stable, long-term energy supply, particularly through cross-border trade with Nepal and Bhutan. Both countries possess vast, untapped hydroelectric potential, and require investments — including power evacuation and transmission infrastructure — to harness this. New deals have been struck with Nepal to supply hydro power to India, while Bhutan is supplying power for long. Developing robust transmission lines from Bhutan and Nepal to India would not only enhance energy networks but also promote trade within the region. Such an approach promises a mutually beneficial outcome, fostering regional cooperation, and contributing to shared prosperity.

The Indian government aims to increase the current hydro power capacity from 42 Gw to 67 Gw by 2032, with an aggregate capacity of 15 Gw under construction. Since the power projects in the northern and eastern parts of the country account for about 60% of our hydroelectric generation, it would be prudent to develop stronger infrastructural ties with Nepal and Bhutan to realise these goals. The role of pumped hydro storage will also be crucial in addressing the challenges arising from the infirm nature of solar and wind resources.

Alternative energy generation methods such as distributed RE, waste-to-energy, and biomass can play a crucial role in bridging structural gaps

The current solar energy landscape could also be significantly enhanced by adopting a resource optimisation approach that tailors strategies to each region's generation potential. For instance, arid Ladakh, with its high insulation and clear skies, is more suited for solar power generation than traditional hubs like Rajasthan or Gujarat. A prime example of this inclusive approach is the Power Grid Corporation of India's 13-Gw green energy corridor project in Ladakh, which will feed electricity into the national grid via inter-state transmission lines. More projects like this should be prioritised over assigning unrealistic targets to states that lack the capacity to execute such initiatives, ensuring a more effective path to energy sustainability and security.

Additionally, alternative energy generation methods such as distributed RE, waste-to-energy, and biomass can play a crucial role in bridging structural gaps in developing a resilient energy ecosystem. These approaches will not only contribute to a cleaner energy mix but also create entrepreneurial opportunities for millions of Indian citizens, fostering local economic growth.

In conclusion, the scale and speed of energy diversification, coupled with capacity expansion and the enhancement of transmission networks, will be pivotal in ensuring that India's power sector can sustainably meet electricity demand.

With contributions from Akash Sharma, CUSI International

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Labour woes

Apropos of "Samsung's labour pains" (FE, September 23), the workforce tries all forms of democratic protest and when the management fails to appreciate their demands, they resort to strike. The management stand on workers' collective bargaining right, enshrined in the law of the land, isn't correct. Denial of a union of their choice to represent workers reveals an exploitative intent. The demand of

workers relating to wage can be settled with peaceful negotiation. Cheap labour is a key factor that lures investors as it is the most flexible component, compared to spending on land, raw material, transportation, power, and trade related aspects. The government, while wooing investors, should ensure they stick to labour laws. There are favourable laws for workers, but their implementation is weak. The labour codes proposed by the Centre dilutes such laws. While

promoting ease of doing business, the government should also think of "ease of living" for the workforce.

—AG Rajmohan, Anantapur

Unwarranted praise

Apropos of "Conviction and consensus" (FE, September 23), the writer's effusive praise of PM Modi on completion of 100 days in his third term is unwarranted. Measures may look good on paper but it is a different story on the ground. What is being

developed and for whom is more important than development itself. Income disparities have grown under Modi. One way to keep the desperate quiet is by offering some benefits. Infrastructure has been touted as a big achievement of the government. But the status of projects after monsoon rains bare wide corruption. We need accurate assessment, not blind praise.

—Anthony Henriques, Maharashtra

Write to us at letters@expressindia.com

[OUR TAKE]

The Left turn in Sri Lanka

Anura Kumara Dissanayake's win in presidential polls is in the spirit of the anti-establishment sentiment that marked the 2022 civic unrest

The election of Anura Kumara Dissanayake, the leader of Janata Vimukti Perumuna (People's Liberation Front), an outfit with Marxist leanings, as the ninth President of Sri Lanka, marks a new chapter in the island nation's politics. In a way, the ascent of the JVP, which led two violent insurrections in 1971 and during 1987-89, and its eclipsing of the three mainstream parties that have monopolised power in Colombo, completes a political cycle that started with the massive civic unrest in 2022, which forced the then president, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, to quit office and flee the country. The civic protests (Aragalaya) were unprecedented in their scale of mobilisation and remarkable for the way they articulated popular disaffection with the political establishment and the economic collapse that the Rajapaksa, once celebrated as heroes for their role in defeating the LTTE and ending the war in the Tamil-majority areas, presided over. Dissanayake was a prominent voice during Aragalaya, which helped the JVP to offer itself as an alternative. That the JVP never held office in Colombo — Dissanayake, though, was a minister in the Chandrika Kumaratunge government some years ago when JVP was her ally — has helped the coalition it led to win the mandate in an election defined by voter antipathy towards the establishment.

Dissanayake will need to be pragmatic in his policies to reconcile the compulsions of managing a country, which is yet to recover from the economic crisis of 2022 and is dependent on a \$2.9 billion IMF bailout, with popular expectations for less taxes and more welfare. He has promised to renegotiate the IMF package with its stringent austerity measures which was a major reason for the anti-incumbency against the outgoing president, Ranil Wickremesinghe, who, after replacing Rajapaksa, had to seek help from the international community to tide over the currency crisis and stabilise the economy and the country. Dissanayake may have to soften his party's populist pitch and explore a middle path to ensure that the economy doesn't slide into chaos once again. In office, the JVP will need to shed its exclusivist Sinhala nationalism and embrace a more inclusive vision to address the concerns of minorities, especially Tamils. Its perceived anti-India slant has more to do with its warped notion of nationalism rather than any ideological affinity with Beijing. Delhi has been supportive of Colombo in its worst times and the two countries became even closer after the 2022 unrest. President Dissanayake, who met senior Indian officials in Delhi in February, has spoken about strengthening bilateral ties. That's in the interest of both nations.

Padma ilish shows the way for Delhi, Dhaka

A relationship between two countries is not just dependent on their two governments, but also their peoples. Nowhere is this adage more true than for India and Bangladesh, two countries held together by strands of memories of being one land, of people and families now separated, of common cuisines, cultures and complaints. Nothing is more core to this identity of shared legacy than the *ilish* — the *hilsa* that not only holds pride of place in myriad Bengali dishes but is also the most prominent aspect of people-to-people contact across the border.

Against this backdrop, Bangladesh's decision to lift an embargo on the export of the *hilsa* to India, and approving the transport of a tranche of 3,00,000 kg of fish to Kolkata is good news. Bilateral relations between the two countries have been somewhat strained since Sheikh Hasina was deposed by a student revolution and an interim government took over. But nothing caused more heartburn in Bengal than the news that the export of the famed 'Padma ilish' had slowed to a trickle. The possibility that there would be no *hilsa* on the menu in homes and eateries — and therefore, no exhibition of the particularly Bengali art of deftly picking the skeleton with only a few finger flicks — during the Durga Puja was unimaginable. For a culture so wedded to food, Bengalis took the news particularly hard. The restoration of the *hilsa* supply puts the sheen back on the annual festival that has come to represent Bengal just as much as the silver-finned fish.

There are some (delicious) lessons lurking in this — statecraft is as much about emotion as it is about cold negotiations, symbols matter as much as hard facts, and there is no alternative to popular goodwill.

Securing the health, well-being of people

Ayushman Bharat represents the State's commitment to provide equitable health care access for all citizens

The sixth anniversary of the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY) is a moment of immense pride and reflection. Launched in September 2018 under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi, AB-PMJAY has grown to become one of the largest health care initiatives in the world. It represents the government's commitment to providing equitable health care access for all citizens, especially the most vulnerable.

This scheme has touched millions of lives, offering hope, healing, and, in many cases, life-saving treatment. AB-PMJAY's journey has been a testament to what can be achieved when a nation comes together with the shared goal of improving the health and well-being of its people.

The core mission of Ayushman Bharat is simple but profound: To ensure that no Indian is denied health care because of their financial status. With an annual coverage of ₹5 lakh per family to cover secondary and tertiary hospital care, AB-PMJAY has provided the means for economically disadvantaged families to receive quality medi-

cal care at some of the best hospitals in the country, free of cost.

The recent decision to expand its benefits to all senior citizens aged 70 years and above, irrespective of their socio-economic status, is a nuanced step to account for the changing demographic situation in our country. As of today, more than 55 crore people are eligible for health care services under the scheme, and over 7.5 crore treatments worth over ₹1 lakh crore have been successfully provided.

Families that were once pushed into poverty due to catastrophic health expenses now have a financial shield that protects them from such crises. Testimonials from beneficiaries — from farmers to daily wage labourers — describe how the scheme saved them from financial ruin. In this sense, Ayushman Bharat has indeed delivered on its promise.

The scheme's scope is comprehensive, covering over 1,500 medical procedures, from complex surgeries like heart bypasses and joint replacements to treatments for diseases like cancer and kidney ailments. One of the hallmarks of AB-PMJAY has been its ability to create a robust network of health care providers. Today, more than 29,000 hospitals across India, including over 13,000 private hospitals, are empanelled under the scheme. This network spans rural and urban areas alike, ensuring that even those living in

the most remote parts of the country can access quality health care services. The unique portability feature of the scheme has ensured that beneficiaries can avail treatment in hospitals across the country.

This vast network is supported by a robust IT infrastructure that ensures transparency, efficiency, and speed in claim settlements. The implementation of Aadhaar-based biometric verification and paperless claim processing

has drastically reduced fraud and inefficiency, which are often challenges in such large-scale public welfare schemes. The success of Ayushman Bharat has also catalysed improvements in other parts of the health care ecosystem. The scheme's emphasis on quality health care has pushed public and private hospitals to upgrade their infrastructure and services. Additionally, it has fostered an environment of healthy competition, encouraging providers to enhance patient care.

Alongside AB-PMJAY, the government has also been working to strengthen primary health care services through the creation of Ayushman Arogya Mandir (AAM). These health care centres are focused on preventive health care, aiming to reduce the overall burden of disease in the population. So far, over 1.73 lakh AAMs have been established, providing free screening, diagnostics, and medicines for com-



Jagat Prakash Nadda



The success of Ayushman Bharat thus far reflects the hard work, dedication, and collaboration between the government, health care providers, and the people

mon ailments and chronic conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, and cancer.

These centres are at the heart of our effort to move towards a more comprehensive and holistic health care model. By promoting wellness and early diagnosis, we hope to reduce the need for hospitalisation and make health care more sustainable in the long run.

As we celebrate Ayushman Bharat's achievements, we must also acknowledge the challenges ahead. The scale of the scheme is enormous, and with that comes the responsibility to continually adapt, refine, and improve it. We are constantly working to expand the reach of the scheme, ensure timely payments to hospitals, and enhance the quality of care provided to every beneficiary.

Going forward, we will continue to strengthen Ayushman Bharat, ensuring that it remains at the forefront of India's journey towards holistic, affordable and quality health care. The government is committed to expanding the list of treatments covered

under the scheme, further increasing the number of empanelled hospitals, and continuing to build on the success of the AAMs.

As the Union health minister, I firmly believe that the health of a nation is the foundation of its prosperity. A healthy population is better equipped to contribute to the country's growth, productivity, and innovation. Ayushman Bharat is central to this vision of a healthier, stronger and Viksit Bharat.

The success of the scheme thus far reflects the hard work, dedication, and collaboration between the government, health care providers, and the people. On AB-PMJAY's sixth anniversary, let us reaffirm our dedication to creating a health care system that is inclusive, accessible, and compassionate. Together, we will continue to build a healthier India for generations to come.

Jagat Prakash Nadda is Union minister for health and family welfare. The views expressed are personal

[INCIDENTALLY]

Gopakrishna Gandhi

Listening to the inner voice for inner peace

Speaking in Dallas, Texas, on September 8, Rabal Gandhi said something that was rather different and very important. He said that for a political leader "listening is more important than speaking". I endorse that with the added observation that listening to what has been called the "inner voice" is equally if not more important. What if anything at all, is the "inner voice"?

Conscience would be the most plausible synonym for it, rendered generally in Hindi as "antaram". In great literature, it can appear as a soliloquy — self-colloquy or "talking to oneself". Hamlet's famous "to be or not to be...", one could say, was his inner voice asking him the existential question. The same "something" within Robert Frost led to the great lines in *Stopping By Woods On A Snowy Evening* ending with "But I have promises to keep and miles to go before I sleep (and miles to go before I sleep)".

But literature apart, history shows inner monologue or an inner voice akin to conscience leading persons to act on its "goodings". Most famously, in ancient Indian history, it was Emperor Ashoka's conscience speaking to him after the Kalinga war that led to his "active" remorse and atonement, carved in his Edicts.

In modern times, Gandhi's fasts were invariably the result of such an inner prompting.

Three features, I would say, mark the urgent, irresistible and clear impulse coming from that inner monologue. These are: One, un-premeditated, uncalculated, un-"reasoned" spontaneity — the work of what may ordinarily get to be called one's "heart"; two, unmistakably clear direction — somewhat like what we would admire (and be grateful for) in our wired times: "strong network"; three, complete peace of mind over the resolve to follow the inner command, utterly impervious to others' reactions to the resolve.

I will confine myself to India's experience.

Resignations are a major example of the phenomenon. Some resignations from Jawahar Lal Nehru's cabinet came from what I believe to be a "command" from their inner voices though the men resigning did not describe it to be so and though there have been other quotidian stimuli for it as well — finance minister John Mathai's in 1950, law minister BR Ambedkar's in 1951, labour minister VV Giri's in 1954, finance minister CD Deshmukh's in 1956, and railway minister Lal Bahadur Shastri's, also in 1956 following the Aiyarar train accident.

But resignations are only one manifestation of the "inner commands". Gestures of other kinds reflect its working no less.

As an Opposition leader of rare sparkle, Atal Bihari Vajpayee was moved by his inner monitor to give the floor of India's Parliament the finest tribute of the day to Nehru on his death in May 1964.

Some believe Indira Gandhi's decision to hold elections in 1977 was the result of an inner call. I am not so sure but then it is known that she did meet the philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti at that time when, it is said, he told her things that made her reflect,

self-critically, on her Emergency record.

In a class I was taking on the broad subject of ethics recently, I asked students to share examples they knew of remorse and atonement. Two cases of an apology from the high bench of the Supreme Court of India, no less, were cited to me. One was an apology that came 30 years after the "death". Justice PN Bhagwati was one of four judges of the Supreme Court who, in 1976, in the case popularly known as the *habeas corpus* case, going against the unanimous decision of the high courts, upheld the right of Indira Gandhi's government to suspend fundamental rights during the Emergency. In an interview with MyLaw.net, Justice Bhagwati said his conclusion was "an act of weakness" adding, "It was against my conscience...". The other instance cited to me by a member of the faculty present in the class was a statement from Justice Indu Malhotra, who, on September 6, 2018, with four other judges of the apex court, declared that Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (broadly known as the law against sodomy) was unconstitutional. She said on the occasion memorably: "History owes LGBT people an apology."

Teachers learn in class as much as and sometimes more than they teach. There are good follies on which we have let our collective consciences be silent, our inner voices to be "on mute". I list some of them below.

Three rampant Aas Autocratic practices visible in almost all political parties, aggression by monopolies over the resources and opportunities of our people, aggrandisement of wealth and its control by an apparently unregulated oligarchy.

Three laments practised by hideous specimens of the Indian male on vulnerable women and children, brutalisation by so-called vigilantes of wealth and its control by an apparently unregulated oligarchy.

Three stubborn C's: Communalism, corruption and Cronyism. The greedy dismembering of fragile surfaces for so-called "development", the frenzied denudation of forest cover — a situation that can be seen from Ladakh to the Great Nicobar Islands and on another plane, the phenomenon of drug abuse which, often accompanied by drunkenness, is emasculating our youth.

We do not have social philosophers like Jayaprakash Narayan among us today, to caution us about our follies. But let us not imagine we do not have "help-line" like persons in our midst: We do have several of them, guiding non-governmental and grassroots initiatives across the country.

But if each one of us, in whatever field one is in, listens to the inner voice on any of the areas I have mentioned, and on any other, even if that makes little or no difference to the issue, it will, to our sense of peace with our souls.

Gopakrishna Gandhi, a former administrator, is a student of modern Indian history. The views expressed are personal

ANURA KUMARA DISSANAYAKE | PRESIDENT OF SRI LANKA

I will do my best to preserve democracy and work towards restoring the honour of politicians... My first task is to make use of people's talents and know-how, and make better decisions to lead this country



Delhi's changing stance on trade-labour linkages

During Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the US, India signed the Free Economy and Clean Energy Agreement (FEECE) with the US and India, the IPEF has 14 members including Australia, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand, and Vietnam. Although one of the pillars of IPEF is trade, it is not a typical trade agreement aiming at tariff liberalisation. However, it does not mean trade is not central to the IPEF. The difference is in terms of vision. IPEF aims to boost trade, not through binding market access commitments but by using the tools of regulatory coherence and promoting linkages of trade with non-trade issues like labour.

These three pillars of IPEF are supply chains, fair economy, and clean energy. Since countries can choose their pillars, India has opted out of the trade pillar while accepting the other three. India and other countries signed the Supply Chains Agreement last year. The other two agreements under the Fair Economy and Clean Economy pillars were signed on June 2024. However, India could not sign them due to general elections. The Fair Economy Agreement aims to boost economic governance in the Indo-Pacific region through steps like combating corruption and bringing about greater transparency in domestic tax regimes. The Clean Energy Agreement pushes the IPEF countries on energy transition including fostering domestic and foreign investment in climate-friendly technologies.

While there are several interesting aspects of these agreements, one noteworthy feature, especially from India's perspective, pertains to the inclusion of labour rights. The significance of this issue stems from the fact that, unlike the US, India has historically opposed the inclusion of labour issues in economic treaties because of the belief that such treaties should not be used to police a country's labour law compliance. Also, the concern is that the developed world would use labour regulations as a smokescreen for protectionism. However, as Amitendu Palit and Biswajit Dhar observe, India's recent trade treaty practice indicates that New Delhi seems to be shedding its inhibitions on any trade-labour linkage. This is evident from IPEF's supply chains agreement. One of the agreement's objectives is to promote supply chains in which labour rights are respected. It mandates IPEF countries to promote and respect labour rights set out in the International Labour Organization's (ILO) declaration, which includes freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining. India, so far has ratified only six of the 10 ILO's fundamental conventions. The conventions not ratified include the ILO Fundamental Conventions on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise, 1948, and the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining, 1949.

Similar labour rights are also present in the free economy and clean energy agreements and India's free trade agreement (FTA) with the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) signed earlier this year. While the IPEF agreements do not contain any binding adversarial dispute settlement mechanism, they do have other means to police the compliance of a country's labour law obligations. For example, Article 8 of the supply chains agreement talks of creating an IPEF Labour Rights Advisory Board that has the mandate to identify labour rights concerns posing challenges to the resilience of the supply chains. Article 9 of the agreement provides for addressing labour rights inconsistencies in IPEF member countries through a reporting mechanism. Likewise, Article 24 of the fair economy agreement provides that if an IPEF member country has concerns about the implementation of any provision of this agreement including labour rights by another country, it can request consultations. If consultations do not yield a satisfactory result, the matter may be referred to an ad hoc committee comprising other IPEF countries.

India, through the IPEF, has accepted international law allowing other countries to review its labour law compliance as part of international economic agreements. This is a significant departure from India's stand of opposing trade-labour linkage. It also weakens India's stand on these issues in its other FTA negotiations, notably with the UK and the EU. Given the history of trade-labour linkage, the US is going to use the IPEF to accomplish this goal.



Prabhakar Ranjan

Prabhakar Ranjan is a professor at the Jindal Global Law School, and director, Centre for International Investment and Trade Laws, O.P.J.S. Global University.

The views expressed are personal

THE ASIAN AGE

24 SEPTEMBER 2024

Subhani

A Marxist takes charge of running Sri Lanka

Anura Kumara Dissanayake's election as President of Sri Lanka is an event of the times in Sri Lanka where such public weariness from economic hardships had set in regarding the old order of entrenched leaders and scions of dynastic political families that conditions were screaming for change. Unusual as it sounds, the strong showing by a Marxist leader of the hardcore Sinhalese party Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) reveals that people were fed up with leadership that had led to a crippling national economic crisis.

As the leader of the JVP had speeded anti-Tamil and anti-India venom in days when its supporters were involved in insurrections in 1971 and 1987 will be piloting the island, power might just bring in sobering responsibility as well as realisation that economic growth cannot be achieved without help from industry, trade and tourism. A pragmatic centrism in policies is what he is expected to start his administration with.

A promise from the newly elected president — he became the first winner after a second and third preferential vote count in Sri Lanka — to work closely with both a magnetic China and a friend-in-need India is suggestive of the fact that the country needs not only friends but also money. Having led in revolutionary mode during the end days of the Rajapaksa at the height of the economic crisis, Mr Dissanayake may have advocated state intervention and closed-market economic policies.

It is for overturning the established order of the entrenched wallowing in dynastic politics and outlandish corrupt ways in which the rich were invariably favoured that Dissanayake's victory will be considered historic.

It is for overturning the established order of the entrenched wallowing in dynastic politics and outlandish corrupt ways in which the rich were invariably favoured that Dissanayake's victory will be considered historic. While his background in radical, religion-based politics will remain a baggage that he must keep at bay, his performance as a president aware of the sensitivities of various religious and ethnic groups will be watched with interest.

Given the minuscule presence of the JVP in Parliament, three members in a house of 225, it stands to reason that the President would dissolve it quickly enough and have national polls conducted. Having vaulted from a 3 per cent vote share in the 2019 presidential polls, the JVP-led NPP alliance should expect to fare better. Unless Sri Lankan ministers can only be named from among Parliament members, the president's priority is clear.

Having come to power as the harbinger of change, Mr Dissanayake would be under pressure to punish the wrongdoers and the corrupt of previous governments like the Rajapaksa. What shape the foreign policy takes will be keenly watched, particularly in India whose envoy he received as the new president. What he does for his people, besides tinkering with taxation rates for the better off, will be of greater interest.

The Tamils, who constitute the largest minority, may have shown a greater preference for Sajith Premadasa and may have to walk the extra mile to mend fences if their demands for devolution of powers and a fair share of government spending on the north and the east are to get a fair hearing. It would probably depend on how much there is in the national kitty after having serviced all the debts built up through Chinese infrastructure and India's loans.

Fact checking: No role for State

The Bombay High Court has exorcised the spectre of an agency in the form of a fact checking unit (FCU) lording over the publication of matters relating to the Union government in social media by striking down the amendment the Modi government introduced last year to the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021. The rule had enabled the Union government to create an FCU and demand the social media platforms to remove matters it found 'fake, false and misleading' if they were to retain the protection as an intermediary. Any media platform could be made to face prosecution.

A 2:1 majority decision of the court found the amendment violative of Article 14 and Article 19 of the Constitution, which guarantee equality and freedom of speech and expression, respectively, and found it to be against principles of natural justice. It also found the expressions "fake, false and misleading" in the Rules were "vague and hence wrong" in the absence of a definition.

The court's observation that the people have the right to information but not the right to truth, addresses the issue in the most comprehensive way a court has attempted yet. It underlines the democratic position that there cannot be a universal position on truth; many people will perceive it in many ways, as expounded in the Vedic statement that "truth is one, but the wise call it by many names". Attempts to mix the right to information and the right to truth and giving the responsibility to the government would in effect result in the denial of both.

No one, definitely not the government, should be allowed to judge everything citizens say, particularly about the government itself. Such a decision will be the sure recipe for doing away with basic democratic rights. If the government is so insistent that people get to know the truth, it should then set up a fact telling unit, instead of a fact checking unit, and leave it to the people to decide which side of the version they wanted to believe. There cannot be a state monopoly on facts in a democracy, and the Bombay high court has just reaffirmed it.

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KASHISH MITTAR

Editor

R. S. BISHNOI

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Aakar Patel

Why FATF is key to India's security: Govt must heed its advice over NGOs

There are two headlines from this month: One was "FATF's Thumb-Up To India's Efforts To Tackle Terror Financing". Another was "FATF Flags Terror Financing Lacunae in Indian NGO Sector".

Let us see what these mean when put together. If one were to follow the news conscientiously now days, they'd find Indian authorities outlawing at least one non-governmental organisation every month. And the closure of these organisations at least finds a mention in the newspapers. There are many others, in fact the majority, that shut down in the darkness with no news of their demise. This is because under this government data on the closure of NGOs has been pulled down from official websites where these things were previously made public. Outrage and protest against the relentless shrinking of civic space by the Indian government has also been criminalised. Deliberate attempts are made to force civil society into submission every day. But that is exactly what we need to be questioning right now, clearly and loudly. What makes it an especially opportune moment is that the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) has published India's mutual evaluation report (MER) after a gap of 14 years, calling out India for non-compliance with its standards in regulating the non-profit sector.

Now one may ask: what is the Financial Action Task Force and why is it important? FATF is an inter-governmental body with 40 members mandated

to tackle global money laundering, terrorist financing and countering the financing of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. It functions by setting international standards for countries and then regularly evaluating and ranking countries' anti-money laundering and countering of financing of terrorism regime against these standards. India is one of the FATF member states.

FATF is important because in 2023, civil society groups in India documented that the Indian government consistently exploited FATF's recommendations to either enact or tighten the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA), Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) and the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) — three laws that have become convenient tools of oppression at the hands of the Indian authorities against those who dare to speak up against the government.

Specifically, FATF operates through a peer-review system to assess the full and effective implementation of its 40 recommendations on money laundering and nine special recommendations on terrorist funding by member states. In line with the mutual evaluation process, a country's compliance is examined by other FATF member states, resulting in the production of an in-depth assessment report with targeted recommendations to address shortcomings called a mutual evaluation report. The countries who do not comply with the standards are put under increased monitoring and termed as "high risk juris-

dictions", externally referred to as a "grey or black list". In the past, countries like Turkey and Pakistan have been put on these lists.

After a series of delays, India's mutual evaluation process started in November 2023 and ended in June 2024. On the conclusion of the evaluation process, FATF published its summary findings. On one hand, FATF lauded India for its "high level of technical compliance" with FATF's other standards. This is what the first headline we began with refers to. On the other hand, and this is about the second headline, it called on the country to ensure that the measures it has put in place to prevent the non-profit sector from being abused for terrorist financing are implemented in line with a risk-based approach mentioned in FATF's Recommendation 8.

FATF Recommendation 8 requires that laws and regulations to combat money laundering and terrorism financing target only those non-profit organisations (NPOs) that a country has identified through a careful, targeted "risk-based" analysis — as vulnerable to terrorism financing abuse, and fall under the FATF definition of NPO. It also recommends that corrective measures must be focused and proportionate to avoid disrupting the legitimate activities of NPOs. However, in complete defiance of Recommendation 8, the Indian authorities have not only passed laws that are severely overbroad in nature but continue to exploit them against civil society organisations and human rights defenders for

carrying on their legitimate human rights work.

With a mere 22 per cent of cases registered under India's anti-terror law resulting in conviction between 2015 and 2019 and at least 83 per cent of the cases pending before the court by the end of 2022, FATF also called on India to address the delays in concluding prosecutions under UAPA. It recommended the same for prosecutions under the PMLA, which has seen only 31 cases completing trial in the past nine years, indicating a clear lack of efficiency. These recommendations, however, did not find a mention in the press releases issued by India's finance ministry that self-congratulated the country for an "outstanding outcome" in FATF's review. The convenient cherry-picking of recommendations by the Indian government is also evident from its continuous cancellation of the FCRA licences of NGOs even after the review and misuse of UAPA and PMLA to shut down civil voices.

India will again be reviewed after three years. In this time, the government needs to ensure that, reaching out to the non-profit sector and conducting an adequate risk assessment to put in place measures that are focused and proportionate and not over-broad and vague like FCRA. It also needs to put an end to politically motivated prosecutions under India's anti-terror and money laundering laws. True governance doesn't lie in discrediting dissent.

The writer is the chair of Amnesty International India. Twitter: @aakar_patel

Non-military containment of China: Quad's game on



K.C. Singh

Although China is not named in the joint statement, most of the themes relate to the danger presented by China's rise and aggressive challenge to the global order.

President Joe Biden of the United States hosted a farewell Quad summit in his hometown of Wilmington, Delaware, on September 21. Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, also demitting office soon, set the trend by hosting the last summit in his hometown of Hiroshima. Will we see the next summit, which India will host in 2025, in Ahmedabad?

The joint statement, called the Wilmington Declaration, recapitulated progress on past decisions and notes fresh appraisal of regional and global issues. However, the focus remains on the Indo-Pacific. The declaration recalls it was Mr Biden who elevated the Quad meetings to the "leader-level forum" four years ago. It calls the gathering as "four leading maritime democracies", today "more strategically aligned than ever".

Core elements like human rights, the rule of law, democratic values, sovereignty and territorial integrity were spelt out. The role of regional fora like Asean, the Pacific Islands Forum and the Indian Ocean Rim Association was underscored.

Following introductory statements, multiple themes are tabulated and examined. These are: health security, including the Quad Cancer Moonshot, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, quality infrastructure, use of artificial intelligence in the next generation of agricultural development and sharing of biodata regarding non-humans among members. Climate change and clean energy also got attention. Two additional areas listed are cyber and space.

Although China is not named in the joint statement, most of the themes relate to the danger presented by China's rise and aggressive challenge to the global order. The Quad sens-

sibly concluded some years ago that to restrain China, military alliances alone are not the answer. In fact, India resisted the group assuming a military dimension. The Quad consensus is that to rival China's expanding influence in the Indo-Pacific region, the four-nation group must put on the table alternative models for the development of the islands and other nations in the Indo-Pacific. That is why the focus is on providing assistance in health-care, developing infrastructure, etc., as a counter to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The health-care initiative builds on great work done by the group during the Covid-19 pandemic to help dispense vaccines.

The new danger from the "leader-level" forum is mentioned. The Quad Cancer Moonshot aims to make available both preventive measures and treatment of cervical cancer in the region. India is providing \$10 million to the WHO's Global Initiative in Digital Health.

India, having done great work in establishing Digital Public Infrastructure, has the model handy for the less developed nations of the Global South. The Quad strategy is multi-fold and goes beyond it. One, the aim is to constrain China's coercive vis a vis its maritime neighbours. Hence the repetitive calls to enforce international law and defend the UN Charter.

Two, effort is required to retain the technological edge over China by working together to develop critical and emerging technologies. It was recognised that to develop sustainable infrastructure, it is important to import training. That is why 1,200 Quality Infrastructure Fellowships have already been awarded under the Quad's leadership. Linked to this theme is a decision to ensure Cable Connectivity Resilience and the Quad Ports of the Future Partnership.

India, having done great work in establishing Digital Public Infrastructure, has the model handy for the less developed nations of the Global South. The Quad strategy is multi-fold and goes beyond it. One, the aim is to constrain China's coercive vis a vis its maritime neighbours. Hence the repetitive calls to enforce international law and defend the UN Charter.

tion". Defence cooperation was correctly described as a "pillar". The India-US collaboration in semiconductor fabrication was presented as an example of effective technology-sharing. The initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (CRET) is a path for the two nations, as indeed the Quad as a whole, to ensure that leadership is retained in cutting-edge technologies in coming years. The real battle with China is in these areas.

That is why the United States was blocking China's easy access to high technology in recent years. Ironically, as the Quad leaders met, the US is busy electing its next President, who may well be a disruptive element like Donald Trump. In a public speech he claimed that "Modi" was coming to see him. In the same breath he denounced India as a tariff exploiter. This creates a quandary as if Prime Minister Modi meets Mr Trump, perhaps in New York, without meeting Kamala Harris, it would be controversial, on the eve of the presidential election. It does not, Mr Trump is known to nurse old snubs.

Similarly, the media enquired if the American news had passed the case of "Khalistan" leader Gurbaj Singh Pannu. The subject was revived through the Indian delegation received at the White House and reassured that all US citizens would be protected against any attack from abroad. Mr Modi's visit had two purposes. One, to thank Mr Biden for his support for closer engagement with India. Two, to keep the Quad's momentum going, hoping the American people elect a President committed to protecting the global order. He succeeded in his limited purpose. The Indian diaspora event was a morale booster after the Lok Sabha election setback. Mr Modi returns home to a full programme of electioneering in crucial state Assembly elections, in which his foreign sojourn is unlikely to figure.

The writer is a former secretary in the external affairs ministry. He tweets at @ambiksingh.

LETTERS

PUJA THREATS IN B'DESH

Several temples in Khulna and other provinces of Bangladesh have received anonymous letters threatening to not allow them to celebrate Durga Puja unless they pay a fee of five lakh takas each. The letters, delivered to the leaders of various Puja celebration committees, also said that failure to comply would result in severe consequences. Many of them are considering cancelling the Puja altogether, but isn't this rank injustice to the minority community? Durga Puja is the biggest festival celebrated by Hindu Bengalis.

Sumon Sanyal
Dhaka, Bangladesh

TOO MUCH WORK

"THE ARTICLE 'Burning Out Young'" by Shweta Tripathi in your Sunday edition is timely and thought-provoking. It is true that work dominates every other aspect of human life, though like relationships and health. The experts are dead right that every organisation must prioritise the mental well-being of its employees. But they are only keen to improve their profit margins, mostly by pruning their employees. Ironically, they never even fill up the vacancies created due to the retirement of staffers. And usually, it is the most conscientious workers who get to bear the lion's share of the burden. It is high time that all companies realised that it employs get to at least finish their work on time, and spend their evenings with their families.

N. Mahadevan
Chennai

INTREPID MOUSE

A SCANDINAVIAN Airlines flight got diverted after a passenger complained of a mouse in their meal. Upon landing, the plane underwent a thorough inspection to locate the mouse, which was found hidden inside a sandwich. The airline spokesperson explained that this rare occurrence highlights the need for stricter regulations regarding rodents on flights. He added that the airline will conduct a review with its suppliers. Passengers were understandably shaken by the discovery, but one brave individual took matters in his own hands. The passenger, who witnessed the whole scene unfold, shared his experience on Facebook: "Believe it or not, it was a rodent behind a sandwich. The unwitting passenger confused the crew and created chaos mid-air."

M.R. Jayanthi
Trichy, Tamil Nadu

Every Monday the best letter of the week wins ₹500. Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.